

Return to Hogwarts

by Alison

This grew out of a pensive mood, and to commemorate the Potion's Master's birthday. It's a few days late, I hope you will forgive me!

Short one-shot story

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I do not own these characters and make no profit from this fanfiction.

There was a loud cracking sound, and a man appeared on the road. He was dressed in a heavy black travelling cape, wrapped closely about himself to fend off the pre-dawn drizzle. His wide-brimmed hat was also pulled down, so that his face was merely another grey shadow in the general gloom.

He stood for a moment, as if orienting himself in the half-light, then strode forwards to the gates. A flick of his wand and the gates opened obediently before him without so much as a creak or clank, then shut just as quietly after he passed through.

He walked slowly, gazing about, taking in the changes. The devastation that had been wrought on the grounds one year ago had been mostly repaired, although there was one less greenhouse than there used to be, and a big foot-sized crater in the soft ground showed that it had been stomped flat by a giant during the battle.

The great black bulk of the sleeping castle looked mostly as he remembered it: it was missing one of its towers, but for the most part it appeared to have been well-repaired. Although presumably it would look different in the light of day, as the scars of magical battle would be impossible to completely remove from the stones; now however the dim watery light clothed it in softer shades.

Careful to stay on the grass rather than risk the crunching of the gravel path, he ghosted past the stone steps leading up to the front door and headed instead for the lake and the graveyard, the many neat tombstones in rows, with Dumbledore's white marble tomb standing in the centre.

There was another change here, he noticed. A large statue had been erected on top of the tomb, Dumbledore in stone. The figure gazed at it for a moment, then shook his head as if in some private amusement. He sank to kneel before the tomb, apparently uncaring that the grass was wet and the ground muddy from the rain.

He stayed in that attitude for several moments, his head bowed. Finally, he rose to his feet, settled his cloak once more, and paced to the right hand side of the white marble tomb. Here was another tombstone, one among many, but in pride of place beside Dumbledore's. The black-clad figure now had something in his hand, something which he held to his face for a moment before slowly, almost reverently, laying it on the mound of dirt in front of the tombstone.

Finally, as if he'd finished a chore he'd set out to do, the figure turned and strode back the way he had come, across the grass to the front gates of Hogwarts, which once more opened to let him pass, then closed behind him. Once back out on the road, there was another loud crack! as the figure Disapparated.

A dark shadow detached itself from the thick tree trunk it had been camouflaged behind. The gamekeeper was a half-giant, true, but he could be very quiet and still when he needed to, and this was one of those times. He'd spent the night in the forest, tending to a sick unicorn, and had been coming home to his hut when he'd noticed the figure in black crossing the grounds.

His first reaction had been to challenge the figure, but this response had disappeared when he recognised, with a shock, just who it was that was visiting the Hogwarts graveyard in this early hour before dawn. So instead of revealing himself, Hagrid had hidden, to watch and see what the man would do.

Now, Hagrid walked across to the graveyard. In front of Dumbledore's white marble tomb, there was still the imprint where the man had knelt on the grass. But Hagrid wanted to see what it was that the figure had placed on the other tomb.

The drizzling rain had stopped now, and a watery dawn was suffusing the sky to the east. By this, Hagrid could make out the carving on the tombstone:

SEVERUS SNAPE

9 JANUARY 1960 – 2 MAY 1998

ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

Beneath that was a quote by a Muggle that Harry Potter had insisted be carved on Snape's tombstone:

LIGHT GIVES OF ITSELF FREELY. IT SEEKS NOTHING IN RETURN AND ASKS NOT WHETHER YOU ARE FRIEND OR FOE. IT GIVES OF ITSELF AND IS NOT THEREBY DIMINISHED.

Now, Hagrid smiled as he gazed at the stone. "Yeh fooled us all, yeh tricky bugger!" he muttered.

He'd always wondered about Snape's body; Hagrid had been the one who'd carried it from the Shrieking Shack back to Hogwarts, and he'd been surprised at the lightness of the man. Not only that, but it was Hagrid who had closed the dead eyes with one hand. The outward resemblance had been enough to fool the others, but Hagrid knew wild animals intimately, and that was never a human eye he'd seen. No, Hagrid had been convinced that what he was actually carrying was a dead bird, perhaps one of the many pigeons who roosted in the rafters of the Shrieking Shack, transformed by a powerful wizard to look like the body of Severus Snape. And Snape had been one of the most powerful wizards Hagrid had ever met ...

Of course, he'd heard from Harry, Hermione and Ron what had happened that night in the Shrieking Shack, that Snape had been attacked by Nagini. But Hagrid also knew that Snape was intelligent enough to have kept dittany or some other restorative potion about his person at all times. No, Hagrid couldn't believe that Snape would have been outsmarted by a mere snake. Perhaps blood loss and shock would have made him appear dead to three frightened teenagers, but it didn't follow that he actually was dead.

Hagrid looked down at the small white thing sitting on the mound of the grave, trying to puzzle out its significance. It was certainly not uncommon to leave flowers on graves, but now he was positive that Severus Snape was alive. Hagrid could understand the man's almost obsessive need for privacy; he could even appreciate that he might wish to appear dead to everybody, to start over without having to be anything for anybody, to live solely for himself for once. To a man like Severus Snape, such an outcome might be preferred to either being feted as a hero or treated like a turncoat. Hagrid could even see that, to maintain that privacy, Snape might have come to pay his respects to Dumbledore's grave in the night, to avoid others knowing that he was still alive. But why would he leave a single flower on his own fake grave, on this, the first anniversary of the battle?

The cloud cover to the east was beginning to break up, and a ray of bright sunlight suddenly illuminated the grave.

It was a white lily that Severus Snape had laid there, with a few drops of rain still clinging to its petals like shining teardrops ...

(Author's note: the inscription I used on Snape's headstone was a quote from Michael Strassfeld.)