

Rosemary

by Annie Talbot

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Warning: This fic is *Deathly Hallows*-compliant. Yes, that means what you think it means. Have a box of tissues handy.

"Wait."

Halfway to Gryffindor Tower, Harry stopped in his tracks. Several steps ahead, Ron and Hermione turned to look at him in concern, leaning against one another in fatigue.

"Never mind," he said quietly. "I just realised that I've forgotten something. You go ahead... I'll see you in the Tower."

"Are you certain, Harry?" Hermione peered at him in concern. "You're exhausted. Surely it can wait until you've rested." Her voice wavered.

He debated explaining to them. They'd go with him, he knew, but they were so tired...

"No. It can't wait. But I'll be fine. It's just one last thing, and I can handle it. Go on, now."

He watched until they had disappeared around a bend in the corridor then turned and, gathering the tatters and wisps of energy that remained, trod back towards the Great Hall in search of Professor McGonagall.

~oOOo~

"Harry, I thought you'd gone to bed!" Minerva McGonagall turned towards the young wizard.

"I had... that is, I was on my way. But then I remembered. Shouldn't we..."

"Look at you, young man. You're swaying where you stand. You need to go to bed right now. I'd be there myself, if I didn't have one last duty to perform." She turned towards the doorway through which Professors Flitwick and Sprout were entering, Horace Slughorn puffing behind them. Each carried a covered basket similar to the one resting on the floor beside the newly-appointed headmistress.

For a moment, Harry feared that she was going to send him off to bed like a firstie. Before she could speak again, Luna Lovegood joined the group, smiling vaguely.

"Are we going to fetch Professor Snape now?"

"The four Heads of House are going, Miss Lovegood," Professor Flitwick explained. "After all, it is we who expelled him from the school. We should be the ones who

restore him, should we not?"

"Of course, sir," answered Luna, grasping Harry's hand. "And Harry and I are going with you."

Harry nodded. As usual, he didn't understand *how* Luna knew what was happening, but he knew in his bones that she was absolutely right.

"I'm really not sure," Professor McGonagall said. "It is for us to retrieve him and give him his due."

"We are his honour guard," returned Luna. She pulled Harry toward the doors, blithely expecting the professors to follow. Which, to Harry's great surprise, they did.

~o0O0o~

The wounded and dead had been removed from the grounds. All that remained were fallen stones, shattered glass, and churned up earth, evidence of the mighty battle that had taken place not twelve hours before. Despite the warmth of the morning, Harry shivered. Hogwarts itself was injured horribly, and he could almost hear the dirt, the stones, and the glass crying out.

Luna's hand tightened around his.

"This, too, shall pass, Harry, and all shall be well. I promise."

He wished he could believe her, but he didn't see how it could be. So much destruction...

He was glad when Professor Flitwick took the lead, guiding them down the winding path towards the gates of the school and bypassing the Whomping Willow and the tunnel Harry hoped he would never traverse again.

The little party trudged up the seemingly endless road to Hogsmeade, passing strangers and townsfolk along the way, never pausing. Harry stumbled in weariness once, but Luna grabbed his arm, holding him upright and saving him from the embarrassment of sprawling in the middle of the road.

No one challenged them, not even the fiercest Auror. People made way for them, stepping back respectfully, murmuring greetings.

Whispers followed them through the village. Harry strained to hear, but he couldn't make out the words. He wished he had thought to wear his Invisibility Cloak, as the stares and murmured comments were making him nervous. He tightened his grip on Luna's hand.

"It's all right, Harry. They're just grateful. And probably a bit confused, as well. After all, you were Undesirable Number One yesterday, and today you're the Saviour of the Wizarding World. They don't know you're the same Harry as you always were."

"Am I, Luna? Do you really think so?"

The gaze she turned on him was as misty as ever, but Harry felt it go straight through him.

"Yes, Harry. You are. I would know you anywhere."

~o0O0o~

The door was warded.

Harry would have laughed at the expression on Minerva McGonagall's face had he not been so tired himself.

The door was warded and it would not respond to any of the Unlocking Spells attempted by the six of them, individually or en masse.

"What would Riddle have cast, Horace?" demanded Professor Flitwick. "You knew him best."

"I have no idea, Filius," was Slughorn's response. "I was his Potions master, not his Charms professor. Wandwork is your specialty."

He broke off.

"Harry, what did you do with Tom's wand?"

With a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, Harry pocketed his own wand and pulled the Elder Wand from the mokeskin pouch. He watched the four professors carefully to see how they responded to the sight of the most powerful wand in wizarding history.

Minerva McGonagall appeared repelled by it, while Pomona Sprout seemed indifferent. Filius Flitwick assessed it openly; Horace Slughorn was frankly covetous, his fingers twitching involuntarily.

Harry sighed, turning towards the Shack, loathing the sensation of it as he cast. "*Finite Incantatem.*"

Through the wand, Harry felt the wards Riddle had set with it just hours ago dropping. Then, unexpectedly, he sensed other hexes and jinxes sliding away as well; traps set by Riddle for any unwary individual fortunate or skilled enough to breach the wards. When the door finally opened, he shoved the wand back into the pouch, wiping his hand on his robes in disgust. If he never touched that wand again, it would be too soon.

~o0O0o~

Once inside, Harry clutched his phoenix feather wand tightly as he guided them to the room where Professor Snape had been murdered.

He sagged in disappointment. He hadn't even realised that he'd hoped...

No miracle had taken place. There had been no second chance for Severus Snape, or at least, if one had been offered, he had not chosen to return.

The former headmaster, professor, and spy for the Order lay sprawled in a dried pool of blood and memory.

Broken.

Emptied.

The professors stood frozen just inside the doorway, horrified at the sight before them. Harry, too, was immobilised, but by the echoes of Snape's scream, Voldemort's voice, and those last, gasping words. "*Look... at... me...*" Harry could do nothing *but* look.

Luna ran forward into the room, dropping to her knees beside the dead man. "There, there," Luna murmured as she tenderly closed his eyes and straightened his limbs. "That's better."

She rose and rejoined Harry, pulling him to one side and making room for the professors to move freely.

Horace Slughorn advanced towards the body, rummaging within his basket. He knelt with difficulty but waved away Harry's involuntary attempt to assist him.

He finally located a tiny phial of golden liquid, which he decanted over his colleague's forehead.

"There you go," he choked.

With trembling fingers, he smoothed the fluid into the lined brow and the furrows around the still mouth.

"Safe journey, boy," he whispered, breaking down completely.

He struggled to his feet, weeping openly.

Snape's face was smooth. The lines that had been etched by decades of grief, anger, and despair were gone, erased by Horace's magical touch.

Felix Felicis, Harry realised. Liquid luck for the least fortunate man Harry had ever known. For an instant he was overcome, and he felt himself sway. Luna's arms came around him, anchoring him.

Professor McGonagall sighed heavily and pointed her wand at a broken-down table in the corner. Seconds later, it was a silk-covered pallet onto which Professor Flitwick lifted Snape's body. Professor Sprout straightened his head on the satin pillow, brushing back his hair and murmuring soft words of comfort.

Minerva McGonagall looked over at Harry and Luna.

"Mr Potter... Miss Lovegood... Lead the way back to Hogwarts, if you will."

Harry nodded, and he and Luna preceded the bier from the Shack.

He did not look back. However, as they made their way through Hogsmeade, he could hear hushed voices and muffled footsteps as their small group was joined by an ever-growing crowd of townsfolk.

~oOOo~

As they passed through the gates of Hogwarts, Professor McGonagall's voice carried clearly.

"To the Lake, Harry."

Obediently, Harry and Luna turned and crossed the rolling field. As they passed Dumbledore's tomb, Harry looked away, tasting bitterness on his tongue. He had forgiven Albus Dumbledore for his manipulations of the child he had been, truly he had. However, when he considered Snape...

He wished they had taken another route. Somehow, it was wrong for Snape's cortege to be blighted by the grand memorial to Dumbledore. He stumbled again, but did not fall. Once more, Luna took his hand.

"We're almost there," she whispered.

Indeed they were. As they crested the last hill before the lake, they were greeted with the blast of a clear horn. Squinting against the bright sun's reflection, Harry was surprised to see the herd of centaurs awaiting them.

In response to the horn's signal, the great doors of Hogwarts Castle opened and others streamed out. Students. Teachers. Order members. Aurors. House-elves. Harry saw the gleaming hair of the Malfoys, followed closely by the red heads of the Weasleys, Hagrid, Hermione and Neville in their midst.

They waited on the rocky shore beside the bier holding the earthly remains of Severus Snape until the crowd finally settled, standing in a semi-circle around the four professors, Harry, and Luna.

Minerva McGonagall raised her voice.

"We are here to honour our colleague, Severus Snape, Potions Master and Headmaster of Hogwarts. As you all have heard, he was little more than a boy when he joined Lord Voldemort, and he spent the last eighteen years in atonement for that error and its consequences. He lost his heart, his life, and injured his very soul in his battle to overcome the evil that Tom Riddle had become.

"No one standing here, no one who fell, has sacrificed more."

Bending, she rummaged in her basket, finally producing a wooden plate and two jars. She laid her hand on Snape's still chest for a moment before replacing it with the plate.

"Ancient Scottish custom requires us to lay earth upon the dead," she said, opening and overturning the larger of the jars onto the plate. "He will return to the earth which bore him."

She opened the seal on the smaller jar and poured a coarse white substance beside the earth. "Salt signifies his eternal soul."

Bending, she placed a gentle kiss on Snape's forehead then stepped back, head bowed.

"Safe journey, Severus."

Horace Slughorn stepped forward.

"Severus Snape was my student, my colleague, and my headmaster. I doubt that I treated him well in any of those relationships. I did not know... But then, perhaps I was not meant to know who he truly was. And perhaps I did not bother to look."

He paused, all of his bluff geniality gone. Harry glimpsed the guilt-ridden man who had confessed to giving Tom Riddle the keys to immortality.

"I shall always regret failing him in his youth and doubting him in this past year. He was twice the man I am."

He tucked the phial of *Felix Felicis* into Snape's lax right hand.

"Safe journey, boy."

Filius Flitwick took Slughorn's place beside the bier.

"I, too, doubted, and to my shame, I called him 'murderer' and cast him out. Severus played his role well, and so did Albus, while he lived. I shan't forgive Albus for what he asked of Severus... required of him, rather. I shan't forgive myself for not seeing what was hidden."

He opened his basket and withdrew a wooden model of a Viking longboat. Seconds later, he'd enlarged it to full size, and it moved gently on the lake's surface, held in place by a single rope. Hagrid stepped up and took the line from him, holding it securely.

Harry began to realise what they intended. His throat clogged with tears as Professor Flitwick hovered the bier onto the boat.

"Now I send him on his way with as much honour as I can muster. Safe journey, Severus."

He moved to stand by Hagrid, whose tears overflowed as he clutched the rope binding Severus Snape to the shore.

Professor Sprout stepped forward, drawing an olive branch from her basket.

"Severus was my friend until last year, when I branded him a murderer and betrayer. The betrayal was mine."

She pressed her lips to the olive branch, then tossed it into the longboat.

"Peace, my friend. Safe journey."

She opened the basket and set it on the ground.

"Take what you need," she said, gesturing to those who had come from Hogsmeade.

Aberforth Dumbledore stepped up first, reached in, and pulled out a spring of rosemary, which he threw into the boat. "Remembrance," he whispered, closing his eyes.

Townfolk filed past, each pulling a stem from the basket and adding it to the pile in the boat. Then the centaurs and those who had walked down from Hogwarts followed, flinging roses, tulips, all manner of flowers and branches, calling out the meanings as they wished Severus Snape a safe journey.

Finally, Professor McGonagall gestured for Luna to reach into the basket. She grasped a stalk of tiny white bells. "Trustworthiness," she declared in her high, sweet voice. "Farewell, Headmaster."

Professor Slughorn added boxwood. "For constancy," he called.

A thistle sailed through the air, landing in the vicinity of Snape's heart. "Nobility!" cried Minerva McGonagall.

Harry stepped forward; all fell silent.

He stood for a moment, inhaling the myriad scents of the wizarding world's tributes to Severus Snape. He fingered the wand he'd snatched from the air that very morning. The wand meant to conquer death. The wand that even now some of the crowd couldn't resist staring at with mingled awe and greed.

He knew what he had to do.

Holding the Elder Wand up before his chest, he grasped it firmly in both hands.

"The Deathstick," someone in the crowd cried, only to be shushed by his neighbours.

"Yes," Harry said, and then, with all his strength he snapped it in two. The crowd gasped.

"No one is Master of Death. Instead, I am returning the wand to Death, where it rightly belongs." He clambered onto the longboat, pausing to pull a lily from Professor Sprout's basket.

He tucked the halves of the Elder Wand into Snape's left hand, closing his fingers around it.

"You are avenged, sir," he whispered.

He laid the lily across Snape's breast.

"Thank you."

~oOo~

Luna didn't catch him when he stumbled after leaping from the longboat; Ron and Hermione did. He was overwhelmed with gratitude as they gently steadied him so he could rejoin Luna. He felt his other friends come up beside him... Neville, Seamus, Dean, George, and Ginny.

They stood motionless as Hagrid released the rope, watching silently as invisible breezes and tides carried the longboat towards the centre of the Lake.

The Great Bell of Hogwarts began its noonday tolling just as the boat stilled. The four Heads of House raised their wands on the eleventh count. Harry held his breath.

On the twelfth count, as the sun reached its zenith, the longboat burst into flames.

It only burned for a few minutes before it sank into the depths of the Black Lake. The crowd dispersed, but Harry stood still until there was no trace to be seen.

Bending, he reached into Professor Sprout's bottomless basket. A sprig of rosemary came into his hand.

He held it to his nose, inhaling deeply, then threaded it through the loop in his robes.

"I will always remember."

Author's Note: Many, many thanks to all the moderators of the Severus Big Bang Birthday Bash, for which this was written, most particularly Sylvanawood for her patience.

In addition, a number of my beloved friends swarmed to help me whip this into shape at the very last minute. It started off as a drabble series. It has been alpha- and beta-read by Ferporcel, Machshefa, Mia Madwyn, Mischievous T, and Potion Mistress. As you can see, it is no longer a drabble series, in large part due to the tactful observations of some of these ladies, who found my efforts in that format somewhat lacking. They were, of course, completely right. As usual. (sigh) If any errors or inadequacies remain, they are mine. All mine.