

The Galleon

by Pearle

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

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It had been around for a very long time and had a multitude of stories to tell: people it had seen, places it had been stored, time spent waiting, let alone the hands it had touched. The goblin that had cast it was known to be the best of his kind, a true artist when it came to gold.

The coin had travelled across the country countless times before coming to rest at its present location. The famous and common, the rich and the poor, the powerful and defenceless alike had all held the coin at some time in its journey, each leaving a trace of their essence on the coin's surface before it travelled on.

It had been used to buy so many wands over the centuries, that Ollivander's bottom drawer almost felt like home. It had been used to buy hundreds of books and supplies for nervous witches and wizards entering Hogwarts. It had even been in the possession of Godric Gryffindor, though only for a short time, before travelling back to Gringotts, only to be sent on its way within minutes of reaching the lower vault in the bank.

It had been doled out with great care during the Witch Burnings in the Fourteenth Century; Wendelin the Weird had even held it in her pocket during one of her forty-seven times at the stake. Luckily, Wendelin was adept at casting a Flame-Freezing Charm, though it would have taken time for the fire to get hot enough to melt the coin.

Its experience had been many and varied from person to person. It travelled on, touching some lives and merely passing through others. And the centuries passed.

If the coin had possessed a consciousness, it would have been most interested, if not a bit apprehensive, as to whose palm it was about to cross this time.

The witch counted out his change as she tried to uncover as much information as possible without seeming to pry. "I would assume congratulations are in order? If I may

say..."

"No, you may not. Good day." Severus Snape dropped the coins he was holding into the velvet pouch he kept tucked inside the inner pocket of his outer cloak. The pouch was spelled to cling to the cloak and only detach at his touch. A small black velvet ring box had preceded the coins.

The Galleon bumped against the ring box, unaware of its significance.

Several times during his return journey to Hogwarts, Severus patted his side, feeling for the comforting weight of the pouch in his pocket. He had to resist the overpowering urge to take the ring box out and stare at it.

He was a cautious man. He rarely embarked on any undertaking if he was unsure of the outcome.

He was almost sure she would say yes, he could only hope.

The Boy Who Lived had fulfilled his destiny around the time he should have been completing his education at Hogwarts or, more accurately, about the time he should have been playing in his last Quidditch game at Hogwarts. An anonymous tip, later confirmed to be from Severus, gave the time and location of the Dark Lord's planned attack as the final Quidditch game for the House Cup. The plan had been to take those in the stands by surprise, students and parents trapped, as the Dark Lord and his minions descended upon them. It was meant to be a bloodbath: young lives snuffed out en masse, a blow that would show the wizarding world the true extent of the Dark Lord's power.

It didn't exactly turn out that way. Prior warning had allowed the Order to set a trap, one the Dark Lord flew into without ever discovering the traitor in his ranks. Voldemort was defeated and the wizarding world breathed a sigh of relief before taking on the arduous task of rounding up the remaining Death Eaters for prosecution. In the end, Severus had stood opposite Harry and cast the curse that ended Tom Riddle's life. Eyewitnesses to the event reported being blinded by an overwhelming flash of green light. When the smoke cleared, all three wizards lay crumpled on the ground. Voldemort's death was felt almost immediately, causing a backlash among the Death Eaters fighting on the Quidditch pitch that afternoon.

As the Dark Lord fell, a final hex burned within the skull tattoos marking Voldemort's followers. Screams of pain could be heard as the cursed ones passed out from the final hex. The remaining Death Eaters and, surprisingly, a few parents, fell to the ground unconscious as the spell triggered the Dark Mark for the last time.

Cautiously, Aurors approached the bodies and verified Voldemort's death. Both Harry and Severus were taken to St Mungo's: Harry heralded as a hero, Severus as the ultimate traitor. Most thought Severus had fallen with the other Death Eaters; it was only later, during an investigation by the Wizengamot, that the truth came out.

Moody, ever vigilant, confiscated both wands, hoping to find enough evidence to hang Severus. He preached loudly, to anyone that would listen, that Snape had aimed the spell at Harry and missed, hitting Voldemort by mistake. The reverse spell incantation performed on the wands surprised everyone when the ghostly image of Voldemort flowed from the tips of both, both wizards obviously casting the Killing Curse at the same time for such a rare phenomenon to occur.

Moody's claim that Snape was playing both sides and only cast the Curse to save his own hide was dismissed out of turn. A simple application of Veritaserum confirmed Severus's intention to kill the Dark Lord. While he hated Potter, he had no desire to kill the young man. Had that been the case, he pointed out, he could have killed him the night Albus died, instead of blocking the curses the boy threw at him.

Mention of Albus's death brought on a new round of questioning. It had taken time, but Dumbledore's Pensieve detailing the slow, insidious poisoning of his system resulting from dismantling Riddle's ring, the fourth Horcrux finally surfaced. Albus's testimony, given posthumously, detailed the elaborate plan he had bound Severus to, including extracting a wizard's oath to kill him if Draco came for him. Minerva had been the Headmaster's Secret Keeper. Struck by a particularly nasty curse at the final battle, she had still been unconscious when Severus was first brought before the Wizengamot or she could have told them of the existence of Albus's Pensieve, clearing Severus's name.

Reluctantly, Severus was cleared of all charges and left with a life he hadn't planned for. He was back at Hogwarts, teaching Potions again. Minerva had offered him the Defence Against the Dark Arts position when she was finally able to convince him to return, but the post held too many painful memories. Albus had been like a father to him; it had almost killed him to carry out the oath he'd sworn. It was only the need to see the Dark Lord fall his final promise to Albus that had kept him going. That and the belief he would not live past the final battle, anyway.

Severus continued to be the outcast he had always been, a shadow that moved silently through wizard society, left to his own devices ... until she took notice of him.

It was the third anniversary of Voldemort's defeat. Never social, Severus nevertheless was happy to show up at the Ministry celebration, if only to annoy those present: to serve as a glaring reminder of what might have been, what could have happened, if the Light had not persevered.

Harry had married Ginny within months of the final battle. If the wizarding world had celebrated Voldemort's defeat, it revered the day their saviour married his teenage sweetheart.

Severus watched as Harry gently led his wife, heavy with their first child, around the dance floor. He estimated her to be about six months along. He failed to see the young witch watching him, her eyes intense as she seemed to come to a decision.

"Severus, I was wondering if I could speak with you for a moment?"

"What is it, Granger?"

"Have you had a chance to look at a copy of this month's Potions journal? I was wondering what you thought about the new Flu Potion they mentioned? I was thinking it might come in handy for the coming flu session, if it really does all that it's supposed to." Hermione had returned to Hogwarts to do her practical in medicine. The years before the war had been hard-spent learning Healing on the job as more and more of the Order's members fell victim to surprise attacks. As in all things, Hermione's extensive medical research helped to reverse quite a few of the more obscure Dark curses inflicted upon the Light. Continuing on seemed the most logical course for her.

She had been an annoying know-it-all as his student. Sometime around her fifth-year, she had stopped flaunting her intellect and chose instead to focus on her own quiet pursuit of expanding her education, instead. As a Prefect, she was allowed clear access to the Restricted Section, a privilege Severus knew she took advantage of extensively throughout her fifth- and sixth-year.

All in all, she had grown into an attractive, confident, intelligent woman. And she still annoyed him. "Really, Granger, why don't you run along and bother someone else? I'm sure Weasley would be happy to entertain you with details of his latest Quidditch match." Severus sipped his drink, hoping the young woman would take off and leave him to his thoughts.

"Why do you do it?"

"What?" What was she going on about now? Do what? "Why do I do what?"

"I've no doubt you've played the bastard, the social misfit, for so long that it actually is who you are now, but how do you find the strength to fight all the time? Don't you get tired of expending all that energy keeping everyone else at bay?"

"And why would you care? So you and your little friends can have a good laugh at my expense?" Severus sneered at the young woman, noting the fire gathering in her eyes. "Run along and play nice with the others and let me be."

"I know you did what you had to. I can't imagine how hard that must have been, but you need to let it go."

Severus's eyes blazed with righteous indignation. "You know nothing about me. What is it you want, Granger? I'll brew you your damn potion. Happy now?"

"I don't want anything. You just looked like you could use a friend."

Severus drained the amber liquid remaining in his glass. "I believe this conversation is over. I do not need a friend. And I most certainly would never consider you for the position, if I did."

"What are you afraid of?" Her voice was quiet; he had to strain his ears to hear her over the music.

"Did you lose a bet? Is that what this is about? Have you decided to take up the evil git as your new cause?"

Hermione stood silently watching him. She had watched him before: no one approached him, no one talked to him other than Minerva or Poppy, and he was barely civil to either of them. It was no wonder that no one else wished to have anything to do with him. He had crossed her mind at the Ministry Balls before, but seeing his lonely day-to-day existence at Hogwarts had saddened her beyond reason.

"Cat got your tongue?" Severus took a step toward her. Reflexively, Hermione backed up. "Where's your courage now, Granger?"

Hermione stopped, the sound of her blood pounding in her ears.

He swept forward, pulling her onto the dance floor and into his arms. "Is this what you had in mind, friend?"

The words were hissed into her ear. She could feel his hipbone pressing into her flesh as he pulled her close. His hand was surprisingly warm against her skin as he held her. She relaxed into his arms, her hand in his, her other arm moving up to drape lightly across his shoulder. "I love to dance. How did you know?"

Severus faltered as he watched her eyes sparkle. He had meant to frighten her. He didn't need her pity. He didn't need anyone, least of all her. The dance had started as a scare tactic. It didn't end that way.

The couples around them parted, and then stopped to stare, open-mouthed, as they danced around the floor. Severus remained strangely quiet as he held the young woman in his arms. He slowed to a stop as the song ended, still holding Hermione. Another song started almost immediately.

"Oh, I love this song. I haven't heard it in so long. One more dance?" She smiled, her head tipped slightly to the side, her eyes on him alone. The rest of the room faded away as they continued to dance, Hermione laying her head against his shoulder.

"Why are you doing this, Granger?"

She could almost hear the fear in his voice as he whispered into her ear, his breath warm as he sighed. She raised her head to look at him, hoping he wouldn't doubt the sincerity of her words. "Because I can. Because I'm where I want to be." She smiled as she felt him tighten his hold on her waist.

They drifted out into a side garden when the music changed to a livelier tune.

"Granger..."

"Hermione." She watched his eyes darken as he looked from her eyes to her lips and back again. Her eyes drifted close as he lowered his mouth to hers. She snaked her hand across his shoulders, tangling her fingers through the silky hairs at the nape of his neck. His fingers threaded through her hair, his other hand pulling her against his body. The kiss was soft, tentative, a brush of his lips, a question, and a promise of things to come.

"Hermione," he whispered. He never gave her a chance to speak. Once again he captured her lips, this time sure of his welcome. His tongue brushed against her lips, seeking entrance. She could feel his erection, hard and heavy against her thigh.

Her blood caught fire as he ravished her mouth. His hands roamed her body, sliding down her back to play with her bum before working his way back up, his fingers gently raking the side of her breast. She moaned into his mouth, her fingers digging into his shoulders as she hung on for dear life, her body moulded to his.

What was he doing? This was Granger, for God's sake! He pulled back, but Hermione refused to let go.

"Severus?"

Her eyes were glazed with lust, her breath coming in short pants. The sight of her red lips, swollen from his kisses, hardened him further, but it was the sound of her voice that proved to be his undoing.

Severus watched her eyes as he spoke. "This is wrong. I don't even like you."

Hermione smiled. "You will." She pulled him back to her and he was lost.

He had never understood why she had approached him that night. She had said she'd always admired his intelligence, but had never had any interest in him. She was a mystery to him. "They" were a mystery to him. It didn't help that Potter and Weasley wouldn't speak to her for months after they started going out.

Eventually, it had been Ginevra who had patched things up among the trio. Hermione was to attend Ron's wedding. Severus had offered to remain in his quarters, knowing it would only cause more friction were he to show up as her escort for the ceremony in the Great Hall. Hermione would have none of it. He was going with her and that was final. It seemed Ginny and Molly was of the same mind-set. He almost felt sorry for Potter and Weasley at the rehearsal, when they voiced their objections to his presence. Voldemort had nothing on the fury three powerful adult witches could evoke. Harry and Ron never stood a chance.

Severus drew the velvet pouch from its resting place before hanging up his cloak. He sat heavily on the sofa, the pouch held tightly in his hand. He drew the ring box from the depths of the black fabric, dislodging the coins in the pouch. It was exactly a year since their first official date. He was planning to propose to Hermione after dinner. She claimed to be happy with their relationship just the way it was. She had often said she was not the marrying kind, a sentiment he would have said he believed about himself, too, until quite recently.

He was sure there were those who would say he was marrying her to prove a point; what that point might be wasn't exactly clear. He had never believed in marriage, especially after being subjected to the sham that passed for his parents' marriage. It just wasn't his cup of tea. So why did he feel the need to propose to Hermione? He loved her; he knew she loved him. So why get married? They didn't plan to have children; teaching the little "darlings" was enough for him, thank you very much. So why was he sitting on his sofa, his palms sweaty, his heart racing, holding a diamond ring and trying to figure out how he was going to "pop" the question?

He supposed it came down to commitment. He knew she loved him; he still couldn't figure out why, but he didn't doubt her sincerity. He wanted to prove he would be with her always; that they belonged to each other for all to see.

He only hoped she would say yes; he thought she would, maybe.

He glanced at the clock as he opened the bottle of wine. They were dining in his quarters tonight: "celebrating" their one-year anniversary. His nerves were on edge as he waited for the woman he loved. He was not a romantic man. Would she want him to get down on one knee? A long flowery speech or a simple "Will you marry me?"

He almost jumped out of his skin when she knocked. His hand slipped on the doorknob, his palm sweaty, as he opened the door.

"Hello." Hermione kissed him as she crossed the threshold.

It was given to Severus again in his change five years later, when he stopped to purchase an anniversary present for his wife...but that's another story, for another time.

~finis~

Pearle

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A/N: This story was the result of a comment I made on Elspethsheir's LiveJournal. A friend of mine purchased a Roman coin as an investment. I was enthralled as I thought about all the people that had touched that coin, the very fact that it had existed for thousands of years. It was the catalyst for this story.

HP Lexicon references an essay set by Binns on Witch Burnings in the Fourteenth Century, and the fact that Wendelin the Weird enjoyed being burned so much that she allowed herself to be caught no less than forty-seven times in various disguises. The melting point of gold is 1947.52 degrees Fahrenheit, and wood combusts at roughly 500-900 degrees Fahrenheit; therefore, the Galleon would not have melted in Wendelin's pocket, since she normally cast a Flame-Freezing Charm when the fire started to get hot.

A grateful thank you to my beta, Nakhash, for her corrections, suggestions, and never ending supply of commas. Another set of eyes is always helpful, the mistakes, however, are still mine.

Please review and let me know what you think. I love hearing from you! As always, thoughts, comments, reviews, whatever are most welcome.

Pearle