

## Greater Love

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It was a cold, gray February day as the small group walked solemnly up the slight hill to a copse of trees where several stones were scattered about. At the end of the procession a woman with long flaming red hair carried a little girl whose hair of a similar hue poked from beneath her small hat. "*At least it isn't snowing this year,*" the woman thought.

Before her walked a handful of boys and girls of various ages, some with red hair like hers, some with dark black hair. The oldest girl carried an infant, two years younger than the toddler in her arms. At the front of the little group was a man whose shoulders were slumped sadly, and whose prematurely gray hair had once been as black as that of the children behind him. Up until *that* day.

As they approached the marker stones, they moved toward one set a little apart from the others, a simple white slab of marble. The children and the woman paused, waiting a respectful distance away as the man approached the marble monument and kneeled down, then sat back on his ankles.

"Mummy? What are we doing here?" asked the inquisitive little girl. The woman reached up to brush a loose strand of hair out of her eyes and answered patiently, as she had so many other times in years past.

"We come here every year on this day, sweetheart, to remember the woman who is buried in this grave. She was a very good friend of ours."

"Oh." There was a pause. "Did we come here last year?"

"Yes, sweetie, but you're too young to remember it."

"Who is Daddy talking to?"

"He's talking to her, or at least to the memory of her. He's telling her some of the things that happened since last year."

"Can she hear him?"

"Yes, sweetheart, I think she can."

"Is he going to tell her about my new toof?"

"I think he probably will."

"Why is Daddy crying?"

"Because he misses her so much."

"You're crying too, Mummy."

"I miss her too, sweetie. Not as much as Daddy does, but a lot. She was my best friend."

"Did Daddy love her?"

"Yes. He loved her very much. She was his very best friend."

"Did she love Daddy?"

"Yes she did. She loved your Daddy very, very much."

"Did she love Daddy as much as you do?"

"Yes. But in a different kind of way."

"Oh."

Before the little girl could ask another question, the gray haired man reached out and placed a single red rose in front of the white marble stone, then slowly rose to his feet and turned to walk back to where the woman was standing. When he reached them he gave a sad smile, and reached up and gently stroked the cheek of the little girl, then kept walking past.

In front of them, each child in turn walked up to the tombstone, crouched down, and laid their own red rose in front of it, then turned and walked back

to join their father. Finally, only the woman and the girl in her arms remained. She approached and knelt down like her husband had. Now they were close enough to read the inscription on the stone.

**Hermione Jane Granger**

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**Greater love has no man than this,  
that he lay down his life for his friends .**

The woman handed a red rose to her daughter, who reached out and dropped it onto the ground with the others. "Here, Daddy's friend."

Then the woman laid her own rose on the pile, twin tears streaking her cheeks.

"Hello Hermione. I'm still taking care of him, like I promised you. We miss you."

The woman slowly rose to her feet and turned to rejoin the others. When she reached her husband he reached out and took the little girl from her arms and put her on his hip, then put his other arm across the woman's shoulders and pulled her to himself. She responded by putting her arm around his waist, and they followed their children back down the hill. Until next year.

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