

Illumination ~or~ Why Snape Didn't Get a Portrait

by *Ariadne AWS*

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Illumination

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: In honour of Annie Talbot's birthday: The happiest of birthdays to you, ma chere amie. No words here for the countless, wondrous ways you've touched my life and my heart and my mind and my spirit.

Illumination

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or

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Why Snape Didn't Get a Portrait

(An Illustrated Ficlet in Honour of Annie Talbot's Birthday)

During Hermione's many years as Headmistress as Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, she'd learned almost everything there was to know about the castle. With the unlimited access to research sources afforded by her position and her endlessly curious mind, by the end of her tenure, she knew why the staircases moved, and in what pattern (it was based on Newton's theory of the 7th wave, adjusted for Christopher Wren's algorithm, which was, in turn, based on the Aramaic). She knew who had enchanted the ceiling in the great hall and how (an almost unknown Magi-meteorologist by the name of Giuseppe Cantore, in the 15th century). She even knew who had created the Room of Requirement and why. When she'd cracked that mystery in her 98th year, she'd burst out laughing, but she'd always refused to explain it.

But for all she'd learned, all the puzzles she'd enjoyed wrestling with, the many secrets she'd shared with the old castle, one question remained, one she couldn't, try as she might, illuminate.

Since her very first day as Headmistress, a day she'd felt far too small for the chair that she'd once known as Albus Dumbledore's and Minerva McGonagall's, this particular mystery had occupied many of the countless hours she'd spent alone in the tower office, her quill scratching into silence as once again she'd raise her eyes to the wall, wondering why Severus Snape had never, ever been awarded a portrait.

He should have been. She'd researched the matter thoroughly – which took less than a minute after she'd located the relevant scroll, as there was only one criterion: all former Heads of Hogwarts were awarded portraits by the castle itself.

It didn't matter if the witch or wizard in question had been actually in office when they died. It didn't matter if their title had included the word "Acting." Gryffindors, Slytherins, Ravenclaws, Hufflepuffs (there were rather more of these than she'd suspected; the school owed most of its smoothly functioning administrative policies and procedures to the badger house); Healers, administrators, archivists, Ministry officials, professors, parents, trustees... witches and wizards of every sort lined the walls of the Head's office, and, Hermione had learned, some of the gently snoring figures had served under shadows of rumour, scandal, even treason.

There was simply no earthly reason why Severus Snape, former Headmaster, had no portrait.

Her years were busy; her hair greyed, and her eyes dimmed, and, as she grew into the sort of calm that one expects of the elderly teacher who has seen everything, she even developed a glint in her eyes that, had they been blue, might have been a twinkle.

And as her years passed ever more quickly, she transferred more responsibility to her Deputy head, a particularly capable young wizard who in his seventh year had finally led Hufflepuff to the House Cup for the first time in anyone's memory, she found herself spending more and more evenings by the fire in her office in quiet conversation with the portraits.

"Have you given a thought to your frame, dear?" Minerva asked kindly from her spot on the wall next to the fire.

"One can choose?"

"One can try." Minerva gestured to her own frame, gilt with an interlacing of knotwork woven tastefully at the corners. "The castle sometimes obliges. It has its own quiet ways of rewarding service, you know."

Hermione smiled wearily. "I'll give the matter some thought."

"Oh, Hermione, dear, don't trouble yourself. I was merely making conversation."

"I know, Minerva... I'm sorry. I'm just so very tired."

Minerva nodded gently, and several of the other portraits exchanged knowing glances.

Hermione slept.

As she slept, she remembered Ron. Such a strange little affair that had been. No matter. He'd been happy, eventually, and she smiled in her sleep.

Harry – ah, Harry. A great-great-grandfather many times over now, surrounded by as much family as an orphaned hero could wish for. Vital, still, although slowing a bit...

... they were all slowing...

... why should she be slowing faster, now? She couldn't think, only wonder...

Time slowed with her and seemed to flow backwards.

Laughter, at long last laughter, after the war, watching James Sirius's first steps... memories in a shaken Pensieve, out of order now... her Hogwarts letter... her first address as Headmistress... Polyjuice potion... whiskers... Viktor's note, asking her to the Yule ball... owls exchanged with her mother... a rustle of tissue paper as she opened the package... pink... she'd requested blue, but her mother had still, even years later, seen her as a child... no matter... his fingertips touching hers, supporting her hand gently as she slowly descended the stair... crossing her fingers behind her gown, hoping she wouldn't trip in her first high heels... a ruffle catching in her heel and she tottered slightly, holding her breath, poised on the edge of falling...

And a spark of blue flames at her heel, so tiny she wasn't sure she'd seen it, and the silk ruffle which had prevented her forward progress melted into ashes soft as snowflakes, curling around her ankle as she could once again step forward.

She'd never told anyone. It hadn't been her. Her eyes had swept the Hall, grateful to whomever it was who had noticed and saved her a disgraceful tumble in front of everyone...

She'd no idea who had done it.

Her fingers resting lightly on Viktor's glove, she stepped forward confidently, eyes sparkling at the surprise of her schoolmates...

The Headmistress nodded in her armchair, smiling as she felt a blanket tucked around her as she slept before the winter fire...

"Thank you," she whispered, *still fifteen, covering his hand with her own.*

She was drawn into his arms and nestled there, smiling softly...

"Of course," he murmured, but he wasn't Viktor and she wasn't fifteen and it wasn't a blanket, it was silk, black silk, and it didn't matter, and it mattered more than anything, and she rested her cheek on his chest and silk fluttered off her shoulder and she said, "My dress..." and he said, low, so low that only she could hear, "Leave it."

And she felt his voice in his chest, through the warm wool, from his heart, and, placing her hand on his shoulder, Hermione smiled, and she heard a low chuckle and felt his breath, warm, hot, alive, into her hair, and she opened her eyes and his were there.

Black. Powerful. Dangerous.

The force in them dissolved her.

"I'm falling..."

"Hush. I've got you." His hand firm at the small of her back, the other tracing a wondering awe of *closer* on her skin.

"Professor Snape..."

"Miss Granger..."

Someone chuckled, and his arms tightened around her, shielding her face from a host of staring eyes.

"Silence, Phineas. The girl is disoriented. You remember how it is."

"I'm not," she said against the rough wool of his coat. "I know exactly where I am – I'm with you."

"Yes," he said quietly. "Yes."

"In your portrait."

"Not mine, Hermione. Ours."

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Credits:

Photo: Lariope

Actors: Team Illusions

Alpha Readers: Machshefa, Lady Karelia, RichardGloucester, Indigofeathers

Art!Betas: Anastasia, FerPorcel.