

# Now You See Them

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Response to the "Portrait" challenge. An accident has strange consequences for the headmaster's portrait. A drabble series.

## One

*Chapter 1 of 1*

Response to the "Portrait" challenge. An accident has strange consequences for the headmaster's portrait. A drabble series.

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Against the background of noise from the battle, the quiet aftermath, and the beginning of the celebrations, the portraits waited.

Some time before, a simple, dark frame had materialised above the fireplace. As hours passed, the bare canvas began to acquire colour – sombre tones that shrouded the indistinct form coalescing there.

Dumbledore sat forward suddenly.

"Phineas – you're closer. What do you see?"

The figure seemed to be struggling with something. This was unprecedented. Portraits usually slept for weeks before moving.

Faint sounds could be heard. Dilys raised her ear trumpet.

"He's saying, 'Let go, you silly little girl!'" she reported.

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Hermione Granger peered white-faced out of the portrait, still clinging to her irate professor's arm.

"It's supposed to be the kiss of life," she whispered.

Snape fastidiously wiped his lips.

"Not when your victim is already full to the brim with venom, you idiot," he snarled. "You couldn't just let me die there peacefully, could you? No – you always have to indulge in *heroics*."

"Oh, shut your face," said Hermione tiredly.

"Let go of me!"

"No."

"Why on earth not, Miss Granger? Neither of us enjoys it."

"I'm afraid of being lost."

He stopped trying to shake her fingers loose.

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"Who painted this thing?" She glared at the gloomy vaulting and grimy stone around them.

"I did," he muttered sulkily.

"I might have known."

"What do you mean by that piece of impertinence?"

"Couldn't you have even *tried* to imagine some kind of comfortable place for part of your soul to exist in for the next few centuries?"

"I hardly think that is any of your business."

"It bloody well is if I'm going to be stuck in here with you."

"Not that you were invited."

"I was trying to save you...!"

Phineas covered his ears as the bickering continued.

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"I'm tired. I didn't know portraits could get tired."

"Every cloud.... Perhaps you have finally run out of the energy that fuels your incessant chatter."

She threw him a sour glance.

"Isn't there *anything* to sit on?"

"The floor, Miss Granger."

"You really did have it in for yourself, didn't you?"

"As did everyone else – so at least in that I am not alone. Are you going to sit down or not?"

Hermione looked dubiously at the freezing flagstones.

"Can portraits get piles?" she mused.

He sighed and sat down, spreading out his voluminous woollen robe for her to share.

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They were leaning back-to-back, supporting each other. Hermione's head was tilted sleepily against his shoulder. Her hair tickled his nose as he turned to speak to her.

"Why did you come back for me?"

"I'm surprised you want to know. It was foolish and rash. That's all."

"And here we are, stuck together forever in an empty room. There is nothing else to do but talk, so you might as well tell me."

"What happened to 'Shut up, Miss Granger'?"

Snape growled and hunched his shoulder to make her uncomfortable. She sighed.

"Because I couldn't bear to see you left alone."

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"I win!" crowed Hermione.

"This is a childish game."

"I'm not the one who painted myself an empty dungeon."

"Just having you here makes it purgatory enough, without forcing me to entertain you as well."

"You're just bitter because you're losing."

"I am bitter because that's what life has made me, Miss Granger."

"Well, you're dead now, so you can stop being bitter, can't you?"

"Hmph. Best of thirteen?"

"Okay."

"Blast you – how do you keep doing that?"

"I'm psychic."

"Not according to Trelawney."

"Thppppffth!"

"Best of fifteen?"

"Ha! I win again. You always smirk just before doing 'scissors!'"

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Dilys rushed into her painting, cannoning into the frame on the side nearest Dumbledore. She whispered urgently to the old man, who turned in a swirl of purple robes and called out, "Severus, wake up!"

Snape remained motionless. Hermione was asleep, her head pillowed in his lap. Night had fallen outside the castle, but the starlight filtering through the windows caught a chilly glitter in the black eyes.

"What do you want?" he hissed.

"Madam Pomfrey thinks she may be able to save the girl. You, too, Severus – you're both still a little blurry, so there may still be hope."

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Hermione's hands trembled violently in his as she began to slip out of focus and fade.

"What's happening?" she cried out.

"I believe you are being cured, Miss Granger."

His voice was expressionless, but his hands held hers just as tightly.

"But what about you?"

"I am dead, you foolish girl." For the first time, there was a hint of regret about the fact.

"Oh, no you're not!" she panted, gripping hard and pulling for all she was worth.

Once again, there was no precedent for what happened, but the other portraits all cheered when even the frame finally disappeared.

**FIN**

14/03/2008