Haunted Hope

by Esarathon

Summary

Harry's Halloween traditions are changed by a helpful ghost which changes his world in more ways than one.

Notes

Prompt:

Harry has had some bad Halloween experiences and so the Fat Friar wants to help him out. After Harry has come to Nick's Deathday Party, the Fat Friar thinks Harry would enjoy coming to the Halloween ceremony he hosts in Hogwarts's chapel every year. When Harry attends, he discovers that a lot more about himself than his true feelings than he first expected.

This piece was written for Harmony & Co’s Halloween Competition, Double Double Toil and Trouble. All canon characters, plots, dialogue, and situations from the Harry Potter series belongs to JK Rowling. I am not profiting from this work.
As Harry walked along, he suddenly felt a wave of cold pass through his body in a rush, startling him from his mindless wandering. He looked up to see the Fat Friar smiling at him.

“Sorry about that,” the ghost floated gently in front of him. “You seemed very distracted and I didn’t know how to get your attention.”

“That’s, uh, ok. I didn’t mean to ignore you. Sir.”

“No need for “Sir” here, Harry,” the friar smiles. “I’m not here on school business. Well, actually I am. Taking care of students is school business. And you are a student, aren’t you?”

Harry stared blankly at the rambling ghost. “Um, yeah.”

“Exactly. And so, as you are a student, I have to make sure you are looked after. And you don’t seem very looked after at this time of year.”

“I kinda just want to alone,” Harry said as he kept walking. The phantom kept pace alongside him. “Hermione offered to come with me, but I just didn’t feel like company.”

“Precisely why I’m here.” The Fat Friar smiled at Harry. “You see, we ghosts know what it is like to want to be alone. To focus on something other than what others do. An obsession in some cases, a defining purpose in others. A shadow on someone’s soul, perhaps. I’m here to help you with what you are dealing with.”

“How?” Harry watched the jovial ghost floating beside him, not just a little suspicious.

“Follow me and I’ll show you,” the ghost said, floating ahead of Harry.

Harry quickly weighed his options, follow the ghost on what was sure to be another Halloween adventure or remain alone. ‘It’s a Hufflepuff ghost, what could happen?’ he eventually decided and quickly stepped to catch up with the friar.

They walked and floated along the hall until the friar stopped at a painting.

“Push the mime’s nose.” The friar floated in front of the painting where a most absurdly coloured mime was standing still, holding up an imaginary wall. Harry stood next to the friar and reached to the painting. His finger seemed to enter a pool of liquid where the mine’s nose was and the painting swung away from him. The friar immediately floated into the dark entry way and Harry quickly followed after him.

“Lumos,” Harry whispered, casting some light on the steps in front of him. Down and around the steps wound, falling into the darkness until they reached a long passage. The friar was floating along, only looking straight ahead and Harry quickly caught up. "So, where are we now?"

"Under the south wing," the friar whispered. "This part was the original castle, long before your time or Dumbledore's. It's been added onto extensively over the years and now the older passages are just for us older folk. Or the more adventurous of you young people. I'm sure you know of a couple of Gryffindors who frequent these passages."

"Fred and George?"
The friar turned and smiled at him, now floating sideways down the passage. "Exactly. However, they haven't found much fascination with what I'm going to show you."

"Why not?"

"You'll see soon."

They kept on walking down the passage which was gradually becoming lighter. Specks of dust hung in the air, lit up from the beams of light falling through the thin, slit-like windows up above their heads. All Harry could hear were the dull echoes from his footsteps. They rounded a corner and were faced with an old wooden door. Harry stopped at the doorstep but the friar just floated straight on through. Harry reached up and twisted the handle, pushing the heavy door in front of him. It swung open and Harry stepped into a small but brightly lit room. Black candles were on every flat surface possible, only leaving a small path through to the door opposite. The walls were plain stone and undecorated aside from the candles. However, there was a strange feeling about the place and Harry wasn't wanting to stay in the room by himself for long. Harry carefully stepped through them all and opened the next door.

Harry entered into another brightly lit room and stopped in shock. He had stepped into what seemed to be a chapel, also covered in black candles, but filled with ghosts. Every ghost he had seen at Hogwarts was there and so many more. He stepped forward slowly, feeling waves on cold as ghosts went through him. The statues on the wall were carved of strange creatures and intimidating figures, nothing like the churches he had seen previously. He was walking closer to a dragon statue when a gong rang. All the ghosts quickly sorted themselves into the seating available and the rest pushed themselves up against the wall like a veil.

"Psst, Harry!"

Harry turned and saw Nearly-Headless Nick waving at him. The ghosts gestured into the pew that he was seated at and Harry hurried over and slipped into the gap next to the Gryffindor ghost.

"Welcome, spirits and mortal!" The Fat Fiar called out from the front of the hall. "I am so happy to see you all hear on this most exciting day of the year for us. The day we feel the most alive."

"I hope you enjoy this, Harry," Nick whispered next to him. "I told the friar how much you had enjoyed coming to my party last year and so he decided to bring you along to this."

"Er, thanks!" Harry said, giving the ghost a wide, slightly forced smile. "Do you mind telling me what's happening? Who are all these ghosts?"

"This is everyone who has died and lives as a ghost in the British Isles." Nick's head bobbed around oddly as he spoke. "We all gather here and for the day as our chance to celebrate feeling more alive as well as feeling close to those who have passed on."

"Passed on?"

"Listen."

"And now, as we all feel the magic of life flowing in our spirits, let us celebrate the lives of those who have passed before us."

All the ghosts formed a line and started filing slowly through a door to the friar's left. Harry followed Nick as he joined the line and they slowly stepped to the front of the chapel. The ghosts who had passed through the door on the friar's left were now returning through the door on the friar's right and returning to their seats. The friar smiled at Harry and nodded towards the door that
all the ghosts were passing through. Harry opened the door as Nick slid through it and stepped into a darker room. Nick was floating passed more black candles which were burning with a dark flame. He stopped by an unlit candle and waited for Harry to join him.

"Now, Harry, for you this is different," the ghost said. "Use your wand and light the candle here. As you do, concentrate on those who have passed before you and then those who you care about most, both alive and dead. What happens next, just let it happen and then come back around through the next door into the chapel when you're done."

Nick floated away and Harry stood by the unlit candle, ghosts floating through and above him. He pulled out his wand and lit the candle with a spell, imagining his parents as best as he could, remembering them standing by him in the mirror of Erised. A warmth flowed through Harry as he stared at the candle's flame. He was suddenly overwhelmed by feelings of love and pride and tears flowed from his eyes.

"Mum? Dad?" he whispered softly. The feelings intensified and he dropped to his knees, sobbing uncontrollably. "I miss you so much!"

He stayed there, heart overflowing with emotion and the feeling of his parents being with him flowed over and through him. After staying there so still for a while, he remembered to think of those that he cared for. He thought of Hagrid, the bushy-bearded giant, and felt feelings of warmth and pride. He thought of Hermione and felt overwhelming affection. He thought of Ron and felt the bond of friendship and admiration. He thought of the Weasleys and felt pity and affection.

Harry stood up slowly, overwhelmed by emotion, and followed the path around the corner and opened the door back into the chapel. The friar was standing at the front of an empty room and turned to face Harry.

"It's a bit of a shock, isn't it?" The friar asked gently. Harry nodded, wiping his eyes with his sleeves.

"That's perfectly normal and to be expected after having people so close to you pass. Now, come with me as you will still be expected at the feast."

"But that's ages away," Harry said as the friar floated down the aisle towards the entryway. The ghost laughed gently.

"Time does strange things when you aren't focusing on it. It's getting close to dinner time now and I expect you'll be hungry."

Harry's stomach growled as he focused on it and he quickly followed after the ghost. "But can I come back?"

"Whenever you want. However, the Halloween service only happens once a year and the rest of the year it is just a chapel dedicated to magic. Still fascinating, in my opinion, but less of an experience for you. I only ask that you don't tell everyone about it as only those invited by a spirit may join the Halloween ceremony."

"I won't. But I want to come back."

"You're welcome any time, especially at Halloween."

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"Harry, where are we?"

"Shh... You must be quiet."

"Why?" came a hushed reply.

"Because it's a holy space," Harry said to the brown-haired witch next to him. "You don't yell in a cathedral, do you?"

"What do you mean 'holy'? Are we entering a crypt?" Hermione asked, attaching herself to his arm. "Because I'm not in a mood to play with inferi or whatever else you've got planned in that devious head of yours. Don't act innocent, I can see the smile in your eyes. You're planning something, that much I know! I thought we were done with adventures for a bit. You know, with Voldemort now gone, I thought you might want to leave the wizarding world for a bit. Not hang out at Hogwarts in a creepy dungeon crypt."

Harry smirked at her, earning a glare in response. "Don't worry, I'll protect you. I'm a hero, didn't you hear?"

"This better be good, that's all I'm saying. I want to go have a cup of hot chocolate and sleep for a week."

"You've been doing that for the last couple of weeks already. This is important, anyway. You'll want to come back here again, I promise."

Hermione gazed at him suspiciously as they walked down the passage, light flickering across their faces whenever they passed by a slit-like window. Harry led her along quietly as she looked around, probably trying to figure where in the castle they were exactly. They arrived at a wooden door and Harry led her through into a tiny room. Bare walls with small ledges surrounded them and Harry quickly stepped to the door opposite and led Hermione into the chapel. He watched the look on her face change to awe as she gazed at the statues around them, lit up by the sunlight spilling through windows high above them.

"Where are we? What is this place? Is that Merlin and the dragons from the stories about him? Who is the one with-?"

"Questions after," Harry cut in. "I told you that you'd want to come back. This is a chapel dedicated to magic and it is the closest place to being with my parents and the spirit world is closer here. At least, on Halloween it definitely is but I didn't want to wait that long and Halloween never seemed appropriate."

"Your parents? Hang on, wait that long for what?"

"Hermione, we've been together over two years now and, because, as you already know, I didn't want to focus on anything but living past Voldemort, I never spoke of anything in the future." Hermione's face went from suspicious to sparkling eyes and a wide smile as he spoke. "Now, that's all over and I feel free to live a normal life. At least, as normal as I can. In that life, I want to be with you, facing whatever adventures as we've always done - side by side. That's why I'm here today, to ask you to marry me in the presence of my parents."

Harry stepped back from Hermione and drew a sparkling ring from his pocket. He dropped to his knee and took her hand. "Hermione Granger, will you marry me and spend your life with me?"
Hermione nodded enthusiastically, tears forming in her eyes as she let Harry put the ring on her finger. Harry stood and pulled her into a hug, holding her close as she cried into his shoulder.

"Yes," she managed to eventually get out. She stepped back from him and wiped her eyes. "Yes, of course, Harry!"

Harry stepped closer and gently kissed her on the lips before drawing her into a hug once more. As he did so, he felt a warm feeling of pride and love wash over him and he knew he wasn't alone with Hermione in the room.

"You know," Harry said as he turned Hermione to face the room. He stepped behind her and pulled her back up to him. "It was coming here that made me ask you out. It felt appropriate to ask you to marry me here too."

"Really? Why did coming here make you ask me out?"

"Bit of a long story, but I had to think of those I cared about and felt the love they had for me in return. It made me realise what I felt for you."

"You'd better tell me the long story sometime then," Hermione said, smiling at him, "because I'm very glad you did ask me out."

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