

The Tribute

by Alison

This, IMO, is how "Deathly Hallows" *should* have ended!

Complete short story

Chapter 1 of 1

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The Tribute

Alison Venugoban

Severus Snape's funeral was a small one and quite subdued.

This was partly due to the fact that there had been many funerals, far too many, in the week since Voldemort had been defeated. But also there was a slight uneasiness amongst those present. All who thought they'd known the man had been proved so very wrong in their assumptions of where his loyalty lay that most of the mourners had trouble meeting each other's eyes as Severus Snape was finally laid to rest.

One end of the lakeside lawn up to the edge of the Forbidden Forest was now a graveyard. Neat stone markers headed up the many new mounds of earth where those who had lost their lives fighting for freedom had been buried. They cast long shadows across the grass in the last rays of the setting sun.

Severus Snape's resting place was also marked with a headstone, with his name, dates of birth and death carved into it, just like all the others. But his grave, at Harry Potter's personal insistence and with the agreement of Albus Dumbledore's portrait, had been given special prominence, situated on the right hand side of Dumbledore's white marble tomb.

Harry Potter was invited up to the Headmistress's office after the funeral. Over tea and Ginger Newt biscuits, Harry listened as his former Head of House and the portrait of Albus Dumbledore quietly reminisced about Severus Snape.

Harry's gaze roamed the comfortable circular room, so very familiar to him, noting portraits of former Heads of Hogwarts, most pretending to doze in their frames. But as he let his eyes wander along the walls, one omission was glaringly obvious.

"Headmistress," Harry interrupted McGonagall and Dumbledore, "where's Snape's portrait?" He put his cup and saucer down on the desk. "He was Headmaster for a year. All Hogwarts Headmasters have a portrait hung here after their death, don't they?"

"Quite right," the portrait of a corpulent wizard in old-fashioned robes broke in. "Instigated that myself, back in the thirteenth century, don't y'know."

"It's traditional," agreed another portrait.

"And you can't say that Sn ... *Professor* Snape ... wasn't truly Headmaster," Harry pressed on. "Not now that we know ... know ..." He stopped, unable to continue. His conscience had been giving him trouble this past week as he attempted to reconcile seven years of hatred towards Snape with the man he had come to know through his dying memories.

"To know that he was doing all he could for the Order," Dumbledore's portrait finished for him quietly. "I quite agree with you, Harry. Unfortunately, to my knowledge Severus never had his portrait painted." He smiled wryly. "He had little time these past twelve months to consider such things."

"But there must be something we can do!" Harry said. "He deserves to be among all of you here in this office. For his service to the Order and to the school. Doesn't he deserve recognition?"

"Harry, we agree," McGonagall answered. "But if he never had a portrait painted, there's nothing we can do."

"Why shouldn't an artist just do a painting of him now?" Harry insisted.

"That could be done, certainly," McGonagall said. "But you need to understand the nature of portraits. Albus, you could explain it better than I can."

"When a portrait is painted, the sitter's memories up to the time of painting are included, they are what animate us," Dumbledore said. He smiled briefly. "A little of their soul is included, if you like! Not like a Horcrux, no Dark magic is used," he amended quickly, noting Harry's expression. "No, a portrait is more like ... one of the Hogwarts ghosts would probably be the best explanation, an impression of the living person. Take me, for example. Even though the soul of Albus Dumbledore has gone elsewhere, a little is kept 'alive', in a way, through the memories of the man. I know all that Albus knew. I feel and think because of his memories, imbued at the time I was created on this canvas. To me, personally, it feels as if I *am* Albus, for all that I'm only an impression created in oil paint on canvas."

Harry began to see what they meant. "So if we painted a portrait of Professor Snape now, it would be "

"Dead and inanimate, yes," Dumbledore answered gently. "Because his memories have already gone. He wouldn't just be sleeping in his portrait, he'd be dead."

Harry had the sudden awful image in his mind of a portrait-Snape slumped against the frame, his dark eyes empty and lifeless as the night Voldemort had killed him, and winced.

"Of course, we could have an inanimate portrait painted, like the Muggles do," McGonagall suggested, seeing Harry's expression. "There would be no memories there, it wouldn't interact, but still, it IS traditional to have a portrait."

"That might be the best we can hope for," Dumbledore agreed. "We'd need a photograph of him for an artist to copy from, though."

"They seem almost impossible to get hold of, Albus," McGonagall said. "There was that photograph of him last year in the *Daily Prophet*." She looked slightly embarrassed. "The copy we had was umm, not kept very well, I'm afraid, it was quite badly burned ..."

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed mildly. "I seem to recall you had it enlarged and pinned to your office wall, Minerva. And each of your colleagues used it for wand practice when they went to take tea with you. I remember Filius Flitwick became quite excited when he hit the photo on the nose. '*Bull's-eye, you bastard!*' I believe were his exact words, were they not?"

"Well, we didn't know Severus's true loyalties then, did we?" McGonagall said heatedly. "He played his part too well. We believed him a true Death Eater! You might have told us, Albus!"

Harry felt they were losing sight of the main subject. "There's no problem, then," he said, as Dumbledore opened his mouth to respond to Minerva. "We can just contact the *Daily Prophet*; get a copy of the photo they used ..."

"I'm afraid you'll have no luck there, Harry," replied Dumbledore. "I have it on good authority that there was a general purge of all records at the *Daily Prophet* immediately following Voldemort's defeat. Apparently the paper didn't want anybody thinking they had ever sided with the Death Eaters. Anything articles, photographs - to do with people thought at the time to be Voldemort's supporters have been destroyed."

"But that's crazy!" Harry said angrily. "Sn ... Professor Snape was on *our* side!"

"Harry, it wasn't, and still isn't, general knowledge. You heard Minerva; he played his part too well. And the *Daily Prophet* has always slanted the truth to portray themselves in the best light; you of all people should know that!" Dumbledore paused for a moment, thinking. "While I don't believe there are any photographs of him here in Hogwarts, the same may not hold true at his home. He may even have kept a copy of that article in the newspaper. Although when I spoke to him about it after he became Headmaster, he appeared ashamed rather than proud of the fact. He refused to speak of it." He smiled reminiscently. "Harry, if I give you directions, would you mind going to Spinner's End? You may find a photograph of Severus there."

A small scrawny cat was searching for food scraps in an open rubbish bin when it felt a whoosh of wind go past its head, almost as if a large bird of prey had swooped invisibly. It froze, its eyes wide and reflecting the full moon as a young man suddenly appeared out of nowhere a short distance away. The cat abruptly decided that caution was the better part of valor and departed at top speed over the fence.

Outside the front door of Spinner's End, Harry Potter bundled his invisibility cloak into his rucksack, shouldered his broomstick and withdrew his wand. A muttered "*Alohamora!*" and the door clicked open. Harry strode inside.

"*Lumos!*"

Harry's first impression was of books. All the walls were completely covered with them, most bound in black or brown leather. A threadbare sofa, old armchair and rickety table stood grouped in the middle of the room. The place had an air of neglect, as though it had long been uninhabited.

With a wave of his wand, Harry lit the lamp hanging from the ceiling. In the pool of yellow light he approached one of the book-covered walls. Inclining his head sideways to read the titles on the spines, he walked slowly along the wall.

"*The Dark Magicks Illuminated*," he read out loud. "*Alchemical Musings. Secrets of the Darkest Art*, yeah, he would own a copy of that ... oh, hey, *Moste Potente Potions!*"

With a reminiscent smile he withdrew the book from its place and flicked through its gruesomely illustrated pages fondly, looking for the recipe for Polyjuice Potion. Although not the same copy as the one he, Hermione and Ron had used in their second year at Hogwarts, this book also had the look of being much-used and often-read.

With a sudden clenching in the pit of his stomach, Harry saw notations in a familiar spiky scrawl had been added to the margins of some of the potions in the book. He looked away, concentrating on the wall in front of him for a moment until he could look back at the notes of the Half-Blood Prince without the letters wavering slightly. The annotations had brought back to him sharply how he'd admired and liked the unknown boy who had been so clever at Potions, who'd taught him so much with his written thoughts. And who had loved Harry's mother so deeply, all his life ...

This was ridiculous, he told himself. He'd always loathed Snape, from their first Potions class. He still wasn't sure how he felt about him, not entirely. The only thing he was

positive of was that he didn't hate him anymore. The memories Snape had bequeathed him, just before he died, had changed Harry's perceptions. It would have been an easier path, more comfortable for Harry, just to be able to go on hating him. But that was impossible. Harry was no longer a child, and he could see now just how petty his anger at Snape had always been.

But *damn* the man! Why couldn't he just occasionally have acted like a human being around Harry, rather than a hateful git all the time? But Snape's actions were no less heroic because he'd been personally unlikable.

Harry recalled the anger he'd felt that morning when reading the *Daily Prophet*. It had been a "special memorial edition" apparently, nauseatingly sycophantic in its treatment of Harry himself and anybody known to have been his friend. A page each had been dedicated to Ron and Hermione, and even Neville had a half-page spread with a large photo of him holding aloft the sword of Gryffindor with which he had destroyed the Horcrux Nagini.

Nearly half the paper was dedicated to "Friends of Potter". Harry had snarled silently when he saw a column devoted to Umbridge, detailing what a wonderful student Harry had been when she'd been fortunate enough to teach him. He'd flipped through the pages quickly, briefly checking each name. Despite what Dumbledore had told him about a purge of the paper's records, Harry couldn't believe that Snape would just be disregarded. He'd done so much for the Order and for Harry. But there was no mention of him.

On the last two pages there had been a list of both Order members and all the "glorious freedom fighters" that had died at the Battle of Hogwarts. In vain Harry had scanned the alphabetical listing for Snape, but his name hadn't appeared. After that he'd run his eye down the list of dead Death Eaters, dreading that he'd been put there by mistake. Still nothing.

Finally, at the very bottom of the listings, Harry had spotted a single short sentence: "*Severus Snape, exonerated Death Eater, died in Hogsmeade, aged thirty-eight.*"

It had incensed Harry. The sentence made it appear that Snape had taken no part in the battle, had not mentioned how he had been instrumental in delivering the means to destroy the Horcruxes, had utterly ignored the fact that he'd worked as a double agent for years and eventually lost his life because of it.

Harry felt he couldn't rest until a proper Headmaster's portrait was installed in Hogwarts. He had agreed to Eldred Worple's renewed pleas to write "the Potter biography." Worple had assured Harry that the market would be immense. "*Everybody in the world will know the name Harry Potter, my dear boy, simply everybody!*" Harry would see to it that Snape got the due he deserved for his exceptional bravery, as well. He wanted nobody to be in any doubt as to the part the former Potions master had played in Voldemort's defeat.

However, this musing wasn't helping him find photographs. Harry lifted his wand again. "*Accio Daily Prophet!*"

Harry waited for a few seconds, but nothing happened. Snape obviously hadn't had any particular love for the Wizarding newspaper. Harry suspected Dumbledore was right: Snape had probably been deeply embarrassed at the way he'd gained the post of Headmaster and hadn't wanted to keep any hagiographic article reminding him of it.

"Okay," Harry said aloud. "Plan B, then. *Accio photograph album!*"

This time there was a result: a rustling sound, and then from one of the walls a heavy book flew out, landing neatly in Harry's outstretched hand. He settled himself in the armchair and opened the album.

Inside were Muggle photos, like frozen moments in time. Two or three were of Eileen and Tobias Snape when they were dating, with Tobias Snape looking very like a lighter-haired version of his son. Then came a few faded marriage photos. After that were Snape's baby photos, with a neat notation printed under each: *Baby Severus, aged three months ... Severus, 18 months, with his toy dragon from Gran ... Severus, his fifth birthday.*

It gave Harry an eerie feeling to see this compressed history of Snape's early life. He flicked through the pages and with a slight, not unexpected, shock saw that his mother as a child was included in more than one of the photos, usually standing next to Severus as the two friends posed self-consciously for the camera. Harry's mother appeared just as Snape's memories had shown her, pretty, auburn-haired and green-eyed, with an impish smile and a self-confidence curiously at odds with the defensive expression of her best friend.

The last photo showed Snape standing in this very room, dressed in obviously second-hand robes, managing to look both excited and scared at the same time. The note underneath read: *Severus, eleven years, ready to leave for Hogwarts.*

But it was there that the photographs ended. Harry wondered what had happened, why the parent who had seemed so proud of him (was it his mother or his father, Harry wondered?) had stopped taking photos.

With a sigh, Harry replaced the album. None of those photographs were suitable for the basis of a portrait. He'd just have to search the house to find later ones.

Locating the door leading to the stairs, he walked to the upper floor. At the end of the short landing were a meager bathroom and two bedrooms. Harry glanced in the smaller of the two, but it was furnished only with an iron bed-frame and the wardrobe and cupboards were empty. He walked into the other room. The room was sparsely furnished, but the bed here at least had a mattress upon it, and the wardrobe had clothes hanging inside, not all of them wizard robes, but articles of Muggle clothing as well, mainly jeans, shirts and pullovers. Harry rifled through them before turning his attention to the dresser, but no photographs were revealed.

Discouraged, Harry sat down on the bed, then, in a moment of inspiration, bent down and peered underneath. Tucked away in the far corner near the headboard he spotted a shoebox, and pulled it out.

The box was a simple cardboard one, but when Harry attempted to open it, the lid remained steadfastly in place. He tried a number of unlocking charms, but nothing he did made the slightest difference to the deceptively simple box. Shaking it gently, Harry could hear nothing within, and for a moment wondered if, when he did finally manage to winkle the lid off, it would reveal merely an empty space. He tried another few spells, anything he could think of to loosen it.

A memory from Harry's third year stirred, that of Snape's attempt to make the Marauder's Map reveal its information. Slowly and clearly, trying to remember the exact words he'd used, Harry touched his wand to the box and said, "I, Harry Potter, the ... the *Chosen One*, command you to yield the information you conceal."

Nothing. Harry laid his right hand on the box lid in defeat. "Please open for me," he murmured.

A soft glow appeared around his hand, making his fingers tingle. Harry snatched his hand away, but the glow became brighter. Suddenly the image of a doe appeared on the box lid, looking up at him expectantly. Slowly, she nodded her beautiful head once, and then of its own accord the box lid lifted into the air, to settle beside the box on the mattress. The image of the doe began to graze patiently on the lid.

Harry let out the breath he'd been holding. He took the open box onto his lap and saw that it wasn't empty. He picked up the piece of paper sitting on top. Although it carried only a few words, Harry recognized it as once as the rest of his mother's letter to Sirius:

... could ever have been friends with Gellert Grindelwald. I think her mind's going, personally!

Lots of love,

Lily

Harry reached inside for the next object, knowing even as his fingers closed on it what it was. He gazed at the torn photograph of his mother. With shaking hands, Harry

reached inside his wallet and brought out the other half of the photo, the one showing himself as a baby and James playing, the one he had carried everywhere with him for the past year.

Laying both halves side by side on the mattress, he whispered "*Reparo!*"

And the two halves knit down the middle, the photo image of Lily reunited with her husband and baby son.

"I'm sorry, Professor," Harry murmured out loud. "I know you loved her, too. But she should be with me and Dad now..."

He reached back inside the box. And there were the photographs; not just unmoving Muggle ones, although there were some, but magical ones, playing a tiny scene a few seconds long over and over. The one thing they all had in common was that they contained Lily Evans, sometimes with Severus Snape, sometimes without.

Harry picked them up one by one to gaze at them raptly. A treasure trove of Lily Evans while she was at Hogwarts. Now Harry felt much the same way he had at Grimmauld Place last year when he'd found his mother's letter to Sirius: joy and grief were mixed together, making him feel shaky and a bit breathless. Each photo was like another small contact with Lily, proof that she had lived. Harry couldn't find it in his heart to condemn Snape's obsession. This hoarding of her image had been a tribute to her, just as Harry wanted to create a tribute for Snape.

There she was in a class photograph, all the shiny-clean Gryffindor faces with their red and gold ties neatly knotted, every robe freshly laundered and ironed for the occasion ... another, and the background changed to Hogsmeade, Lily and Severus walking side by side through the snowy streets, their arms full of wrapped Christmas gifts, apparently chatting companionably ... Lily dancing at the Yule Ball with Severus ... a photo of them both with Professor Slughorn between them, his arms draped in an avuncular fashion over each student's shoulder as he beamed down at the potion they had created together ... with their heads close together, studying in the library from the same book ... Severus laughing, actually laughing, eyes sparkling with delight at something Lily had just said, and Harry could count on the fingers of one hand how often in six years he'd actually seen the adult man *smile* ...

Harry wondered who had taken all the photographs. Had his mother and Snape gone to school with the nineteen-seventies equivalent of Colin Creevey? Curious, he turned over one of the photographs at random and saw a penciled notation on the back.

"Sluggy said this was the best Draught of Living Death he'd ever seen from his fourth-year students! Sev wrote our variant recipe into his workbook as usual. He's read all his mum's old schoolbooks and can do NEWT level now. I have to really stretch myself to keep up with him, luckily Potions is my best subject! It was his idea to stir clockwise, but I'd already discovered more juice comes out of the Sopophorous Bean if you crush it first with a silver knife."

Harry turned over other photographs and saw that some, although by no means all, had his mother's handwriting on them. With a feeling in his chest that was almost painful in its intensity, he read them one by one, feeling as if Snape had left him a doubly-valuable gift: memories of his mother plus her image and thoughts preserved in writing. He didn't realise at first that his face was wet with tears as he read the little notes, some funny, some sad, simple observations Lily Evans had made of her time at school. Finally, a tear dropped onto one of the photographs. He wiped it away feeling slightly embarrassed and glad that Ron wasn't there to see him make such a fool of himself, crying about his mother.

There were only a few photos left. He reached into the bottom of the box and pulled out the next. There was Lily Evans, her arms about Severus Snape's neck, kissing him passionately. Harry stared in a mixture of horror and amazement for a moment. He'd known Snape loved Lily, but everything he'd read tonight had led him to believe her feelings for him were affectionate, but went no further than friendship. But this photo showed otherwise. Unable to bear watching them kiss so tenderly, feeling like a voyeuristic intruder, Harry hastily turned the photo over. There was his mother's handwriting, recording her thoughts once more.

"Sev was really angry at Alice for taking this photo of us! I had to stop him hexing her; he said it was private, he didn't want the whole school to know. I wonder though: is it that he doesn't want the other Slytherins to know he's dating a Muggle-born? He says he loves me, and I believe him, but he acts differently towards me when they're about, sort of cooler. I hate that. I love him, and I want the world to know it."

Harry thought back to the memories Snape had bequeathed him. It must have been the end of fifth-year when they'd broken up after the confrontation with James and Sirius by the lake. So Severus Snape had indeed had Lily Evan's love; had it, then lost it due to his allegiance to the Death Eaters.

Harry slowly laid the photo down on the pile of others beside him, with the writing uppermost, as he still couldn't quite reconcile the fact that his teenage mother would kiss Severus Snape so lovingly. Sure, his perceptions had taken a battering and been irrevocably changed recently, but still!

The next photo showed the Great Hall, a shot of the graduating class of nineteen seventy seven. The Slytherins were at one side of the hall, the Hufflepuffs alongside them, then Ravenclaws, and Gryffindors at the other end. Harry didn't need to look closely to spot his mother and Snape in among the graduating students. While the rest of the year for the most part faced forwards, beaming at the camera, Lily and Severus had their heads turned, gazing at each other across the room. Harry's breath caught. Both had identical expressions of misery etched on their faces, as they mutely bade goodbye to each other.

James Potter was beside Lily; he grinned cockily and put his arm about her, and she turned away from Severus, giving James a tiny forced smile. Harry flicked his eyes to Severus. His expression had turned stony; he again faced the front.

Harry turned the photo over, but it seemed that this was one photo his mother couldn't bear to write on. At any rate, it seemed self-explanatory. Lily and Severus had still been very much in love with one another at the end of their seventh year, that was evident, but Lily was making the best of the untenable situation and making a life for herself with James.

Harry stared at the far wall for a moment, trying to make the contradictions swirling in his head make sense. Everybody who had known James and Lily Potter had agreed that they had been a happy, well-suited young couple. Moody, Dumbledore, Lupin, Sirius and Hagrid all agreed that they had been a good match with Lily acting as a steadying influence to James's headstrong ways. Certainly in Lily's letter to Sirius, she had sounded content with her lot.

But these earlier photos showed Harry that his mother had been in love with Severus, Harry was positive the broken-hearted looks on both their faces at Graduation had not been fake. For years the thought of his mother and father had been idealized, a source of strength and comfort for him. That image had taken a serious battering when he'd realized what a bully his father had been at school.

Now it seemed as if his mother had been a pragmatist at heart, a woman who had foreseen the coming conflict with Voldemort and had given up on her first love when it appeared he'd gone too far down the Death Eater path to ever come back to her. It gave Harry an unsettled feeling in his chest, a strange aching yearning to put things right. But if Lily had not married James, then Harry would not have been born to be wishing things had turned out differently!

For a moment Harry wished Hermione was here so he could talk with her about how he was feeling, and get her take on the situation. But Hermione and Ron had left the country the day after Fred's funeral and were currently in Australia, restoring the Grangers' memories. And really, this situation concerning Lily, Severus and James felt too personal for Harry to want to share it with anybody, not just yet at least.

Harry reached for the last photo in the box. It was a single photo of Lily Evans, dressed in a flowing white wedding robe, and in her hands was a wedding bouquet. There was nobody else in the photo.

Harry turned it over. A sheet of paper written in an unfamiliar hand was spellotaped to the back.

"Severus."

"Here is the photo you asked me to take of Lily at her wedding to James Potter. I still don't know why I'm sending it to you; you were never particularly nice to me in school when I'd take snapshots of you and Lily."

However, I'll hold you to your promise that you won't contact Lils in any way from now on. I remember how much she cried after you broke up, night after night sobbing into her pillow and telling me how much she loved you, but that she couldn't be with you if you followed the course you were on. She's my friend. I never want to see her so unhappy again.

If you love her as much as you claim to, Severus, leave her alone. She's content with James and he'll treat her properly. I know what you've become, and I know that Lily can never be safe with you. You and your friends are bad news, particularly for Muggle-borns like her. And you're a deluded fool if you think otherwise.

Take this photo and don't bother to ask me for anything else ever again. My fiancé Frank Longbottom and I are going into Auror training soon. If ever I meet you again, it will be at the other end of a hex.

Alice."

Harry's breath caught, and his gaze became unfocused again as several things slotted abruptly into place. Alice Longbottom, *Neville's mother*, had been the photographer! Small wonder that Snape had been so antagonistic towards Neville and Harry in class for six years. Neville, the image of his mother, and Harry, so very like James, would have been a constant reminder to Snape of what he had lost due to his rash decision to join the Death Eaters.

Harry wondered for a moment why Snape had bothered to keep the letter; Alice clearly had no liking for Severus, but then, perhaps he'd felt the rebuke was warranted. And Alice's words at least provided confirmation that Lily had loved Severus.

An idea, sparked by the discovery of the photos, had been slowly growing in Harry's mind. Coming to a decision, he gathered up the photos and piled them haphazardly back into their box, replaced the lid and watched as the doe faded from sight. Then with the box tucked under one arm, he left the room.

"It would be difficult, Mr Potter, enormously difficult ..."

"Yes, I know that, Professor," Harry answered patiently, "but can it be done?"

Professor Flitwick frowned at the box as if it had personally insulted him. He reached out and prodded the pile of photographs sitting on the table before him consideringly.

"This does represent several years of stored magical memories," he said at last. "But distilling them, mm, that's something I've never seen done before, nor even considered."

The Headmistress leaned forwards and took one of the photos from the pile, turning it over and over in her hands. "It would seem not that much different to creating a magical portrait, Filius," she offered. "Only instead of sitting for a painting, we transfer one of these photographs of Severus onto the background medium. The resulting portrait should still have all the memories he had up to the time the photo was taken."

"He wouldn't remember anything after that, though," Dumbledore's portrait said. "He'd need to be told everything that happened between his teenage self and now. I'd be more than happy to fill him in on events."

"Albus," Professor Flitwick objected, "if we do this, he'd be the youngest-ever Headmaster to hang on these walls! The oldest photograph we have of him is his Graduation at eighteen years of age!"

Albus made a show of looking about the walls of his former office, at all the portraits who were listening avidly. "I believe it would be nice to have a younger face up here," he remarked conversationally. "Most of us were over one hundred at the time of painting. We could do with a fresh, young voice helping us in our advice to the sitting Head."

"Besides," the smooth voice of Phineas Nigellus broke in, "Severus Snape, at thirty-eight years of age, was the youngest Head we've ever had at Hogwarts."

Flitwick pursed his lips stubbornly as he looked up at the portrait. "Thirty-eight, yes. Eighteen, no!"

"I tried to find an older photo of him," Harry said apologetically. "But there were none. These are the only ones we have."

"What about that photo of him you had up on your wall, Minerva?" Filius asked desperately. "It wasn't too badly burnt. Singed a bit, particularly about the nose area, but surely it's still usable?"

"It was burnt, Filius!" McGonagall said. "Beyond any hope of salvage. But surely between us, with our knowledge of Charms and Transfiguration, we can do this. What does it matter if Severus's image looks so young, really? I must admit, I'm looking forward to the challenge!"

"And it seems we are moving into a new Age," Dumbledore's portrait added with a smile. "This will be the first time since the school opened that a Head's portrait is not the traditional paint-on-canvas, but photographic!"

Harry stared at the image of the sleeping young man, hoping his gamble had worked.

Over the past month, the combined skills of McGonagall and Flitwick had managed to successfully enlarge the photographic image and transfer it into a traditional frame. The background, the "room" where the image was set, was a photographic representation of the Potion master's study. Harry had been unable to do much to help the Charms and Transfiguration professors, but had visited Hogwarts every day to be an avid spectator along with Dumbledore and the other portraits.

The photographic portrait of Snape was the one taken at his graduation. The two professors had managed to move the other students in the photograph out of the way so that Severus had been left in a clear space, looking uncertainly at the others herded away from him. They had then isolated his image, hopefully with memories still intact, enlarged and transferred onto the specially prepared background.

He was wearing neatly pressed Slytherin robes, black with a tie and cloak lining of green and silver. Harry moved a little closer, staring at the portrait. The face of eighteen-year-old Severus Snape had not yet developed the permanent sneer lines of the adult, and in sleep he looked softer and more vulnerable than he ever had before. He was sitting with his head pillowed on one arm on the desk, slowly breathing in and out.

Harry mentally crossed his fingers that nothing had gone wrong. Today was the day of the Awakening. As Ginny had remarked that morning before he'd left Grimmauld Place, even if the image didn't wake up, at least they would still have a portrait of a sleeping Headmaster. Harry had tried to smile at the gallows humour, but the truth was that he'd invested such time and effort into the project that he hated the idea of it failing now.

The door to the Headmaster's office opened, and McGonagall and Flitwick came in, smiling widely. Harry felt his spirits lift at their smug expressions.

"It worked, then?" he enquired breathlessly.

"Perfectly!" McGonagall answered. "Woke up beautifully, all memories up to the time of the photograph being taken were intact. Dumbledore's busily 'filling in' the missing memories of the last two decades. He should be back up in his portrait in a moment, and we can attempt to wake Severus."

Flitwick was shaking his head and smiling. "I wouldn't have credited we could do it, Minerva, it seems incredible that it would work. I was sure the limited memory available

to a photograph would make the project untenable."

"It seems Albus was right. We're moving into a new age, Filius, a fusion of magic and technology," McGonagall answered. "Do you know, I believe that I will have a photographic representation done when my time comes to leave this job ...?"

Harry tuned them out, smiling to himself at the thought that the plan was working. So far, he reminded himself. Yet it was impossible not to get his hopes up at this good news. He went to the window of the Headmaster's office and stared out at the grounds below, the neat rows of graves and the forest beyond. A hand on his shoulder surprised him and he turned.

"This is a very decent thing you're doing, Harry," McGonagall said gruffly. "There's not many who would be so ... selfless."

Harry looked down in embarrassment, flushing. "Ginny thinks," he admitted at last, "that since Voldemort's death, I need to have something else to fight." He smiled slightly. "Killing dragons', she calls it!"

McGonagall nodded. "She may be right. Maybe you need the challenge; it's a good thing you thrive under pressure!"

"Did my mother ever love my Dad, do you think?" Harry blurted, looking into McGonagall's eyes. He tried not to grimace; he hadn't wanted to just come out with it like that, but he had been feeling the uncertainty eating into him since seeing the photographs at Spinner's End for the first time.

McGonagall hesitated for a moment, gazing in her turn over the grounds, her eyes unfocused as she remembered. "I'm sure she did. In her own way," she answered finally. "James Potter grew into a good man, Harry, despite his rather wild ways as a schoolboy. He certainly loved Lily. I think she was ... content with her choice. She grew to love him." She sighed slightly. "If she'd stayed with Severus ... well, that was impossible, of course, with him supporting You-Know-Who. Perhaps he thought he could protect her, who knows? But Severus made his decision, and nothing would sway him ..."

A discreet cough interrupted them, and they turned to see that Dumbledore had reappeared in his frame.

"Ah, Albus!" McGonagall said with a return to her usual brisk tones. "Did you encounter any problems with recall of new memory?"

Dumbledore helped himself to a sherbet lemon from the tray painted on his desk and settled himself comfortably down in the representation of an armchair. "No problems at all," he said around the sweet. "Quite attentive, as well, fascinated by events and eager to learn everything that's happened in the past twenty-odd years."

Filius Flitwick rubbed his hands together in anticipation. "Well then, if everybody's ready, we'll begin! Harry, would you like to do the honors?"

"What do I do?"

"Just stand beside the portrait, touch your wand to the frame, and say *'Awaken, Severus Snape!'* If all goes to plan, he should come back to full consciousness and cognizance."

"Will he know he's a portrait?"

"He'll realise that something is different. Be patient and answer his questions as concisely as you can."

Harry moved into position, his heart beating fast in his chest. *'Awaken, Severus Snape!'*

For a long moment, nothing happened. Then the image of Snape stirred and sat up, looking out at them all blearily. As his eyes settled on Harry, Snape sneered. "James Potter! I should have bloody guessed." His eyes flicked to McGonagall. "Professor, what the hell's he done this time?"

Harry moved closer. "I'm not James; I'm his son, Harry. And you're in the Headmaster's office."

Snape's eyes focused back on his. He glared at him for a moment. "There are a few differences," he conceded at last. Then his expression changed to one of alarm. "Wait, how old are you?"

"I'm eighteen, Pro ... Severus," Harry answered evenly.

Snape examined McGonagall, then Flitwick, then raised his hands and stared at them. "You're eighteen," he repeated at last. "And Professors, you all seem older than I remember. This isn't some prank of James Potter, is it?" Now his gaze roved about the room, taking in the paintings on the other side of the wall, before he turned and gazed out the side of his own frame, and gasped.

"Headmaster?"

"Severus, welcome back!"

Severus turned his glare back onto Harry. "All right. So I'm in a portrait in the Headmaster's study. What happened?"

"Do you remember joining Voldemort's Death Eaters, Severus?" Harry asked gently.

A closed expression came over Snape's face. "Who says I did?"

Harry smiled. "You did, you gave me your memories just before I managed to finally defeat Voldemort."

"What? The ... the Dark Lord is defeated?"

"He's dead, Severus," confirmed Dumbledore. "Waste no tears over his demise. You came to realise that you supported a madman, and for the past seventeen years you worked as a double agent, a spy for the Order of the Phoenix."

"I don't remember any of this!" Severus said loudly. "I realise that ... that I must be unable to answer for myself, in person. So what is this, some sort of trial in absentia? How can I defend myself if I don't even know what I'm supposed to have done?"

"This isn't a trial," Harry hurried to reassure him. "This is to honor your part in the defeat of Voldemort and the fact that you were Headmaster of Hogwarts for one year prior to Voldemort's death."

Snape's eyes focused on Harry once again; Harry could almost see his thought processes working. "I was Headmaster. Why can't I remember any of this?"

"You were never able to sit for a portrait," Harry explained gently. "We needed a way to honor you for what you did, but the last image we had of you was your Graduation photograph ..."

Snape's expression became bleak. "I didn't survive this defeat, did I?" he said tonelessly.

"No. I'm sorry."

Snape stared at him for a moment. "I believe you are. Did we know each other in life what was your name, again?"

"Harry. James's son, Harry Potter. And yes, you were my teacher for six years, sir. You taught me Potions. And Occlumency." The memory of hours spent poring over the Half-Blood Prince's Potions book came back to him. "I learned more from you than I ever appreciated. It was due to you that my best mate survived a poison attack. And you saved my life many times. I never got to thank you for any of it."

Surprise flashed across Snape's face. "I taught?" He shook his head. "I never thought I'd come back here, certainly not as a teacher!"

The room was quiet for a moment as they all let Snape's portrait absorb what they had told him.

Finally Dumbledore broke the silence. "I plan to answer in more detail any of your questions. Doubtless you'll have many once you've had the time to think about it all. You might be interested to know that you succeeded me as Headmaster."

"I did?" The surprise was genuine. "But excuse me, Headmaster, I always thought Professor McGonagall was next in seniority ..."

"Circumstances were unusual, Mr Snape," McGonagall said with a slight smile. "I am Headmistress now, although I am thinking of retiring in the not too distant future ... I'm not getting any younger ..."

Her comment seemed to jog another question from Snape. He looked at Harry again. "How old was I when I ... passed on?"

"You were thirty-eight, sir," Harry answered. "It was on the night of the battle where I defeated Voldemort. You gave me information that was ... important in helping me to win."

Snape looked around the photographic backdrop of his portrait. "This all of this," he gestured vaguely with one hand, "feels real. Yet it's just a photograph, powered by my memories of life. I understand this is meant to be an honor, but what if I don't want it?"

"Would you rather we hadn't made the portrait?" Harry asked in sudden dismay. The thought that Snape wouldn't want this had never occurred to him.

"I'm not sure," Snape answered, and he suddenly appeared young and frightened. "I don't want to acknowledge that I've died. But I can't throw away this form of existence, now I've got it. I just don't know what's expected of me. Am I to be trapped in a portrait forever?"

"There's no question of being trapped, Severus," Dumbledore answered. "As a former Headmaster of Hogwarts you're free to visit any of the paintings within the school."

"Speaking as a Slytherin," spoke up the smooth voice of Phineas Nigellus, "being a portrait is not a bad life. You can still experience everything you used to: eating, drinking, art, music, literature, philosophy, anything you wish. You can touch and feel and smell. I assure you, it all feels as real as it did in life. I understand," he added dryly, "that Guinevere de Matins, the guardian portrait of Gryffindor, regularly, ah, overindulges in the celebratory Yuletide wine. She suffers hangovers just as she did when she was alive." Harry noticed that Phineas Nigellus managed to keep a completely straight face as he said this.

"Yes, well, Gwen's fondness for egg-nog aside," Dilys Derwent's portrait said, after a quelling glance at Phineas Nigellus, who merely raised one eyebrow at her in a non-committal way, "we are dedicated to helping the current Head, offering advice from our years of experience. But it isn't an onerous job. And you don't have to spend all your time in this office, Severus. As Dumbledore said, there are many paintings in Hogwarts, great vistas of them. I assure you, it's never boring."

"Plus I've hung frames for you in each of the rooms of your house at Spinner's End," Harry added quickly. "I've made the entire place Unplottable so that nobody can disturb you when you feel like some privacy. And I've got a frame for you in my house at Grimmauld Place. There's only me and my fiancé Ginny Weasley living there at the moment, but you're welcome to visit us at any time."

Snape put a hand to his forehead shakily. "I'm feeling overwhelmed," he muttered. "This is all so confusing." He paused for a moment and then looked back at Harry. "Why did I decide to fight against the Dark Lord? There must have been a reason. I can't believe that I'd just switch sides. I gave up somebody very important to me to follow him."

"You were in love with Lily Evans. I know," Harry said. "And it was because of what Voldemort did to her that we both ended up fighting him."

Something in his tone of voice made Snape start. His eyes narrowed. He searched Harry's face. "Come closer! Your eyes ..."

Harry moved up until his face was only inches from the portrait. "Look at me," Harry whispered.

The green eyes found the black, and after an incredulous moment, Harry saw Snape cover his mouth with a shaking hand, and his dark eyes filled with tears.

"You have her eyes!" he murmured. "Lily's eyes!"

"I'm her son," Harry said quietly. "After you joined the Death Eaters, she married James Potter. When I was a baby, you gave Voldemort information that led to him murdering her and dad. And that's why you switched sides and worked to keep me safe. For Lily's sake. You felt responsible for her death. But you've repaid your debt to her, repaid it in full. Thank you, Severus. You were the bravest man I ever knew."

Snape had tears dripping from his eyes. He seemed not to have heard Harry's last words. "She's dead? No, no! Not Lily, please, no!"

Dumbledore cleared his throat. Speaking loudly to be sure that Snape heard him, he said, "I think this might be an appropriate time to introduce a guest to the Head's office. Severus, you should know that we now have a gallery hung in the Great Hall. It contains a pictorial record of every member of the Order of the Phoenix, each in their own portrait. This particular one had to be transferred, like you Severus, from a photograph. Her Graduation photograph, in fact. I've told her everything that has taken place in the years since, and she kindly offered to help you adjust to your new existence. Come in, my dear. Thank you for waiting so patiently."

Into Snape's portrait walked eighteen-year-old Lily Evans.

Harry's eyes fixed hungrily on her. The misery that had been on her face in the Graduation photo was gone, replaced with a restrained and slightly wary eagerness as she gazed at Snape.

"Hello, Sev," she said nervously, standing in the centre of the room. "I've missed you."

Snape was sitting as though frozen, staring at her in utter incredulity. "Lily?" he managed to whisper.

"Dumbledore told me I married James Potter," she said. "But I ... the me *now*, I mean, here ... oh, this is coming out wrong, I sound stupid, but ... I still love you, Sev. I always have ..."

Anything else she may have been about to say was muffled, as Snape, recovering abruptly from his frozen state, jumped from the chair he was sitting in, overturning it in his haste, and enveloped her in a hug, his face alight with joy, before kissing her passionately.

Harry turned away, feeling slightly embarrassed. This was, after all, his mum who was returning Snape's kisses so enthusiastically.

Only her image, Harry reminded himself. *This* Lily Evans was the one who had not yet learned to love James Potter, who had not yet had the baby Harry, who was still very much in love with her childhood sweetheart.

Both she and Severus had died for a cause, and this reunion of their memories was the least Harry could do to thank them. Harry glanced across at Dumbledore's portrait. He was quietly sitting in his armchair and caught Harry's eye. Giving a little nod and a smile, Albus reached for another lemon sherbet.

Harry suppressed a grin. All was well.

The End

Author's note: I have included three direct quotes from two of the Harry Potter series of books into this story. " ... *the walls were completely covered with them, most bound in black or brown leather. A threadbare sofa, old armchair and rickety table stood grouped together ...* " and *the place had an air of neglect, as though it had long been uninhabited.*" from "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince", page 28, UK version. "*All was well.*" from "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows", page 607, UK version.

Also, if you liked this story, please have a read of my original story "Love Inhuman" at this link:

<http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=11932>

Alison