

Exanimus Virtutis: A Hero's Goodbye

by LadyTuesday

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Response to Potter Place DH Prompt #4. **Second place winner of the Post-DH Prompt Contest for One-Shots.**

Requiem

Chapter 1 of 1

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Response to Potter Place DH Prompt #4. **Second place winner of the Post-DH Prompt Contest for One-Shots.**

A/N - A response to the Potter Place Deathly Hallows challenge # 4: "Snape is dead. Harry/Hermione/Ron (or someone) goes back to get him... carries the body back to the castle. Harry and co. are confronted at the doors of the Great Hall, and Harry declares that Snape was Dumbledore's man. A hero's good-bye."

And wow! Now that the Potter Place DH Challenge voting is over, I finally get to post this story (of which I'm ridiculously proud) under my own name and say, "It's me, it's me! I wrote it! Me me me!" ^_^ And I even won an award! Second place in the one-shot stories!!! *dances like a fool*



ahem So, yes, here it is: the first (and, quite likely, LAST) *completely* canon-correct fic I have ever written. And I must say, I really did laugh when doing the character indications ... does Sev count as a character when he's dead the entire piece? ^_^ I think so ... you be the judge. So here it is, my version of the hero's goodbye.

Enjoy,

~~ ** Lady Tuesday ** ~~

Exanimus Virtutis: A Hero's Goodbye

Hermione Granger couldn't help laughing out loud as she walked across the long lawn of Hogwarts, towards the lake where Professor Dumbledore's tomb stood. She knew that this should be a somber occasion crossing the blood-soaked battle grounds to replace the Elder Wand with Dumbledore's body but the strangest sense of lightness and relief washed over her with every step. Each footfall made her feel as if her body became more and more buoyant; it wasn't only Harry who was free now that it was all over. They were all free to live their lives without darkness shadowing them and that horrible, horrible weight of responsibility and calamity and imminent doom hanging about their shoulders. Despite the fact that Ron and Harry were staring at her as if she'd run stark-staring mad, Hermione threw her arms up in the air and twirled.

Free!

When her arms dropped again, Harry took her hand on one side and Ron on the other. Her boys. This thought made her smile. Ron would truly be hers now and that thought made her smile like nothing had before! and Harry would just be Harry, unencumbered and open. No shadows. These boys were her life, and she was determined to live it fully now that she was able. *Determined to live*, she thought, *in honor of those who have lost that privilege*. That particular thought pricked at the bubble of happiness inside her chest as Harry tapped the top of Dumbledore's tomb with his wand. She found she couldn't look inside. Reaching out his long, thin arms, Ron took her into his chest, where she sniffed back tears. She'd seen too many dead bodies tonight ... Fred, Lupin, Tonks, Snape... *SNAPE!!!* The thought tore threw her mind as shrilly as if she had actually shrieked it through the stillness of the late night air. Without another word, Hermione pushed free of Ron's loose grip, turned towards Hogsmeade and ran with all her might.

"We left him there!" she whimpered as she ran. "God, I can't believe we just left him there! All this time!"

She could hear Ron and Harry calling after her in confusion, but she didn't stop. Panic drove her, made her arms and legs tingle with anxiety and her chest suddenly wrenched as if caught in a vice grip, her sorrow acutely crushing. As soon as she was reasonably certain that she had passed Hogwarts' wards, she Apparated into the pinkening morning with a loud *crack!*

The house was still. She had only been in or near it a handful of times, but in any of those times she'd never known it to be so still. It was as if even the rickety, tumble-down building itself mourned him. A tear slipped down her cheek. Hermione took several deep, steadying breaths as she leaned one hand against the doorsill at the end of the entryway and let her heart rate drop back to normal. Not entirely certain that she could summon the courage to do what she must now that she was here, she took advantage of the quiet to gather her emotional strength. She'd never particularly cared for the man, true; he'd been harsh and cold, unforgiving and unreasonably demanding, but she'd never harbored the hardened loathing for him that Harry had. He was simply a professor she'd had who'd never given her the credit she deserved and whom she didn't care for in the slightest.

Until tonight. No, after tonight, she could never think of him just as unpleasant Professor Snape, that sharp man with the cruel snap of voice dripping with vitriol and knife-point invective. Not after what Harry had told her about his past. The man was a hero, in whatever twisted format he occupied the post. He had saved them all numerous times and through it all had suffered as no one could possibly have believed he suffered. No one but Dumbledore, who wasn't even around to vouchsafe the man the properly resplendent send-off that he deserved. A single, broken sob left her throat before she placed a hand on her stomach, wrapped the other around her wand and forced her seemingly liquid limbs towards the room where she'd seen him last. Her breath roared in her ears, the only sound echoing through the ramshackle cottage at the far edge of Hogsmeade. Her stomach seemed to house a stampeding herd of hippogriffs as she rounded the corner into the room where she knew he'd be. He was dead. She *knew* he was dead. Of course he was. So what did it matter, really, that it had taken her so long to get here? It was not like he'd protest. Why did she feel so nervous? He wouldn't leap up from the floor and insult her, throwing her pity back in her face and taking copious amounts of House points. Perhaps that was why she was nervous. She couldn't bear the thought of the callous, ceaselessly resolute man stripped of (quite literally) everything that made him who he was. Her knees buckled and she tumbled to the floor as she saw his body sprawled out on the dusty wood, lying in a thick pool of soupy blood.

Her hands trembled violently as they closed around her wand, her voice wavering as she muttered *Tergeo* and began siphoning the claret puddle off the floor. She felt, wildly, as if she should save it. The thought disgusted her, but after all she knew he had given up over the years, something in her didn't want to get rid of this last thing. It seemed as if in the end the only things Severus Snape had been able to retain were his life and his dignity, and even those had been stripped from him roughly in his last moments. He hadn't even been given a glorious champion's death for his troubles. Hermione felt as if she'd swallowed a golf ball, but she pushed a rough exhalation of voice through it and tried to steel herself. She'd never get through this if she kept dwelling on that sort of thought, and she refused to leave the poor man as he was. She was going to clean him up, seal up his wounds and take him back to Hogwarts; back to his home. After all he'd done, he deserved that much, and she'd be damned if anyone but her or Harry or Ron would be the one to give it to him. They *owed* him that much. The thought strengthened her enough that she was able to rise to her knees over him and examine his body; so it was with a stronger resolution that she laid gentle hands to the stiff wool at his right shoulder and pushed, rolling him onto his back.

A powerful urge to vomit pummeled her as she caught sight of the slow ooze of blood now trickling from the gaping wound on the side of his neck. Most likely it had occurred simply because she had moved him, but the sting of bile at the back of her throat didn't quite dissipate at the rational explanation. She had to turn her head a moment and heave a few long breaths before she could stand to turn back to do something about it. Pointing her wand carefully at her left hand, Hermione said, *"Ablutium!"* A tingling sensation, as if she'd just dipped her hand in a strong antiseptic, whisked over her hand. Switching her wand to her left hand, she repeated the charm over her right. She wasn't entirely certain why she was bothering to sterilize her hands Perhaps it was for her own safety, though it felt more like an act of care and respect for Snape. Not that he'd feel it. Her throat hitched at that, so she went back to her work. Taking slow, deliberate breaths, Hermione lowered her wand to his neck and prodded just the tip into the viscera at his neck. *"Detineo Contagium,"* she said softly. Confident that neither infection nor venom had escaped from or infiltrated into the wound, she gingerly laid the fingers of her left hand above the first puncture wound just below his Adam's apple and reached down with her thumb to capture the hanging fold of skin near the back of his neck. She tried not to notice that pieces of a ripped artery slid against her fingers as she squeezed his neck, bringing his skin back together, nor that she could quite clearly see into the wound to a thick cord of muscle from his throat. Instead she just breathed and pulled it all back together, ignoring the gelatinous glop of his blood that seeped across her hand. When her grip closed it as much as possible, she chanted, *"Arceo,"* over the tears in his skin. She hadn't been quite certain that her idea it would work when she began; after all, she wasn't trying to heal the skin (impossible, as being dead would prevent new cell growth), simply shut the tears. So she used a charm that she had previously thought only to use for things like sealing envelopes or packages. It seemed to be a satisfactory extrapolation of knowledge, though, because though his skin did not repair, it did seal the open area as if she had glued one side of the broken skin to the other. His neck still looked angry and raw, but no longer appeared as if he'd been torn open. Which he had been. Hermione dry-heaved again, but managed to keep herself composed enough not to vomit.

A few quick cleansing charms to his hair and robes and Hermione could almost pretend that he was simply lying there sleeping *Or unconscious like that time we all Disarmed him*, she thought, surprised that it made her chuckle. Her laughter rang out, strangled and hysterical, as she thought about how mad he'd been later that they had turned their wands on him and somehow managed to get away with it. Well, he was finally rid of them three, now. There was certainly no love lost between them all in parting company. At least, there wouldn't have been on his end. But now ... now that she knew the truth about whom he was...who he had always been...her heart ached horribly with the agony of it. How mad he would be now if he knew that she was the one to tend him in death. The sound that had once been laughter dissolved into sobbing, just as hysterical and strangled. She collapsed over his still chest and clutched at one pale, cold hand.

"I'm sorry," she whimpered. "I'm so sorry, Professor. I'm sorry that you had to live that way. I'm sorry that you had to suffer like that and that all anyone did to thank you was to ask more of you. I'm so sorry that we never knew. I know that you wouldn't have made it easier on Harry or Ron or me, but we could have made it easier on you." She began to hiccup as she cried. "And I'm so sorry there was nothing we could do. I wish we could have ... saved you, somehow ..."

But they couldn't have. She went over it and over it and over it in her mind, but she could come up with no way they could have saved him. But at least they had done one thing for him: he hadn't died alone. He had died staring up into the eyes of his enemy, but he had not died alone. Not even Severus Snape should die alone. For the first time, Hermione looked up into his face. Into his eyes. They were still open; she hadn't bothered to close them. The deep black of his irises were no colder in death than they had been in life; looking into his eyes had always been like diving into a void. Placing a hand against his cold cheek, Hermione wondered if it had always been that way. She hadn't seen the memories in the Pensieve, but she wondered suddenly, strangely, if the ebony eyes had ever been possessed of warmth. Perhaps when he looked at Lily...? Love made warmth. Her heart ached painfully again; he had died without love. No one should die without love. But then again, he had lived without love, so should it really be all that strange that he should die without it? Seized of a strange mood, she suddenly remembered the words to a Beatles song that her mother loved: "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make." Severus Snape had certainly made no love in any form, so why should he take any with him?

What a terribly cruel thought. Hermione couldn't even stomach that she had considered it. And swiftly she felt a desperate stinging need to give the man some tiny bit of tenderness to take with him to whatever place he would go to now that he was dead. It may be late, but it couldn't be too late. It was never too late to give love. She had to believe that. Without considering the strangeness, perhaps even the disgusting nature of what she was doing, Hermione traced her fingers over the hooked curve of nose she'd seen a thousand times and the heavy line of his brow that had usually been pulled together in agitation and anger, now smooth in the repose of death. Closing her eyes, Hermione drew deep down through her chest into her soul for whatever love she could give this man. She cupped both of her hands around the chilled, inert face of her former professor, bent over him, and gently laid a long, quiet kiss against the thin, cold lips beneath his large, hooked nose. Then, without a word or another wasted action, she rose to her feet, hooked her hands beneath his shoulders and began to drag him from the Shrieking Shack.

Hermione slashed angrily at a line of sweat trickling down her face and over her nose as she heaved. She apologized again to the corpse in her hands that this wasn't the most efficient way for him to be brought back home, but she felt that taking the 'easy way out' and lifting him via a Levicorpus Charm would firstly be too reminiscent of the last time they two had been in the Shrieking Shack together (and he had been jostled, unconscious, along the tunnel then, too), and secondly she felt that putting her own physical effort into it gave him the dignity and respect he was due. Somehow. Though she had to admit, with a rueful smile, that his legs dragging along in the dust might not be entirely dignified either.

"Oh, well," she said, still smiling just a tad more. "Sorry, Professor, but there's only one of me to carry you, and beggars can't be choosers and all that." And with just a moment for an extra breath, she bent back and began hauling him along again.

It seemed like decades that it took her to heave him halfway down the tunnel towards the Whomping Willow before she heard a thunder of noise coming towards her. With a lightening quick spin, Hermione dropped to her knees in front of him, thrust an arm around his chest and pointed her wand towards the curve in the tunnel ahead. She cast the charm to make a set of her bluebell flames and tossed them towards the bend, anxious to see whom it was coming to overtake her. Within moments, Harry, Ron and Neville burst forth, crouching low in the small tunnel and looking for all the world as if they might cry at the sight of her. She lowered her wand, but even the relief she felt at their presence could not put a smile back on her face as they regarded her and her charge.

"Bloody hell, Hermione!" Ron practically shouted. "Do have any idea how bloody worried we've been about where you nobbled off to for the last three bloody hours?"

"Three hours?" Hermione asked, as if the words made no sense to her. Then, it registered. "I've been gone three hours?"

Ron nodded enthusiastically and opened his mouth to retort, but Neville just placed a hand on his shoulder and nodded. "Everyone's been quite panicked, looking for you."

"I'm sorry," she muttered absently. "I didn't mean to scare anyone, I just..."

She trailed off as she looked to the one live person who hadn't spoke. Harry's face was granite as his eyes wandered from her to the limp man in her grip. Heart leaping into her throat, Hermione shuffled around in front of Snape, as if hiding him from Harry's wrath.

"I'm sorry," she said again. "I remembered that we'd just left him there, and I didn't think we should just ... leave him there. He didn't deserve to be left there like that, so I went back to get him. I went back to clean him up because he shouldn't have been left there to just lie in a pool of his own blood after everything he did and I just..."

She didn't realize that a thick line of tears had streamed down her face as she babbled until Harry knelt down next to her and pulled a crumpled tissue from his pocket. He hitched forward as if to hug her, then stopped. After a moment, he launched himself forward into her arms. Hermione sobbed against Harry's chest and Harry's grip practically cracked ribs, but she held on and so did he. Shortly, he pulled back, his face hard once again but seeming to twitch from the effort to keep it so.

"I should have thought of it," he growled out. "I should have remembered him. How could I have forgotten him when he was the reason I knew how to beat Voldemort?"

Hermione laid a hand against his face. He jerked away from her touch, but she didn't let it dissuade her. This time, both of her hands encircled his face. "You had a bit more on your mind at the time. You're not alone, Harry. After everything, I'd think you'd remember that by now."

The words were biting, but her tone was soft. Harry smiled back at her before looking to Snape. Hermione got to her feet again and thrust her arms back underneath his shoulders, making to begin carrying him again. As she began to pull, Harry laid a hand on her arm; without a word, only a strong look, he took up the position at Snape's right shoulder, bending with Hermione to lift him from the ground. She smiled to him, grateful that she didn't have to explain her determination that they not use their wands to carry him like a ... like a Corpse, her mind supplied. But she wouldn't dwell on it. They moved past where Ron and Neville had pushed against the walls to get out of the way of their two friends, then the two other boys bent and took up carrying his legs without having to be asked. The four of them moved in silence, bent low to keep from hitting their heads on the ceiling of the tunnel. When at last they came to the end, they laid the still body on the grass only long enough to look to each other and, without a word, lift him to their shoulders. It was a bit awkward going for a while, as Hermione and Harry at his shoulders were significantly shorter than Neville and Ron at his thighs and his long robes wavered strangely and slapped against them as they walked, as if determined not to give up their trademark billowing just yet. But the burden of his weight was borne upon them without comment. Severus Snape was to be carried back to his home of the last two decades in silence and reverence.

"Harry?"

The dark-haired Boy-Who-Could-Live-At-Last next to her stopped short at the foot of the stairs to Hogwarts, glancing at her around their professor's lolling head. He didn't say a word, but raised an eyebrow at her before looking back up towards the main doors, cracked open and spilling golden light across the stairs in front of them and the grounds behind them.

"What do we do with him now?" Hermione asked, her voice uncertain.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," she started, "we've brought him home where he belongs. But ..."

"But what?"

Ron took up the question when Hermione's voice failed her. "Up until about five hours ago when you defeated You-Know-..." Harry wrenched around and glared at Ron. "...oh, fine, Voldemort, everyone thought Snape was a traitor who murdered Dumbledore for the Death Eaters. And the only cause they have to think he's not is the fact that you said he ... well, that he loved your mum. You've got to admit, it's all a bit confusing. It's not as if we can just stroll into the Great Hall with Snape's corpse on our backs, now can we?"

"Actually," Harry said, his face determined, "that's exactly what we're going to do."

Without waiting for a reply, Harry started moving again, up the steps towards where the cacophony of thousands of people still celebrating drifted out from behind the walls and doors of Hogwarts.

The roar of happy noise and music and chatter thundered to a deafening silence when the four Gryffindors crossed the threshold into the Great Hall. The room held a quiet so tense it practically pulsed, the only sounds being a muttered vulgarity and dropped piece of cutlery from somewhere near the Hufflepuff table. Up at the front, McGonagall rose from her chair at the head table, her hand flying to her chest to cover her heart. No one else made a move. Harry cleared his throat and the four of them moved forward. Hermione could feel every eye in the Hall latched onto their procession as they made their way towards the head table. By the time they reached the head table, all of the professors that remained were on their feet and, seeming to realize what they were about, Professor Flitwick hopped up onto the table and conjured a raised platform with a deep green cushion on top. Sending him a strained by grateful smile, Harry whispered to the other three to lay down Snape's body when they reached the dais.

Hermione, Ron and Neville all allowed their gaze to scan the line of teachers and adults in front of them Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Mrs. Longbottom, Kingsley, Bill and Fleur among them but eventually turned to Harry, who stared straight out the back windows for a moment before turning back to the mass of people in the Hall, staring at the raised platform just at Harry's waist where Snape lie. Hermione moved immediately to take Harry's left hand, and Ron clasped a hand to his right shoulder. Neville pulled back discreetly, allowing himself to be enveloped into the arms of his grandmother. Harry opened his mouth to speak but lowered his head when no words left him. Hermione looked up as a thin, wrinkled hand passed her peripheral vision: McGonagall had come down behind her to clasp Harry's other shoulder. The move seemed to steady him.

"A good man was sacrificed tonight," Harry said. His voice started shaking just a bit, but he cleared his throat and pressed on. "One whose goodness remained hidden from nearly all of us until this evening, after it was far, far too late. Those of you who were here when I faced Voldemort have heard a bit of it. At least, the tip of it. Severus Snape worked for Dumbledore and for the Order of the Phoenix for nearly all of his life. He worked tirelessly, giving up all of his freedom, giving up his very life for truth..." Harry's voice cracked. "...and for love. It was because of Severus Snape that the Order of the Phoenix could combat Voldemort at all and it was because of Severus Snape that I stand here before you, alive and as unharmed as I could ever have hoped to be. And because of that, everyone in this hall ... everyone in the magical world owes their lives to this man.

"I can't say I'll miss his conversation," Harry said, a wry smile on his face. Many people chuckled, some unpleasantly, but most in baffled amusement. "But I can say that whatever our differences were, I owe my life to him. Severus Snape was Dumbledore's man, if any of us ever was. I will make sure that a portrait will be commissioned and hung in the Headmaster's Office, so that he may share eternity here, where he watched over the lives of the future of the wizarding world. He may not have lived a hero's life, but if I have anything to say about it, he will have a hero's legacy."

Hermione tightened her hand within Harry's as a line of tears snaked out of the corners of his eyes.

He looked to Professor McGonagall helplessly. "I'm sorry, Professor," he said quietly. "I can't ... I just can't..."

She smiled a watery grin back to him and flicked her wand in a circle encompassing all the people on the platform. Small glasses of mead appeared in their empty hands. The statuesque Head of Gryffindor House raised hers and, in a husky voice, said, "To Severus!"

Harry looked at Ron and then at Hermione, who each raised their glasses in unison. Everyone in the hall rose quickly and held up glasses, steins, cups, anything that came to hand.

"To Severus Snape," Hermione said loudly, her voice thick. "May he rest in peace."

"Severus Snape," echoed the crowd, saluting him with their cups before drinking.

When the Professors McGonagall and Flitwick had charmed the platform on which Snape rested to float out across the Hall, the entire assembled mass watched quietly as the party at the head table followed the bower, moving out towards the grounds. People spilled out the front doors to watch the procession, led by McGonagall, Harry, Hermione and Ron, as it snaked its way to the lake near where Dumbledore's tomb stood.

"Are you sure this is what he would have wanted?" Ron asked McGonagall quietly.

"He was quite a private man, after all," Hermione whispered in response, nodding.

McGonagall's face tightened with exhaustion and stress, but softened as she looked down at her colleague's body. Tears welled in her eyes. "Severus was a private man, that's true," she said. "But I've known him since he was a child and whether he ever admitted it or not, what he wanted and needed most in his life was the kind of outpouring of care and love and honor that he's getting right now. And much like Albus..." A hitch caught in her voice before she fought through it. "...this was home to him."

She straightened her back and as they neared the object of their procession, she raised her wand. Next to the high, enclosed white marble altar that held Dumbledore's body sprang up a second table, half as high and as darkly ebony as its brother's was snowy white. With a flick of his wand, Flitwick moved the green cushion bearing Snape's body from its stretcher onto the stone table. Hermione thought that Snape's face was nearly as pale as the stone of Dumbledore's tomb behind him and his robes as black as the stone beneath. *A fitting resting place, she thought, for a man so full of the extremes in life.*

The crowd circled around the altar and, with very few words (for what else really needed to be said?), the magical world said its final goodbyes to Severus Snape. McGonagall moved forward for a moment to straighten Snape's robes in a touchingly motherly gesture and then withdrew his wand from an inner pocket in them, placing it in his right hand and crossing both hands over his chest. When she finished, all of the teachers crowded nearby pointed their wands towards his body and though Hermione heard no incantation, a sudden spring of bright orange and red flames lit up the morning now just starting to show signs of dawn. Hermione heard Harry's breath hitch next to her and she found that her own was ragged. Ron moved behind her and threaded an arm about her shoulders as tears rained down his long, straight nose.

Talk resumed around them as the flames began to lick up his body, but the nearest of the crowd stayed quiet. After a moment, the fire snaked across his chest and caught the wood of his wand. With a small popping hiss, a silvery figure, just barely visible, darted from the end. Ron's arm tightened its grip on her and a gasp rocketed out of Hermione's chest as she clamped her fingers down on Harry's forearm. The word "Mum?" escaped Harry's lips in a whisper. The silver doe leaped off the table and gamboled towards the forest. Hermione scanned the area frantically, but nobody save Harry, Ron and she seemed to have noticed. They all watched desperately, hearts beating nearly audibly, as the faint image of a hooked beak, then the sharp steely eyes, then the sleek head, wings and body of a peregrine falcon rose from Snape's chest. Its pallid silver outline was all that distinguished it from the night around it, and after one quick glance towards where they stood, it soared into the trees after where the doe had gone.

A lump crowded Hermione's throat; she managed to speak in a husky whisper. "I think she's led him home, Harry."

He closed his eyes and nodded slowly. The sharp cry of a falcon cut the still air, fading into the distance as black marble encased its slumbering occupant.

"Godspeed," Harry said.

Hermione nodded and wiped a tear or two from her eyes. "Safe flight home," she said to the retreating bird.

~~ Fin ~~

A/N First of all, now that voting is over and I'm at liberty to say so, thank you SO much to all of you who voted for this fic. I've never won anything for my writing before and my writing is a very important part of me. So thank you from the bottom of my heart for supporting my work.

And now... the text-based a/n:

I know that no references have been made in canon as to what kind of animal Snape might occupy should he ever have an Animagus form and much conjecture has been made in fandom. After lots of thought, I could come up with nothing so like him as a falcon. The peregrine falcon not only has a hooked beak (*snickers* I couldn't resist), but is also the fastest moving creature on Earth, can kill on the wing, and was the facial form of the Egyptian god Horus, who was a hunter's god, as well as a war god and sky god. It just seemed fitting to me. Obviously, the image of the falcon rising from the fire and leaving the body is not only an elusion to the final freedom of his soul, but a parallel to the phoenix that rose from Dumbledore on his funeral pyre. Oh, and the rough translations of those charms Hermione used are as follows:

Ablutium To wash clean.

Detineo Contagium Detineo: To hold off, hold back, to detain. *Contagium*: infection, contagion, infectious disease.

Arceo to shut up, to enclose, to seal.

And lastly, "*Exanimus Virtutis*" (the title of this piece) means "The Virtuous/Honorable Dead." Thanks for reading, I hope you enjoyed.