

Yuletide for the Mourner

by Roman

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The lightning bolt pounding the grass just outside jerked Ginny awake. Her sleep became lighter and lighter with every passing night. An earth-shattering thunder followed and lightning again crossed the sky, drawing her eyes to Hermione, who slept peacefully just a few feet away, a book propped open against her pillow.

Ginny stretched half-heartedly. She couldn't have slept more than an hour, as the candle beside Hermione still burned. It was beyond Ginny how anyone could still sleep so soundly these days. A short time ago, she would have curled comfortably under the warm bedclothes, drifting back into sleep to the sound of the raging storm. But now...

It didn't quite occur to her that although she had only just been introduced to the real, palpable horror of Lord Voldemort's return, Hermione had been dealing with it from up close for years. Sirius' death was a sad casualty, the hostile press a surmountable obstacle, and their own endangered lives... just the price to pay for befriending the boy whose rather scrawny shoulders carried their fates.

Another thunder shook the window in its hinges. Ginny yawned out of habit, completely awake now. Perhaps some warm milk would help her go back to sleep. Perhaps even a detour to her parents' room wouldn't be too out of place. Whereas food in their bedrooms was still absolutely forbidden, never as now had the Weasleys made so many allowances for their children's nightly fears, and Ginny (as little prone to hypothetical nightmares as the twins, and even less interested in frantic displays of vulnerability) suddenly found herself warming up to the idea of the reassuring hug that awaited her just around the corner.

She sat up, mechanically reaching for her wand, as though Mad-Eye stood just beside her, warning about 'Constant vigilance...!', and took a few carefully silent steps towards Hermione. Having tenderly removed Hermione's hand from between the pages of the book and replaced it on the bedside table, Ginny reached for the nearest woollen coat and blew out the candle.

The floorboards creaked as she left on her tiptoes, her lit wand guiding her along her darkened path. When she reached the floor below and the door at the very end of the corridor came into view, she stopped in her tracks, and the floor moaned again. Fortunately, the carpets that Mrs Weasley had laid out in a valiant attempt to give Grimmauld Place a slightly more welcoming air absorbed the sound. That was Ron and Harry's room. The door was slightly ajar and, surely, just having a peek wouldn't hurt, would it?, Ginny thought, approaching the entrancing space between door and wall more carefully still. As she went, she thought that she could hear a faint murmur, probably issuing from the slumbering portraits. It didn't bother her greatly. She was almost by the door--she wouldn't even have to enter the room--she could just have a look...

There was Ron, sleeping just as peaceably, if much more noisily, than Hermione. Beyond him, there was Harry's bed... and it was empty. Ginny took one step into the room, just the one, squinting to make sure the messy blankets weren't hiding Harry from her view. Another bolt of lightning lent her a hand. The bed was empty. She retreated soundlessly. So much the better. Harry would be in the kitchen, where she was headed, and a bit of company on one such night would be so very welcome.

Harry's more than any other. She smiled inwardly, leaving the door as she had found it and stepping onto the next flight of stairs.

The murmurs hadn't faded. If anything, they were louder. Ginny frowned, extinguishing the flickering light of her wand at once. The portraits, as far as she could see, were all asleep, and they were all acquaintances of the Order; none of them would be disrupting the guests' sleep. There was Mrs Black, but she never would have settled for a disgruntled grumble if she were awake. A grumble, in fact, which seemed to be turning into a hushed argument. And was that Harry's voice? Ginny had a quick look over her shoulder. The remaining doors in the corridor were firmly closed, and she couldn't picture any of her relatives choosing to have a row in the dead of night. No members of the Order were staying for the night. Was there anybody else there?

She closed her eyes, trying to make out some of what was being said. Impossible. The voices, still hushed, echoed indistinguishably in the hollow of the stairs between them and Ginny. Quietly, but as fast as she could, Ginny retreated into Ron's room and felt about for Harry's belongings, only daring to whisper *'Lumos,'* when no lightning shone from outside to help her. Harry's wand flickered into her sight, lying peacefully on his bedside table. His invisibility cloak sat neatly atop a chair, limp and harmless in its rest, and she picked it up instantly, knowing that Harry wouldn't mind her wearing it on one such occasion. None of the defences they had set up had denounced an intruder. But there was one, and Harry had no wand. A bit of precaution wouldn't be out of place, she thought, once again stepping into the corridor and onto the flight of stairs. The voices became clearer as she approached, descending step by step, virtually in slow motion. One of them was definitely Harry's. The other was too hushed, but she knew she recognised it. Kingsley? What would he be doing there? Lupin? The voice was too deep to be--Snape? Was that *Snape's* voice?

It was. As she stepped onto the final turn of stairs, she could see their profiles, standing tensely mid-corridor. They weren't terribly far from her. She extinguished her wand again, unsure if Harry's cloak worked on the light as well as it did on her, and she waited. Snape never stayed for the night. What was he doing there?

Rowing with Harry, apparently. He gestured more fiercely than Ginny had seen him do in almost five years of schooling, but Harry, scowling, appeared to be unimpressed. Harry had not been keen on Snape's company of late, Ginny recalled with some concern. He only bothered to mention him when they talked about Sirius, and never in a pleasant way. And Snape's wand was drawn; its tiny flicker of light danced eerily across their angry faces.

Just in case, Ginny held her wand at the ready. She trusted Dumbledore's judgement entirely, and if he thought that Snape deserved to be part of the Order, she was sure that he wouldn't just attack Harry in their own Headquarters. Their expressions boded nothing good, however, and *Harry had no wand*, her sinking heart repeated incessantly.

Yet, he had a fair amount of recklessness. He had grasped Snape's arm just as he seemed to be turning away and, in the ensuing barrage of grumbled recriminations, their faces were so close that, for an absurd moment, it occurred to Ginny that they might be about to kiss. The illusion lasted only a second, the time it took for Snape to squeeze his arm out of Harry's grip with a spitted insult that made Mrs Black stir behind her curtains. They both quieted down at once, but Harry again reached for Snape's robes, holding them more securely this time as he took another step to whisper in Snape's face something that Ginny couldn't hear.

In response, Snape shoved him so briskly that he reeled, rather than stepped, backwards. The lit, aimed wand didn't seem to intimidate Harry one bit, for he now reached for Snape's hand. He had turned his back to Ginny, and from that angle, she could only see that Snape was unsuccessfully trying to twist his hand out of Harry's grasp. The look on his face seemed to be going from tense to pained. Harry, were it not for the dancing shadow of his right arm firmly holding Snape's, might as well have become a statue.

Snape had a glance in the general direction of their joined hands, his lip curled in distaste, and he forcefully tried to wrench his arm away, but Harry's hand didn't release his fingers. Harry took a step forward and, this time, Ginny could see that he had raised Snape's hand to his face, touching his cheek to the fingertips. The hand curled into a fist and Harry held it closer still, dragging his lips across the fingers and drawing a knuckle in with an audible sucking sound.

Ginny's eyes widened. The expression in Harry's face as his cheeks hollowed in the dim light, his fingers gripping Snape's so forcefully that they vibrated, didn't leave much room for interpretation. Harry chanced a step forward, and another, his eyes set on Snape's face and the moist sucking more audible. The knuckle slipped out of Harry's lips and glistened against them for an instant, before being drawn in again. Snape's eyes blazed--or was that his wand?

Gulping somewhat dryly, Ginny shook her head almost imperceptibly, and then she had to repress a shocked gasp because Snape had finally jerked his hand away from Harry's own, and his wand had jostled him across the corridor and onto the sideboard so noisily that Mrs Black emerged from the depths of her frame, screaming her undying indignation at them.

Ginny's wand, in her now trembling grasp, was pointed at the portrait before she frenziedly recalled that she was invisible. Turning her attention back to the corridor, she had only skipped half a second of the events, and a shiver actually ran down her spine at Snape's expression when he stepped, not towards the door, but towards Harry, who had straightened himself out of the bric-a-bracs Mrs Weasley had set on the sideboard, jostling a fair amount of them onto the floor.

Snape was *on* him in the blink of an eye, pulling him back against his body with his wand arm across Harry's throat and the other slithering down the front of Harry's pyjama bottoms at the speed of light to cup him roughly, drawing a ragged groan from Harry and renewed screaming from Mrs Black.

Ginny wasn't the least bit concerned about the maddened woman in the portrait now, though. Her screaming would be very dim by the time it went through walls and doors to reach the ears of those who slept, and no-one would bother come downstairs to shut the curtains around her. Kreacher, she knew, had been forbidden from leaving his bed precisely in case he decided to make use of night time in an unbecoming manner. No, she was concerned about Snape's feral gaze, and the fact that Harry was doing nothing to remove Snape's hand from inside his clothing. Mesmerised, in spite of herself, by the movement that she knew was taking place under the creasing, undulating fabric, she could only spare a fleeting look at the arm still draped around Harry's neck.

Anyone who tried to do that to her would have been hexed on the spot. Yet Harry didn't seem to find it out of order. He had actually twisted himself into an impossibly uncomfortable position, his head drooping back against Snape's shoulder, courtesy of the wand, and his torso arching forward, his hips responding to Snape's hand with not a hint of prudery.

Ginny's grip on the wand tightened. There were only two things that she could dignifiedly do. Either show herself and wake up the entire house to have Snape thrown out, or climb silently upstairs, leaving them to their patently private moment. Yet she did nothing. She stood frozen at the bottom of the stairs, watching the scene unfold just feet from her. She doubted she could have even found her voice, had she chosen to reveal herself.

Mrs Black shrieked on, but Ginny was barely aware of her. She couldn't draw her attention away from the hint of desperation she detected in Harry's voice, the utterly unsettling glint in Snape's eyes, which even the combination of his drawn brow and darkness couldn't disguise. Surely this wasn't a consensual... *tryst?*, Ginny thought, a rather acrid feeling beginning to slither up inside her. *Surely* there was a reason Harry was allowing--

Snape's voice dripped into Harry's ear, and Ginny really wanted to block out *that* sound, but Harry's own, loud response pummelled it into her head. He reached down, weaving his fingers around Snape's through the fabric of the pyjama, cupping himself through Snape's fingers, his torso rhythmically sliding against and snapping away from Snape's chest with a fluidity that even *Imperio* wouldn't have mustered.

A throaty sound left his lips, sending Mrs Black into an even louder fit, and Snape jerked him forward, making Harry stumble towards the door to the dining room. Ginny still stood at the bottom of the stairs, her muscles aching with tension and her mind having trouble acknowledging what she had just seen. The unprintable sounds that trailed along the corridor towards her brought her back to reality. They echoed, they were heart rendering, pained.

Holding Harry's wand at the ready merely out of habit now, Ginny tiptoed along the hallway, ignoring the portrait that still went on about blood traitors sullyng her ancestors' house, until she reached that same door. Her body fought her principles in its curiosity, and her neck craned onto the doorway almost in rebellion against her reluctant mind.

The dining room was a lighter place, though not by much, due to all the glassy surfaces that now rested there. There was Hermione's sparkly Muggle gift wrap, the bottles that Kingsley had offered them for Christmas Eve, the impeccably glinting cutlery that Mrs Weasley had laid out on the table, all flashing under the lightning that seeped in

through the large windows.

And there *they* were. Just there, just beyond the door, as though their energies had only allowed them to go that far before collapsing. If she weren't so near them, Ginny would have had trouble telling where they ended and the darkened floor began.

Harry was almost completely blocked from her sight. There was one of his hands, gripping the very bottom of one of the table legs, white from the effort--his other hand, she couldn't see, but she guessed it was the reason why the chair on his left was shaking against the table. And there was his right leg, stretched out from under Snape's cloak, little more than a flash of light fabric against the carpeted floorboards.

Snape's cloak fanned out over them, turning them into an almost indistinguishable dark mass, undulating on the floor. The very soles of Snape's shoes were visible, pushing harshly against the carpet to leverage the rest, the unmistakable rest of his movements.

Ginny had to clamp a hand over her mouth to mask the uncontrollable gasp that erupted. But they wouldn't have heard her, anyway. Harry was *vocal*. Surprisingly, so was Snape. And the fact that she hadn't known where Snape's hands had been only truly disturbed Ginny once one of them came into sight. Squinting for a clearer view, though she couldn't for the life of her understand why, she glimpsed fingers spidering out of the darkness, ashen and tense. As Snape reached up and grasped the edge of the table for leverage, Harry actually cried out. Again and again.

And again.

As time wore on, Harry quieted down somewhat. His rasped response subsided into wheezy breathing as Snape's legs slid entirely under the cloak--ensconcing Harry in his grasp, Ginny guessed, further cocooning Harry underneath him. At some point, Snape's hand slipped from the table and, coincidentally, on that very moment Harry's response developed into punctual, muffled 'hmphs', with which he met every one of the tiny, urgent thrusts that Ginny's mind eye could see being poured into him as clearly as if they had been naked before her eyes.

Curiously, as Harry grew more silent, Snape grew louder. Ginny couldn't quite block out the harsh panting that accompanied the frantic movements under the cloak, the occasional grunt that escaped. It sounded ominous, and it was tattooed into her ears because it reminded her time and again that they weren't kissing, they weren't whispering romantic nonsense, they were adding nothing that distracted her from the sheer, animalistic edge of what they were doing. There was nothing else.

And it was consensual.

Harry's head emerged every now and then, just beyond Snape's shoulder, reacting to a sharper thrust, a whiplashed move that was somehow unexpected. Ginny wondered if it had even crossed Snape's mind that Harry's head was an inch away from slamming full force into the table leg. Probably not. As the sharpness of the movements drew them forward, crinkling the heavy carpet under their bodies, Snape's own head was on its way to meet the underside of the table, and he didn't seem to care.

A guttural, hollowed groan snapped her out of her thoughts. Harry's hand left the table leg, pressing against the carpet around it. His leg tightened against the floor, sweaty fabric clinging to it as his body jerked under the cloak. The chair that he gripped fell, and his other hand came into view when Snape grasped it, pounding against him with a sound that Ginny could hear even through the several layers of cloth shielding it from her and that she really, really wished she could *unhear*. She wished they would at least kiss.

Another set of thrusts, another barely disguised grunt... Ginny had to close her eyes against the sight of Harry's unresisting limbs. His leg slid forward and backward in sync with the thrusting, and his fingers just let themselves be gripped, and his head was surely pillowing Snape's, and she couldn't see that, though for an unknown reason, she couldn't muster the strength to walk away from the scene. In the corridor, Mrs Black still ranted, and for lack of other diversions, this time Ginny focused on her words about *'freaks of nature, filthy half bloods'*, fiercely shutting out the sounds of the living.

It was *interminable*. Her eyes flew open when Snape passed by her in a flurry of dark fabric, so swiftly that it rumbled up her sheltering cloak. Thankfully, he didn't notice anything amiss, and she paid him no further attention, her eyes trained on the body that still lay on the floor, so close to her that she could study every detail of his expression, even in the darkness that followed the quieting storm.

Harry's eyes were directed at her, but she knew that he wasn't even remotely thinking about the chance that she might be there. She just happened to be standing on Snape's exit path. Ginny gulped at the sight, Harry's back still heaving, his hands still aquiver with tension, his face and neck still flushed, his backside still exposed, reddened by the friction, half-shadowed by the table. He made no move to cover himself - in fact, he barely moved an inch. Only his head had tilted to gaze at the door, resentment beginning to well up in his eyes with every distant footstep towards the front door.

Harry's right arm was extended, his fingers curling up, not terribly distant from her feet. They seemed to invite her in, and for a moment that she would revisit in a doubt-ridden future, Ginny actually took a step towards it, her own cold hand snaking away from her, to the very edge of the cloak, as she crouched...

She would later tell herself, repeatedly, that the indignity of the whole affair had stopped her at the very last second, that she simply couldn't have shown herself to Harry then, not when he was so prostrate, so defenceless--that she couldn't drill in the *indignity* of it all.

Wrapping the cloak more securely around her, Ginny crept away from the scene, mentally going through the ways in which she would later try to make Harry feel better.

Later, he would be silently hugged. There would be a loving note on his bedside table, a silent invitation for a talk, or a clandestine attack on her parents' best bottles (would Harry want to deal with this in such a way? she wondered), or... something. Anything. Anything that Harry wanted, she would give him.

But on that moment, and on that moment alone, she would admit to herself that her best efforts alone wouldn't give Harry what he wanted. It had already left the house.

Until now, she had thought that Sirius' death was all that Harry begrudged Snape.

THE END