

The Colour of Time

by duniazade

Her daughter asked for the same tale, night after night.

A/N: Three loosely related series written for GrangerSnape100 (respective challenges: grey nightshirt, when I'm old and grey, when ghosts intervene). Margot is Bluestocking's creation; she graciously allowed me to use the name.

1. The Colour of Time

Chapter 1 of 3

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Hermione sat by her daughter's cot.

"Shall we try Babbity Rabbit & Her Cackling Stump?"

"No! Please, Mummy. The Prince."

Hermione sighed. Margot wanted the same tale, night after night.

The book opened by itself at "The Colour of Time," and Hermione began.

Margot listened with rapt attention, thumb in mouth and black eyes glittering.

"And then... " Hermione paused for effect.

That was the passage Margot loved best. If Hermione read it just so, her daughter would go to sleep almost instantly. If not, she'd have to read again and again until the little imp would be satisfied.

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"And then Death offered to the Prince an Invisibility Cloak, but Time offered him a cloak the colour of fleeting clouds, the colour of a snake's trail, the colour of ashes and memory, the colour of dreams. The Prince chose the cloak of Time. From the moment he put it on, everyone saw in him only what they desired to see. Very few ever saw his true colours."

"That's just like Daddy's grey nightshirt!" cried her daughter.

Hermione breathed. She'd done it right.

"Yes, my dear."

She bent to kiss the white forehead, but the child was already fast asleep.

2. The Good Life

Chapter 2 of 3

It was already very hot, even under the great plane trees, and the garden was humming with the music of Provence summer.

It was already very hot, even under the great plane trees, and the garden was humming with the music of Provence summer: a soft blend of insects' buzz, lazy leaves' stirring, sounds of Hermione's distant activity from the house.

Severus raised to his lips the glass of elf-made champagne with a little pang of guilt: it was not good for him, and he knew it.

But the golden, delicate, chilled drink seemed in such harmony with the morning sun, and he knew there would soon be a strawberry tart for lunch.

He sighed happily and turned over in the hammock.

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The blue door was flung open, and the midday heat burst into the cool, treasured shade of the house.

Strands of whimsical song floated out: though Severus harrumphed, Hermione had taken to listening to Trenet while cooking. "For the local colour," she had explained.

"Seeeverus! Lunch is ready!"

Hermione stood in the doorway, brushing a wisp of silvery hair from her face.

"He must have fallen asleep again," she grumbled and walked to the back of the garden.

She saw the shattered glass of champagne first, then the elegant and listless hand over the edge of the hammock.

"Oh, Severus."

3. After the Party

Chapter 3 of 3

The party was a roaring success.

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"Thanks to you. Asking the elves' ghosts to prepare the spectral dinner was pure genius. Dobby in particular outdid himself. Even Nearly Headless Nick had to grant that the salmon was perfectly rotten."

"But you invited Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore just to annoy him."

"It was my Deathday Party, and I will invite whomever I please. The Gryffindor Ghost Wonder is welcome to decline."

She looked up at him. He might be pearly white, but he enjoyed irritating people more than ever. He was positively shining with unholy glee.

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"And who," she sighed, "could refuse a joint invitation from the living Headmistress and the ghost Headmaster of Hogwarts?"

From the silver frame on the dressing table, a beautiful dark-haired witch laughed.

"Even my daughter turns against me," he grumbled. "How is she faring at Beauxbâtons?"

"She loves you, as do I. She's doing very well."

He passed his hand lightly over her brow, and the cool touch soothed her. "And now, you must sleep – the sleep of the living. Tomorrow you have to greet the delegation from Durmstrang."

She closed her eyes under the whisper of the softest spell.