

In Memory of Severus Snape

by herbologist

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N:

Written in response to Agnus Castus' Remembrance Day Challenge on the Muffliato! Facebook group. My thanks go to Agnus Castus for beta reading and giving me an excuse to write this little piece!

The silence in the circular space of the Headmistress' office was oppressive. Sitting in the high-backed chair in front of her desk, Minerva McGonagall could feel the painted eyes of the old and venerable Headmasters of Hogwarts boring into her back as she faced the most daunting task her new role had entailed so far. Staring at the blank piece of parchment in front of her, she sighed heavily. The *Daily Prophet* had asked her to write an obituary for her predecessor, Severus Snape, who had tragically fallen during the battle. It was a perfectly reasonable request, and she had to admit that she was the obvious and most appropriate person for the job.

Since she had been appointed Headmistress a few weeks ago, she had had to master a number of challenges assisting in the retrieval and burial of the many bodies strewn over battlefield of Hogwarts grounds, leading the repair work of the castle, organising the diminished faculty and preparing the school for the new academic year, to mention but a few. But none of these jobs had presented her with as much difficulty as the present one. She had been procrastinating over it for days until now, the day before the submission deadline, when she really could not put it off any longer.

She had known Severus for most of his life. He had been her student, her colleague, her ally, and during the last year her boss and most hated enemy. And yet, as it had turned out, she had not known him at all. With another deep sigh she turned around to look into the portraits' faces who were watching her expectantly. Unfortunately, the one who could have helped her out, the one who probably had been the only person who might have truly understood Severus (and unlike herself had always trusted him) rested in his painted chair with his eyes closed. She knew full well that Albus was only pretending to be asleep, an annoying habit he fell into whenever he did not want to be bothered, and which told her that he had no intention of assisting her with this task.

There was another pair of eyes that should have been watching. As a deceased Headmaster, Severus himself should have had a portrait according to Hogwarts' ancient tradition, but none had appeared following his death. A number of theories about why this was so had been circulating amongst Hogwarts staff and students and wizarding society at large. The most widely held belief was that Headmaster Snape had left his post when he fled the castle during the battle and therefore was no longer eligible for a portrait. Others rumoured that, having been appointed under the Dark Lord's reign, he had never been a rightful Headmaster to start with. Minerva, however, knew that nothing could be further from the truth. Severus Snape had served the school with every fibre of his being until he took his last breath. As Transfiguration mistress, she knew that there was only one possible explanation. It was not possible to create a magical portrait of someone against their own will, and she was sure that Severus had simply not wanted to be represented in the circular office. Perhaps he just wanted to be left alone to rest in peace. Perhaps, after having served two masters all his life, he didn't fancy being called upon by scores of future headmasters and headmistresses throughout his death.

Whatever his reasons, Minerva had to admit that she was rather relieved not to be faced with his piercing glare and acerbic nature whenever she was in her office. How could she possibly have looked him in the eye after how she had wronged him?

With a shudder, she recalled how they had gone to the Shrieking Shack to retrieve his body. The sight of the once formidably powerful wizard lying broken on the floor amongst all the debris, cobwebs, and so much dried, encrusted blood, his formerly fierce black eyes staring ahead dull and dead she would never be able to rid herself of the image. His features had looked surprisingly relaxed for someone who had suffered such a violent death, as if he had left this world at peace, making her wonder what his last thoughts might have been. She had been incredibly grateful that it had not been she who had killed him. Oh, yes, she had tried, but thank Merlin she had failed. She would never have been able to forgive herself otherwise. She felt bad enough as it was...

For the entire year of Severus' tenure as Headmaster, she had done all that was in her power and that had been considerable to make life difficult for him and undermine his authority. She had been unaware, of course, that he had secretly been on their side, playing his role of faithful Death Eater to perfection so that he could better protect the students and staff of Hogwarts. And of course, that was no excuse. Had she not known him long enough to trust him more? How could she have fallen so easily for the seemingly obvious? In retrospect, there had been hints the surprisingly lenient way in which he'd dealt with certain disciplinary matters, or the fact that he was apparently unaware of a growing group of subversive students camping out in the Room of Requirement, while on other occasions it seemed as if he had ears and eyes everywhere in the castle... But she had been blinded by hate and feelings of betrayal, too ready to believe the worst of him. Her only consolation was that she had certainly not been the only one. Every witch or wizard in Britain, if they believed Harry's testimony, must feel the same as she did.

Suddenly the piece of parchment on her desk drew her attention again. She would never have the chance to ask his forgiveness or thank him for what he had done, risking his own life every day for them all, but she had been given the opportunity to set the tone on how Severus would be remembered. It was one last chance to do him justice. Straightening her back, she reached for her quill.

I have been given the honour of writing an obituary for Severus Snape, the late Headmaster of Hogwarts and my predecessor in this office, whom we sadly lost in the Great Battle. I have known Severus as a student, as a colleague during his sixteen years as a professor, teaching Potions and Defence Against the Dark Arts here at Hogwarts, and as an ally and comrade in arms, fighting against Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters. From that, you might expect that I should have known him well. And yet, to my own shame, I have to admit that I never knew him beyond the superficial.

To his students, he was a harsh and demanding teacher, but he was also exceedingly competent within his field and beyond, never expecting more from anyone than what he expected from himself. To his colleagues and peers, he often came across as unfriendly and solitary, but he was always supportive and dependable when someone required his help. To his enemies, he was a powerful wizard and a formidable duellist.

Unfortunately, like so many of us, I counted myself amongst the latter during the last year of his life. There are so many things I did not know and still don't know about Severus Snape, but there is one thing I now know for sure: There has never been a worthier Headmaster of Hogwarts, or one who was more committed to serving the school, its students and staff, and the general public. He was a member of the House of Slytherin, and as cunning and resourceful as the best of that House. But like every great Headmaster, he also embodied the qualities valued by each of the other Houses. He was incredibly intelligent, fiercely loyal, and of exemplary bravery in fact, he was the bravest man I've ever known.

As she wrote the last line, she could feel her heart constrict painfully in her chest. Her vision blurred, her hand holding the quill started to shake, and then the normally so reserved Scotswoman lost her composure. Burying her face in her hands, she let herself go and wept. It felt incredibly liberating. After several long minutes she sniffed, turning around to look apologetically at the portraits of her predecessors. To her surprise, she found Dumbledore to be awake. He looked at her with a benevolent smile on his face. When she rose from her chair, he gave her a satisfied nod.

Minerva wiped away her tears with the sleeve of her robe. She cast a de-smudging spell on the parchment on her desk, rolled it up, and headed for the owlery.