

The Portrait Speaks

by phoenix

Severus ponders his life after Dumbledore's death. Deathly Hallows spoilers.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Summary: Severus has finally reached the pinnacle at Hogwarts, but is all as he expected it to be?

A small passage has been taken from the Pensieve scenes to tie this into *Deathly Hallows*.

Severus Snape entered the Headmaster's Office. Though this time not to speak with the Headmaster, but to be Headmaster. It was something he had always aspired to, hoping to redeem the Slytherin reputation, but he knew that was not to be the case now. He was there at the Dark Lord's bidding, and he could tell no one, not even Minerva, where his true loyalties lay.

His loss of Minerva as a close friend saddened him almost as much as having lost Albus.

Staring around the room, he saw most of the portraits turning their backs to him or else walking out of their frames. He could not blame them. He had done what no other Headmaster had done: killed his predecessor.

The only one who looked at him was Phineas Nigellus. "Well done, boy. I knew we'd have a Slytherin back as Headmaster some day."

"Thank you, Phineas. There is something I need to ask of you."

"You want me to keep an eye on the house?" asked Phineas with a sly grin.

Snape knew that Phineas did not approve of the Order and had only reluctantly kept an eye on Potter. "Precisely. I need to know if Potter or his friends arrive."

"Well, I can tell you this, that Auror, Moody, was there laying some traps for you."

"I suspected as much. I have no need to return; just let me know if anyone else does."

"Most definitely. I can't stand seeing the family home inhabited by such filth."

Severus chose to ignore this comment. "Now if you will excuse me, I have important work to attend to." With a flick of his wand, the portraits were hidden behind a thick black curtain... All save one.

Turning around, Severus stared at the one frame that had no patina on it. Pointing his wand at the sleeping wizard, he said, *Renervate*."

The old wizard opened his eyes. "Severus. So it is done?"

"It is. And it is worse than you expected. The Ministry is under his control, as is Hogwarts."

Albus frowned. "He is moving quickly. You know what must be done."

"Headmaster..."

"Albus, please. After all, we are now equals. You must continue to do his bidding. Protect the students from harm as much as you can, but it must not appear as though you are doing so. Your presence here is vital."

Severus closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He knew that what he was doing would only lead him further down the path of being remembered as a traitor. He still held out hope that he would be able to reveal the truth and repair his reputation once the Dark Lord was vanquished. "I know that. It's just so difficult. I always knew that I might have to betray the trust of those who are my friends..."

"The necessary path is often the difficult one. Where is Harry?"

"He is at his aunt and uncle's, as you directed. Though he will not remain there past his birthday since that is when the protection ends. As you know, I no longer have any contact with the Order, so I do not know what their plans are. The Ministry has a plan, but I doubt the Order will agree to the Ministry's plan. They know the Ministry has been infiltrated."

"I will pass the information to you."

"You want me to hand Potter to the Dark Lord?"

"You will have to give Voldemort the correct date of Harry's departure from his aunt and uncle's. Not to do so will raise suspicion, when Voldemort believes you so well informed. However, you must plant the idea of decoys; that, I think, ought to ensure Harry's safety. Try Confunding Mundungus Fletcher. And Severus, if you are forced to take part in the chase, be sure to act your part convincingly.... I am counting upon you to remain in Lord Voldemort's good books as long as possible, or Hogwarts will be left to the mercy of the Carrows."

Severus pondered momentarily on how Albus could have known of his latest appointments to the staff. "To rely on Mundungus..."

"He is the one most susceptible to Confunding and none will question the idea of decoys if it comes from him. After all, he is a cowardly man, though he does have his uses. The idea will seem perfectly natural coming from him."

"Of course. I understand." He had never approved of Mundungus' presence in the Order, but Albus had always had a soft spot for troubled souls, something he should not complain about.

"Is there something else bothering you?"

He was about to snap 'of course there is', but he suddenly did not feel like arguing with his former mentor. "Potter... will he understand what he is to do?"

"I have planted the clues in my will. He, Ron and Hermione were bequeathed items that have no meaning independently, but together, they should unlock the mystery, especially with Hermione at his side." Albus paused before continuing. "Do you not trust Ron and Hermione?"

"This whole plan seems quite foolish, trusting unqualified wizards. You obviously know information which could be useful to Potter in this quest you have sent him on, but you are not telling him. Always the secret keeper. Using up yet another person. Do you not think he deserves to know what his fate will be?" Severus asked angrily.

"He will learn when the time is right. He has not yet matured enough to understand the gravity of his fate. You do not agree with my decision?"

"Not in the least. You tricked me all these years, told me I was keeping alive a part of Lily, but only to send him to slaughter. Now you won't even tell him that. And my fate... Once again it hangs in the balance. I wonder what you know about my fate that you have not deigned to tell me."

"If I had the answer, would you really want to know?"

Severus pondered this for several long seconds. Would it be easier to know what his fate was? Would it make a difference if he were to live or die? He had made a promise to Albus, one that he intended to keep. "No," he finally replied. For just this once, he felt it was better to live in ignorance. He would do what he could to protect the students while still showing outward loyalty to the Dark Lord.

"There is one more thing," Albus said.

Looking up from his reverie, he asked, "What might that be?"

"I have left the Sword of Gryffindor to Harry, but as you can imagine, the Ministry will balk at passing on such an important artifact to him. I have created a duplicate. Please see that he gets the original. As you will note, there is a concealed compartment behind my portrait; that is where it is hidden."

"And how am I supposed to do that?" It seemed that the list of unusual requests Albus gave him was not going to diminish with the old man's passing.

"We will know when the time is right. Now, I think it is best for you to wake the others. We have spoken long enough alone. I will be here when you need me."

Severus grunted. Even death could not release him from the bidding of one of his masters. Though Albus was the one he followed of his own free will, the one to whom he was truly loyal. He would work alone, do what he could to facilitate Potter's victory, Potter's death. He almost could not bear the fact that he would be responsible for the last part of Lily dying. For this reason, he did not fear the death he felt was inevitable from this tangled web he had been immersed in for the last sixteen years.

With a flick of his wand, the curtains covering the other headmasters vanished. Though none of them said anything about his private conference, a few did look at him strangely.

Headmaster of Hogwarts something he had long coveted, though believed he would never attain. After all, he had a very dark past, only made darker by recent events. Would he be the last Headmaster? Remembered as the man who destroyed Hogwarts? Or would he be remembered as the man he was the man who spied on Lord Voldemort at great personal peril? There was no one else, and never would be anyone else who was capable of what he was accomplishing.

No matter what, he would succeed. Potter would get the sword. Potter would survive to vanquish Voldemort. Lily's sacrifice would not be in vain *Sweet Lily. Forgive me for what I do. I had not known I would be protecting your son only to send him to his death.*