

Haunted

by Mint Stick

Hermione comes across something unexpected in the Shrieking Shack. This drabble series was originally written for the 'Haunted House' challenge on grangersnape100.

Part One

Chapter 1 of 5

Hermione comes across something unexpected in the Shrieking Shack. This drabble series was originally written for the 'Haunted House' challenge on grangersnape100.

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A/N: Thanks to my wonderful beta a_bees_buzz!

'Mum! Guess what?'

'Hello to you too,' said Hermione, as her daughter skidded to a halt and took the seat beside her in the Three Broomsticks, visibly struggling to contain her excitement.

'The Shrieking Shack! It's haunted! Really haunted!'

'Don't be silly, Rose. It's never been haunted; it was only a rumour.'

'But it is! Albus and I just went to take a look inside, and there was this really weird noise, like someone was crying. And then we saw a ghost, a really scary, angry looking ghost! I'm not so sure, but Albus swears it looked like Headmaster Snape!'

* * *

Once Rose had finished her lunch and said goodbye to her mother, Hermione had time to consider the news.

She didn't know whether to believe Rose or not. On the one hand, she was sure her daughter really had seen something – *someone* – but on the other, neither Rose nor young Albus Potter had ever seen the late Headmaster alive. Only on some old photos, but that was a long time ago, and neither her nor Harry's family made a habit of showing the kids pictures of Snape.

'Well,' she thought. 'There's just one way to find out for sure.'

* * *

When Hermione entered the Shrieking Shack, it was quiet. And dark. There was barely any light coming from the windows – no wonder, as it was late November and the sun was already setting.

'Anyone here?' she called out, feeling vaguely silly for asking questions of an empty house.

Upstairs, the floorboards creaked.

As a sudden gust of wind closed the door with a loud bang, Hermione jumped, only to admonish herself for being scared of nothing. Until she heard a voice – one she had not heard for over two decades but could never forget.

‘That depends on who is asking.’

* * *

Hermione stood still for a few moments.

‘This is impossible,’ she told herself. ‘We’d have known if Snape returned as a ghost. All these years, and no one has found out before? This has to be a trick – did the kids set it up somehow?’

Encouraged by her thoughts, she lit her wand and started climbing the stairs.

Something cold touched her hand, passing through her fingers and nearly making her drop the wand. She swallowed nervously, her throat dry. Suddenly she was not so sure any more that this was a trick.

‘Well, well. If it isn’t Miss Granger.’

* * *

‘Professor?’ she whispered.

A few steps above her, the air flickered. A moment later, it took a shape she instantly recognised.

‘Indeed,’ came his response. ‘To what do I owe the honour of this ... unexpected visit?’

Hermione took a deep breath. She was a Gryffindor, she reminded herself. Familiar with ghosts. A grown-up. A mother, for Merlin’s sake! This was a mystery to be solved, and she’d be damned if she allowed herself to seem like a bumbling, scared schoolgirl.

‘My daughter informed me that she and her friend saw a ghost here. *Your ghost*. I came to investigate.’

* * *

‘That red-headed brat was yours, then. I had wondered how someone looking like a Weasley would have come to be in Ravenclaw.’

The familiar sneer she remembered too well from her Hogwarts days looked oddly misplaced in the translucent face. In fact, nothing about him seemed quite right. It looked like Severus Snape – hooked nose, hair that still looked greasy, two bite marks on his neck – but something was off.

‘Your robes ... They’re not black!’ she exclaimed.

‘Quite. How wonderful to see that you’ve put your vaunted intelligence to good use. Have you ever seen a ghost wearing colours?’

* * *

Part Two

Chapter 2 of 5

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A/N: Thanks to my wonderful beta a_bees_buzz!

‘I’ll thank you not to use that tone of voice with me, Professor. I’m not a schoolgirl any more. In fact, unless I’m mistaken, and I don’t think I am, I am older than you were when you ...’

‘When I died. Thank you for reminding me.’

The guilt Hermione had felt, once the euphoria of winning the battle had vanished, returned.

‘We did come back here, you know. Afterwards. To see if there was anything we could do. But it was too late.’

‘It would always have been too late, Miss Granger. Or should I say Mrs Weasley, now?’

* * *

‘It’s Granger again, actually.’

He didn’t say anything, but drifted slightly upwards on the stairs.

Hermione was suddenly worried that he would disappear, leaving her little wiser than she was upon her arrival.

‘Professor ... why are you here?’

He sighed and gestured for her to enter the room upstairs.

'I don't know why I should tell you anything. But if you are anything like the girl I remember, you will not leave me in peace until you've had your answers.'

He entered the room behind her, his translucent robes billowing magnificently, as if he'd spent years practicing the movement.

* * *

He was silent for a few minutes.

Hermione kept her eyes on him, clutching her wand with both hands, suppressing the urge to fidget or bite her lower lip. She didn't like the way Snape, even as a ghost, effortlessly managed to make her feel small and insignificant again.

Finally, his voice – sounding a little rusty from years of disuse, now that Hermione was composed enough to pay attention to its nuances – broke the silence. 'I don't really know. I suppose I had ... unfinished business. I didn't know if Potter would succeed. And I did not want to ...'

* * *

He stopped abruptly, as if he'd realised he had already said more than he had intended.

'In any case, it doesn't seem to have done much good. By the time I returned, in this form, the battle was long over. My assistance was certainly not needed here any more.'

'Have you been here *all* this time?' asked Hermione curiously. 'Why did no one know about it?'

'Not many people come here.'

'But surely you could have moved to Hogwarts? Why stay here?'

There was that familiar sneer again. 'Really, Miss Granger. Surely you don't believe I would be welcome there?'

* * *

'You are a hero, you know. Everyone knows that! Harry made sure of it.'

He drifted towards the window, not looking at Hermione.

'I know what Potter told people. After I returned, I ... spent some time outside the castle. Watching. Listening. Studying. It doesn't change the fact – and it is a fact, Miss Granger, do not try to argue! – that I was not liked when I was alive. Why should it be any different now?'

'But–'

'Do not argue, I said!'

The look on his face, paler now than ever, was feral, making Hermione take a step back.

* * *

'Can you honestly say, Miss Granger, that there is even one person in the castle who would want me there? Not as a curiosity item, not so that they may whisper about me, pointing fingers when they think I am not looking, but because they would welcome my company?'

His bitterness should not have surprised Hermione, and yet it did.

'I do not want to become the next Bloody Baron,' he continued, his voice so quiet that Hermione had to strain to hear the words. 'Disliked – hated – by everyone, doomed to spend all eternity facing the reason for his guilt.'

* * *

Part Three

Chapter 3 of 5

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Hermione hadn't expected his words to affect her so deeply. For a moment, she wanted to lay her hand on his arm, to offer him support and sympathy.

She nearly reached out to him before realising that Snape might consider it pity and not take kindly to it – and remembering that ghosts didn't always appreciate contact with living, heated bodies.

'Is this why – why you did not want to move on?' she asked before she could stop herself. 'Harry told us about you and Lily ... Was it the thought of meeting her in the afterlife that held you back?'

* * *

She expected him to lash out again.

Instead, he looked relieved, as if he had hoped she would figure it out, nodding briefly before sagging down on the floor in a heap of translucent robes, not quite touching the boards. Hermione could make out the texture of the wooden planks beneath him.

She sat down, careful not to touch him.

She wanted to say something – anything – but couldn't think of the right words. What to say to a man who spent his life protecting others and yet felt a solitary half-existence as a ghost would be preferable to moving on?

* * *

'What have you been doing here, all these years?'

He turned slightly to face her, quirking an eyebrow at her clumsy attempt to change the topic.

'The usual, I suppose. Float around. Haunt. Scare passing children.'

'Rose said she had heard – well, she said she heard someone cry.'

'Did she now.'

When an explanation did not seem forthcoming, Hermione decided to try her luck and press on. 'It's not like he can hex me for asking impertinent questions,' she told herself, although she felt a little guilty about it.

'Did she? Hear someone cry?'

'It must have been the wind.'

* * *

It was becoming clear that his talkativeness had come to an end, yet she didn't want to leave the Shack. She still had questions to ask, and she did not feel comfortable about leaving him on his own again, now that she knew he was there.

'I think I've taken up enough of your time,' she offered apologetically, dusting off her clothes as she got up from the floor. 'I would like to return some day though, if you don't mind.'

He snorted.

'As if I had a choice. I don't suppose cheap tricks would be enough to scare you.'

* * *

'I bought a few books,' she declared a week later, placing a pile of tomes on the floor.

Snape drifted closer, giving her a look she could not quite read.

'I didn't know what you'd be interested in, but these are all new – published in the last twenty years. Ghosts can manipulate physical objects to an extent, can't they? I mean, you can make the doors bang shut, and Moaning Myrtle could flush the toilet, so I was thinking that you could turn the pages too, yes?'

Eagerness shone in her eyes, as she was waiting for his affirmative reply.

* * *

Most Saturdays, she arrived at the Shrieking Shack in the morning with new books. The exceptions were Hogsmeade weekends when she had lunch with Rose first.

She had not yet told anyone else about Snape. She was not quite sure why she hadn't – she tried to tell herself that it was to protect him from the curiosity of others, to give him time to accustom himself to the company of living people, that he had not given the slightest indication of wanting to meet anyone else.

It certainly had nothing to do with wanting to keep the professor to herself.

* * *

Part Four

Chapter 4 of 5

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'Severus?' she called out when she didn't immediately see his familiar, pearly-white form in the upstairs room. 'Sorry I'm late. Ron called to complain about Lavender messing up his dinner again. I tried to get him to stop, but he just wouldn't take the hint!'

He appeared a moment later, floating through the bookshelf she had installed two weeks after her first visit.

'Hmm,' he muttered, picking up the copy of *Notable Achievements in the Field of Potions, 2022* which Hermione had brought along the week before. 'Why you don't just use the Silencing Charm on him, I'll never know.'

* * *

As she was waiting for him to make the next move in the chess game they had started a few weeks earlier, she contemplated, not for the first time, the odd way her life had developed.

If she was perfectly honest with herself, she had to admit to feeling a certain sadness about the whole situation – in particular, about Severus being a ghost and not a man of flesh and blood. Not that she would have told him that.

'Ha!' he cried out. 'Check and mate, I believe. I must say, you are not such an insufferable know-it-all any more.'

* * *

She was glad he had taken an interest in her life. With Harry and Ginny both busy with their lives and careers and both children at Hogwarts, she had not had many people to talk to after the divorce.

'Ron was livid when he found out about Rose fancying Scorpius,' she told him. 'He's not such a bad kid, really – hard-working and loyal. No wonder the Hat put him into Hufflepuff!'

'I understand Weasley was hoping for Rose and Potter's younger son to come to an understanding?' asked Snape.

'Indeed. I haven't yet dared tell him about Hugo and Al.'

* * *

Snape was doing his best to avoid wondering whether it was Saturday yet.

His internal clock and calendar had always been accurate and reliable when he had still been prowling the corridors of the castle, but since his return as a ghost, time had considerably less meaning for him. More precisely, it had had less meaning for him for the first two decades of haunting the Shrieking Shack, before Saturdays had become important.

He had also noticed that he did not spend his time thinking about Lily any more.

Deciding it was probably Friday, he floated back to the bookshelf.

* * *

'I'm here!' called Hermione, stepping into the room. 'Just dropped Fred and Lucia off at Ron's. I did mention that Rose and Scorpius decided to spend a week in Paris without the kids, yes?'

'I believe you told me, yes. I'm sure that even Weasley can manage to take care of them for the weekend, so you needn't look so worried.'

She smiled at him, directing an *Incendio!* towards the fireplace, when her phone – she insisted on using the Muggle device – started ringing.

'What do you mean I have to come immediately? Look, I really can't – oh, very well then.'

* * *

'Sorry, I really must go. I'll be back as soon as I can,' she apologized, grabbing her bag.

In her hurry, she lost her balance on the stairs.

Snape reacted without thinking, hurling his ghostly form down the stairs, hoping to – he didn't know what he was hoping to do. To catch her, without having a body?

It didn't matter.

Her falling body sunk into the translucent form. Her lips brushed against his.

To his shock, the ectoplasm started to solidify.

He could not stop her fall, but his body acted as a cushion for her and hers for him.

* * *

When they came to a stop at the bottom of the stairs, Hermione was speechless with shock. All she could do was to stare at the very solid form of her companion, feeling the heart beating in his chest.

Severus wondered if he was dreaming. Not that he had dreamed once since becoming a ghost. Apparently, ghosts did not dream. So perhaps it was a hallucination.

'What ... How did that happen?' he finally managed to sputter.

Hermione shook her head, trying to clear her mind.

'I have no idea. But we have a lifetime to find out, don't we?'

The End

A/N: This is the end ... sort of! I was undecided between two options until the very end, and some of the readers at GS100 encouraged me to write down the alternative ending as well. So there is still that to come.

Part Five

Chapter 5 of 5

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A/N: Thanks to my wonderful beta, a_bees_buzz!

The first alternate ending is the one I originally had in mind when writing the story. The second alternate ending is, I'm afraid, more crack!fic than a real alternative, but then again, perhaps in some universe it might actually work.

Alternate ending 1

'Sorry, I really must go – I'll be back as soon as I can,' she apologized, grabbing her bag.

In her hurry, she lost her balance on the stairs.

Snape reacted without thinking, hurling his ghostly form down the stairs, hoping to – he didn't know what he was hoping to do. To catch her – without having a body?

It didn't matter.

Her falling body sunk through his translucent form, hitting the bottom of the stairs with a sickening thud.

'No,' he whispered. 'No! Hermione, talk to me! Please!'

She remained silent. The dark puddle forming under her head spoke for itself.

* * *

For the first time since his return, he showed himself at the castle, going straight to the Headmaster's office and informing him of the body in the Shack. He left before the shocked man had collected himself enough to start asking questions.

When Hermione's body was taken away, he stayed invisible.

He stayed invisible at the graveyard, too, listening to everything that was being said. Family, friends, colleagues – it seemed to him that none of them had really known her. Not the way he had.

He didn't want to return to the Shack. But he had nowhere else to go.

* * *

A week had passed. He did not know how he had spent it, except that he felt more alone than ever. He wondered if ghosts could go mad.

When the window flew wide open, he suspected the wind.

'Severus?'

So apparently it was possible, he thought. Hearing voices would surely be the first step towards madness.

'Severus, it's me. Show yourself, please!'

Slowly, he forced his form to become visible again and looked up. And gasped.

'Hermione!'

The pearly white shape of her, so familiar and dear, drifted closer until it was embracing him.

'I had unfinished business,' she whispered.

* * *

Twelve years later, two fourth year students were on their way back to Hogwarts when one of them suddenly had the idea to go and visit the Shrieking Shack.

'Come on, sis, it'll be fun,' he persuaded his companion.

The two sneaked up the stairs, wands at the ready.

Fred reached the top first. As soon as he had peeked into the room, he backed out again, a shocked look on his face.

'You'd better not go there, Lucia. There are two ghosts in there, having an, um, private moment.'

Being a brave Gryffindor, she took a look anyway.

'GRANDMA?!'

Alternate ending 2

Hermione stormed into the room, throwing the newspaper at Severus. It sailed right through him and landed on the floor.

'I wish you wouldn't do that,' he remarked. 'It's not pleasant.'

'Shacklebolt!' she yelled. 'He has completely lost his mind! I told him the Marriage Law is a bad, bad, BAD idea – and what does he do? He goes and passes it anyway!'

Taking a look at Severus, she calmed down a little.

'I found a loophole. It says nothing about having to marry living people.'

Her hot lips landed on his, making the ectoplasm sizzle.

'Will you marry me?'