

Hermione's Portrait

by Pearle

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Warning: There is a main character death as suggested by the title. Unfortunately, it is necessary to bring the story to its conclusion.

Note: This story is inspired by a story by beaweasley2, "Painted Domain." The story can be found on this archive and is a very entertaining read. I highly suggest you check that story and her other work out. My mind turned to what ifs after reading her story. What does a portrait feel? What would happen if Severus and Hermione had reached an accord of some type and something happened to Hermione? What then? Hermione's Portrait attempts to answer those questions. Enjoy!

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: The characters, settings, etc., of the Harry Potter series are not mine; they belong to J.K. Rowling and Co. I promise to return them when I am through. Well, most of them anyway.

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Hermione's Portrait by Pearle

It wasn't as if he truly cared for her, or that she'd ever harbored any feelings for him. So he thought it rather odd that he should feel the loss of her presence so keenly.

If they had become 'friends,' it was only because he'd kept company with her for the last thirty years, though he supposed it should have occurred to him to wonder why she'd never married during that time. God knew Minerva had been quick enough to mention that fact any time he spoke with her. He just assumed Hermione, like him, did not suffer fools lightly. After all, whom would she have married? Ronald Weasley? They had dated for that brief period at the end of the war, but really, every time Weasley talked about the most recent Quidditch game he'd attended, or the broom he'd been drooling over, or quoted some past sporting move, Severus could see Hermione's patience run thin. He could tell she was resisting the urge to hex Weasley into next week, something he would have cheerfully done if a portrait were able to hex a living being. It didn't take long before that relationship crashed and burned. Personally, Severus had thought she was well rid of the oaf.

In the beginning, after Weasley, there had been a few 'blind dates' set up by well meaning friends and co-workers, all of them ending badly. He knew of few individuals, if any, that could match Hermione's intelligence, who could have held her interest for longer than an evening or two. There had been one or two over the years, a few odd wizards she had worked with, someone she'd met at Flourish and Blotts about ten years ago who had almost seemed to be a match for the witch.

The evening would start out well enough, but after conversing for a bit, or trying to explain her latest work and findings, it would appear that the individual did not have enough intelligence to follow her train of thought; Hermione would tire of the dolt and quickly send him on his way. It didn't surprise him that none of those attempts at relationships had lasted more than one or two encounters. Severus would disappear into the back of his 'house,' into a small nook in the back of his library and away from prying eyes when any of those idiots were in attendance. He always waited until they'd left before coming out again. Thankfully those occasions were far and few between and seemed to have stopped entirely more than twenty years ago.

Now that he thought of it, the odd date had stopped somewhere around the time she started addressing him by his given name and chastising him for still calling her Miss Granger after all these years. He'd resisted at first on principle alone...she had been his student at one time, after all. But Merlin, the woman was worse than Devil's Snare when she decided something. In the end, it had been easier to call her Hermione than argue with her. He'd held out much longer, however, on agreeing to monthly tea with Potter. He did have his principles, after all.

It wasn't as if they were anything more than colleagues, of a sort. All right, fine, he could possibly acknowledge they'd even become friends through out the years, but there was nothing more to their relationship than a quiet respect for each other's intellect, if you could even consider their association a relationship. He was a portrait, for God's sake, so why did he miss her now that she was gone? Why was there an ache where his heart would lie had he been a living, breathing individual and not just canvas and paint? What would happen now?

He stood at his potions bench, sadly chopping ingredients for a variation of a potion that would never be completed. She had published their findings jointly...citing his notes and trials as the basis for her work...and continued to do so through the years, though in fact, each contributed an equal share while arguing ingredients and methods as they tested and created new potions and philters.

His lab. He truly appreciated the world she had created for him, even if he never properly thanked her for her efforts. His potions lab contained the highest quality of equipment imaginable and was equipped with a bottomless walk-in pantry. His library was a source of endless pleasure containing both academic books and journals as well books to peruse at his leisure. Even the house, with its gardens and extensive acreage, was more than he'd ever thought to attain. Now that she was gone, he was left to wander the grounds alone, to brew by himself. Who would he debate the properties of aconite with? Who would argue with him whether fluxweed was more effective if chopped rather than crushed? What purpose did reading a Shakespearian play serve if there were no one with whom to intelligently discuss it? And who else would indulge his enjoyment of Sherlock Homes?

He'd known something was wrong when she hadn't returned home Saturday night. Nodding an absentminded goodbye as she walked out the door to visit her parents, he'd finished his work in the lab and then retired to his bedroom to read for a bit before going to sleep. When he awoke early the next morning to find her sitting room lights still on and that beast she called a pet crying pitifully as it padded from room to room, he suspected something was wrong. Surely she would have turned off the lights and fed that furry monstrosity of hers if she had left to go to her office for a bit. It wasn't until later, when Potter stopped by the flat looking like death himself, that he understood what had transpired.

It was ironic that such a powerful witch, one of the Golden Trio directly responsible for bringing about Voldemort's demise, should have had her life ended in such a senseless manner. A car accident, Potter had said...a drunk driver crossing over the line and into her lane, hitting the car she rode in head-on. She and her parents had been killed instantly.

Hermione had willed her home and contents to Potter, which evidently included his portraits. Potter had informed him he would be moving his paintings to Grimmauld Place within the next few days. He'd assured Severus he'd hang them in a quiet spot on the third floor, well out of the way of prying eyes and small children, but before they could be moved, he had a few details that needed to be taken care of.

Severus stared blankly at the empty room in front of him, the silence deafening. At least Potter had taken the blasted half-Kneazle with him, but the quiet of the last few days was starting to unnerve him. He would never hear Hermione's voice again, never tease her about her endless hand waving as his student or her know-it-all attitude, never discuss another potion with her, they would never ... There were too many things they would never do again for him to name. Hermione was gone, and he would never see her again.

His afterlife stretched out before him, quiet and alone. He supposed he could go visit his portrait at Hogwarts. He could always talk to the other Headmasters, but it wouldn't be the same. He should probably see how Minerva was holding up with the loss of her favorite cub, but he just didn't have the heart.

Grimmauld Place. He sighed, knowing he would probably be seeing a lot more of Potter and his family if they were to reside under the same roof. The man did not know how lucky he was that some tenet of magic said a portrait being, even one that possessed a working wand, could not hex a living human being. He supposed it could have been worse; he could have been consigned to the dungeons for the rest of his eternity. To be subjected to the students day in and day out was more than he cared to endure. At least at Potters he'd have peace, presumably, most of the time.

A knock at his garden doors interrupted his thoughts. Cursing, he crossed quickly into the painting hanging in Hermione's living room and stopped short. There, standing on his patio, was Hermione herself.

"Severus?"

"Hermione? What are you doing here? How did you get here?" He threw open his patio doors and pulled the witch inside.

"I'm not sure." She gestured vaguely to a house set back at the very edge of his garden. "I don't know what happened. The last thing I remember was getting ready to visit my parents. Next thing I know, I woke up there this morning. I looked out the back window and recognized your garden. I'm dead aren't I?"

Severus eyed the witch. She looked to be in her mid-thirties but she seemed to possess memories up until the last week. He racked his brain trying to remember how old she had been on her last birthday. He was inclined to think she'd been fifty-one or there about. "What do you see when you look out the front windows?"

"I can't see anything. It's like there's a covering over the windows." Absentmindedly, she accepted the cup of tea he'd handed her. The shock of waking up in a painting had obviously dulled her senses. She hadn't been aware of being lead into his library until he'd handed her the teacup. She took a moment to apprise the room, the endless shelves of books, the overstuffed fireside chairs, one of which she was currently ensconced in, and the dour man in front of her. "I'm dead aren't I?"

Raggedly, Severus ran a hand through his hair, not sure how much he should tell her. He knew he was dying after Nagini had attacked him. Waking up in his portrait had not been such a shock to him as it seemed to be to her. "What was the very last thing you remember?"

"Am I dead or not?" She looked around the room. "This feels too real to be a dream."

"It would help to know what the very last thing you remember. Where you were, what you were doing."

"Fine. I'd planned to go into London to visit my parents. I'd just finished dressing, and I remember thinking we should find a way to extend the shelf life of the new Wolfsbane potion we've been working on. We keep getting hung up on the brewing and delivery times. You know, if we could create a potion or spell that would allow the potion to stay viable longer especially in transit, we could market it to a larger population than just those in England. What?"

Severus shook his head. The witch was dead, sitting with him in his painting, and she was still discussing what changes they should make to the Wolfsbane potion. It was a bit too surreal even for him. "Well ..."

Hermione sat up suddenly. "Harry."

"Harry?"

"Harry. It must have been Harry who commissioned that painting for me." She pointed in the general direction of his garden where he had spied the house she mentioned earlier. "Has he been by recently? He always thought my commissioning these paintings for you was the nicest thing I could have done. I remember him saying he hoped he had a portrait like this to retire to one day. I didn't really look around my house too much, but he seems to have commissioned a similar setup for me. I hope my library is as nice as this one."

"You are welcome to use this one if you like. Pott... Harry came by a few days ago. Sunday I believe it was." He remembered Potter going into the bedroom, but after the news of Hermione's demise, his attention had been elsewhere. He wasn't sure just how long Potter had been in there, though now that he thought about it, Severus remembered seeing the man pocket one of Hermione's favorite quills before he'd left. He'd thought it was a sentimental gesture at the time; now he was not so sure. She remembered the potion they'd been working on, most likely due to her essence embedded in the quill she used to take notes that he'd lifted. If her memories ended with dressing for her visit with her parents, he probably took some hairs from her hairbrush, too. It made him wonder just what else Potter had taken.

"A few days ago? How long have I been ... uh ... dead?" Anxiously, Hermione walked to the edge of the painting and leaned forward, trying to get a better view of the room. "Chase? Chase? Where's Chase? Some one needs to take care of Chase. Has he been fed?"

"Potter took Chase with him. I'm sure the beast is well cared for."

"He's not a beast." She sat down abruptly on the couch next to her. Unshed tears lined her eyes as she realized the reality of her situation. "I can't hold him anymore, can I?"

Severus was at a loss as to how to comfort the witch. She obviously understood what was going on. There was nothing he could say or do to change the circumstances in which she found herself. He moved to sit next to her on settee. Tentatively, he touched her shoulder. "Hermione ..."

"Oh, Severus." Overwhelmed, Hermione leaned against him and cried. It was several minutes later, after she'd thoroughly soaked his shirt with her tears, that she managed to get her crying under control. "Well, at least I'm here with you...that's something. Maybe I can get Harry to have Chase added to my painting when he ... well, you know."

"Perhaps Potter has placed a portrait at Hogwarts so you may visit with Minerva and the others there."

"That would be nice." She'd always enjoyed the time she spent with Severus, regretting that he'd died before she'd had the chance to really know him. Maybe now they would become real friends.

It couldn't have been more than twenty minutes or so since Hermione had turned up on his doorstep, but he found the ache he'd felt in his heart had been replaced with a feeling of well-being at the sight and sound of the woman next to him. To actually have her with him, despite the tragic circumstances, filled him with a lightness he had thought he'd never know. "Hermione, I can't tell you how sorry I am that your life has been cut short. You deserved to find someone to love, to have a family, to live."

"It's not as if anyone but Harry and Ginny will really miss me. I really only talked to Harry and you most of the time."

"Yes, well, I can't say that Potter's intellect is on par with yours, but he does seem to care for your welfare." Severus examined the crease in his trouser leg, at a loss of what else to say.

"Has he done some thing to annoy you?"

"Nothing more than the usual," he said with a slight sneer.

"I'm dead, aren't I?" she asked quietly. Perhaps it was being a portrait or perhaps it was magic, but her feelings toward being dead were not as overwhelming as she would have expected.

There was no use in continuing to avoid the obvious. "Yes, I'm afraid so."

"How?"

Severus sighed. "There was a car accident."

"My parents?"

Silently, he shook his head. "No one survived."

"I guess that's it," she said, tears streaming silently down her face.

"So it would seem."

She sat quietly for a few minutes before appearing to reach a decision. "Well, if this is to be my life now, I suppose I should go look next door and see what my new home has to offer." Hermione sniffed, taking the handkerchief Severus offered her. "Would you come with me?"

"Yes, of course. Potter must have had the painting finished within the last few days. I don't remember seeing that house there when I was in the back garden on Sunday. I know Potter took your favorite quill." Severus paused to open the patio doors for Hermione. "Since your last memory includes dressing for your parents, I would assume he took a few hairs from your brush, too, among other things."

"Severus, I'm sorry to intrude on your solitude. I'm sure this is not what you imagined your afterlife should be. I could ask Harry to paint a home for me elsewhere. But in the meantime, we can still continue with our research...we're so close to finding a solution. Maybe we could come up with an answer while he has another painting made for me. Harry could publish our findings post-mortem for us." Hermione wound her way along Severus' garden path toward the wood gate that had materialized in the gardens stonewall. Silently, the gate opened on well-oiled hinges to reveal a side path that led to what was now Hermione's house.

"You need not have Potter change your domicile. I'm sure we can coexist here without too much readjustment."

She hadn't appeared to notice, too taken in by the gourmet kitchen she was investigating, but the windows now showed the world beyond her portrait. From what he could see, he thought she had a view of the Grimmauld Place library from her front kitchen windows. That would mean she would most likely have more contact with the Potters than he did, a condition that suited him just fine.

They walked through the kitchen and finally found her potions lab. It was equipped much the same as his, though from what he could see of her study through the side door, it seemed to resemble the one she'd had in her flat rather than the one he had in his home. He supposed Potter had recreated her bedroom, too. He could see the edge of a portrait hanging in the front hall. The reflection appeared to be of one of the hallways at Hogwarts. Most likely Potter had a portrait hung there, too. It would give her the option of visiting the castle when she was desirous of company other than the Potters or himself.

Hermione turned to him, her smile bright despite the circumstances. "You don't mind me being here? I promise to try and stay out of your way. I know you like your privacy, but this will make researching together easier. You know, if I have to be somewhere, I'm glad it's here with you."

He'd felt the loss of her presence quite keenly the last few days. When she'd been alive, there had been periods where they'd spent days at a time working together. He found her company ... acceptable. Welcome even, if he were to admit it. Maybe they could have something in this world that they never would have had in reality. "Perhaps we should have dinner together and discuss what has happened." Severus noted the sudden change in Hermione's expression. "Or the latest changes we made to the Wolfsbane, if you prefer."

Hermione looked questioningly at Severus. "No, I think dinner would be nice. I know you didn't sleep as much as I did when I was ... alive, but other than tea and scones, I don't think I ever saw you eat a meal. Though now that I think about it, I do remember some of Hogwarts portraits having picnics and drinking wine."

"I occasionally indulge in a meal. You will find that time and physical needs exist differently here than the world you knew. It's not that difficult to adjust to. All things are possible on this plane."

Hermione blushed as she thought what that statement might include.

Severus tipped his head as he watched the color rise on the young woman. "I believe I have been remiss in telling you that I have missed you these last few days."

"You did?" Her eyes shone as she smiled at the dour man.

Severus nodded. "I'm glad you are here, too." He could see a new version of his afterlife spread out before him: days spent brewing and experimenting with the witch; a picnic or two by the brook at the edge of his property as they debated ingredients, books, and whatever caught their fancy; a chance to cook a few gourmet meals; evenings spent in front of the fire with a favored book, a glass of vintage wine, and Hermione at his side indulging in the same; and the nights ... the possibilities were endless.

"Shall we?" Severus gestured in the direction of her kitchen.

Hermione laughed, her smile brightening as she led the way. "We shall."

They would start with dinner and go on from there. After all, they had all the time in the world.

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A/N: As I said, this was inspired by beawesley2's story, 'Painted Domain'; Go read her other stories, I'm sure you'll enjoy them as much as I did.

This story was written when a vicious little plot bunny bit me and refused to let me rest until I wrote this story. I wondered what if Severus the portrait developed feelings for Hermione that he might not have been aware of (she being human and he a portrait- sort of like a fish and a bird falling in love). What would happen if Hermione suddenly turned up in his portrait? What then?

I have gone back to finishing up Dances and I'm currently working on the next chapter of Dances which is more than half finished (blame the plot bunny that made me write this story first) and hope to have it finished by the weekend-ish. The next chapter, chapter 50, is titled: The Problem With Plans.

A grateful thank-you to Shug for her support, her time, her general enthusiasm for Dances and all my work and for beta'ing this story for me, especially when I know you have a life outside of the internet that keeps you more than busy. I truly appreciate your help and your friendship.

And to those celebrating- Happy Mother's Day and to everyone, have a great weekend!

Pearle

Chicago 2012

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