

# The Witches of Gilford: Yule Edition

*by pyjamapants*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Extra special thanks to kittylefish and Persevero for their quick turn-around (and at Yule time, nonetheless)!

This fluffy little Christmas snapshot falls chronologically between chapters 12 and the Epilogue of *The Witches of Gilford*. Fear not, there are no spoilers here for chapters 9, 10, or Epilogue, well unless you feared that our beloved duo would be left to shoulder their UST for eternity.

Enjoy! Happy holidays!

Warning: Contains no lemons or citrus related by-product. May have been processed on machinery that also processes lemons. Copious amounts of sugar included. Brushing and flossing recommended.

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"What about a copy of *The Witches of Gilford* complete with Compulsion Charms?" Severus asked as he fumbled with the Muggle Christmas lights. How could one continuous piece of wire and bulbs be so bloody tangled?

"No," Hermione replied.

He stifled a groan as she enlarged even more boxes of decorations. This would surely take hours. How had he not managed to wiggle his way out of this? Gods knew, he was suffering enough this holiday season. Snape pondered again the impossibility that he had a girlfriend. A girlfriend he'd been seeing long enough that he knew all of her knickers well enough to have a favourite pair. Several favourite pairs, in fact. Pairs of knickers he wouldn't see if he didn't promptly remove his head from his arse and help decorate. Why couldn't they skip to the part where Hermione rewarded him generously for promising to spend Christmas and Boxing Day with her parents and the Weasleys. Fuck. He was never going to get a moment's peace this entire break.

"Well, then *The Witches of Gilford Cookbook*? She'll eventually have to try the recipe for Cornish pasties that puts everyone in the gastrointestinal ward at St Mungo's."

"No, Severus," Hermione said, her rump wiggling in the air as she bent over to examine the contents of a box.

Severus quickly averted his eyes. Shit! Had he just made the lights more tangled?

"Perhaps liqueur-filled chocolates with a bit of undetectable poison?"

"As if Molly would trust anything edible. She did raise Fred and George after all," Hermione said as she turned to face him with ornaments dangling from her fingers. "They're going to expect retaliation from you. It would be much better for you to give them something entirely innocuous but suspicious and let them fret over it."

Severus wondered how the cookbook could be eyed with suspicion. Although, perhaps it would be best not to risk angering his girlfriend's surrogate wizarding mother. Minerva, however, was another matter entirely. She would certainly be dealt with on his terms.

"Besides, much as we hated the book club itself, we do owe them," Hermione admitted, her shirt riding up to expose her midriff as she hung ornaments.

"For what?"

"Severus! For us, of course! We wouldn't be together without the book club."

"Hermione, you don't know that. We might have bumped into each other somewhere else and struck up a conversation."

"Severus, you never left Hogwarts," she said flatly.

"I left for Potions ingredients," Severus retorted haughtily. Dammit, where was the end of the blasted string of lights?

"And what, exactly, was the likelihood of us encountering one another in a field on the first new moon after the vernal equinox?" Hermione replied, smiling as she watched Severus struggle with his new nemesis.

"I went to Slug & Jiggers, too, I'll have you know. Fucking hell! Why do you insist on using Muggle lights?"

"They remind me of my childhood," she said a bit more innocently than was necessary.

"It is completely unlike you to keep them a tangled mess," Severus growled in exasperation.

Hermione couldn't help but giggle. He looked adorable, scowling like a petulant child as he sat in the middle of a tangle of lights.

His eyes narrowed. "You did this on purpose."

Hermione nodded and waved her wand. The lights hovered above his head, untangled, and settled on the tree.

"Show-off."

With a mischievous look in her eyes, Hermione said, "Oh, look. We're done decorating. Whatever shall we do with our afternoon?"

"You deserve to be tied to the bed with those bloody lights and left to contemplate how naughty you were."

Hermione squealed and ran down the hallway to her bedroom. Severus gave chase, leaving Crookshanks to sniff the tree in peace.

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Severus sighed as he scrubbed up the dishes from dinner. Hermione was running hot and cold. One moment she was playful, taunting him with sexual favours and well-placed mistletoe. Two hours later, she was moody as hell. She had snapped at him repeatedly during dinner, in a fashion which he was accustomed to delivering, not receiving.

Things had grown a bit tense between them at the end of the school term. Hermione grew incredibly cranky when she went days without seeing him. He still found it surreal that she enjoyed his company enough to grow irritable in his absence.

He was at odds for a short-term fix to the problem, but he'd been working vigorously on a long-term solution. He and Minerva had finally selected a professor to replace him the following autumn. As much as he had grown weary of teaching the little brats who sauntered into his classroom, he refused to leave them in the hands of some idiot who would spend his time pandering to the future movers and shakers of the wizarding world or to someone so addlebrained that he would destroy the school's reputation for producing the highest NEWTs scores. He shuddered again at the thought of those nincompoops from Beauxbatons gaining the lead. No, he was determined to stay on at Hogwarts until a suitable replacement had been found. Thank gods, the search had only taken eight months.

His other long-term solution involved a particular piece of jewellery to be delivered to his beloved. He'd purchased it months ago and had been waiting for the opportune moment. He'd put off asking for her hand long enough, and he was determined to ask her before he returned to school. It was just a question of when to ask. If he gave her the ring before Christmas, he would be forced to endure the questions, heckles, and threats of the entire Weasley brood. No, perhaps New Year's Eve would be more appropriate. They'd declined several invitations in favour of a quiet evening at home, sipping champagne by the fireside. Yes, New Year's Eve would do.

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Hermione sat on the sofa and stared into the fire. This was bordering on absurd. Ever since last week's Sunday brunch at the Burrow, she'd been fighting a mood so horrible it had taken her three days to figure out why she was so irritable. By then, she was so firmly entrenched in the mood it was impossible to shake, no matter how pathetic it was. It had now festered to the point where if she talked about it with Severus, she would surely cry. Damn the Weasleys and their unnatural ability to repopulate their little corner of wizarding Britain. Five members of the three-foot-and-under club already called her Auntie, and the number would shortly grow to ten. Perhaps triplets would finally make Fleur lose her perfect figure. Not bloody likely, but a girl could dream, couldn't she?

Would Severus even want children? Despite the end-of-term stresses, things were going exceptionally well, but she had no clue as to his long-term plans. Bringing up the question of children seemed a bit presumptuous. Besides, it wasn't as if she would break things off if he didn't want kids. It would make her a bit sad, but she would recover.

She fought off a sniffle. Damn hormones. She was by no means ready to have a little one running around. She and Severus had quite a bit of naughty sex to attend to first, but apparently her body was ready to begin brewing her Potions master's progeny. She hated this. She hated being hostage to any outside force, anything that made her lose control. War and grief were at the top of the list. Hormones were a very close third.

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Severus entered the sitting room to see Hermione slouched on the sofa in front of the fire. He smirked as he thought of the memories the sofa held for them. His smirk faded when he saw how utterly miserable she looked. He sat down next to her and asked, "Hermione, what's wrong? I can tell you've had something on your mind all day."

Hermione panicked. Oh, gods. She had really been hoping he wouldn't press the issue. Well, at least she would be able to get it off her mind and enjoy the holidays. Throwing subtlety to the wind, she asked, "Severus, how do you feel about having children?"

Severus had expected that Hermione was feeling guilty about bringing another man to the Weasleys' for Christmas. Shit, this was far more serious. Well, no wonder she'd been so moody. Fluctuations in both mood and magic levels were well documented within the first trimester of a witch's pregnancy. Fuck! Had his potion failed? Oh, gods, he had to tell Poppy. His mind assaulted him with visions of the entire group of seventh-year females waddling their way to the Hogwarts Express come end of spring term. Unless he paled the legion of dunderheads had their babies before term ended. Shit. Minerva would have his head. Bloody hell. How would he make it as a freelance brewer if word got out that he had fucked up something as simple as a basic Contraceptive Potion? Damnation.

Hermione had imagined a number of different reactions to her question, but silent, abject fear wasn't one of them. Severus was nervous and twitchy and looked like he was

about to jump through the Floo at a moment's notice. Ah, well, better to find out now. Honestly, it was a bit of a relief if she thought about it from the right perspective. She was more than happy to keep her nieces and nephews for the occasional night or weekend, but she was always glad to hand them back. And, while she'd briefly entertained the thought of a little girl with curly, black hair adorably presenting her father with a daisy chain rather than the ingredients he'd suggested she collect, she resigned herself to the fact that, in all likelihood, their child would have inherited the monstrous combination of her teeth, his nose, a disgusting combination of bushy and greasy hair, and a disposition so offensive no one, including its parents, would want to be around the child after he or she learned to speak.

Severus realized he'd been silent for far too long. Gods, at this point, she was probably terrified he was contemplating ways to avoid his fatherly duties. His fatherly duties. The words sent shivers straight up his spine. The very idea gave him a bit of hope for the future of the wizarding world though not because he thought so highly of his genes. Gods knew, he was a bit of a cock-up in many respects. But he'd always hoped he could have a sprog or two so the stream of idiots flowing through the doors of Hogwarts would be punctuated with a couple more intelligent minds. It nearly brought a tear to his eye, just a single tear, mind, to imagine someday showing his progeny the proper way to skin a shrivelfig. His hand fumbled a bit as he felt for the ring in his right pocket.

At last, Severus grasped Hermione's hand and spoke, "Hermione, these weren't quite the circumstances under which I envisioned asking you this, but would you do me the great honour of becoming my wife?"

Hermione's jaw dropped. Wife?

"Yes, of course! A thousand times, yes!" she exclaimed, goggling at the ring Severus had slid on her finger, before throwing herself into his arms and kissing him.

Severus returned her kiss ardently for several minutes before gently disengaging. "Hermione, I need to know. Did you skip a dose?"

"A dose?" she asked, utterly confused.

"Yes, a dose of Contraceptive Potion. Is that why you're pregnant? I'm not angry, but I'm trying to figure out if you skipped a dose or if the potion was faulty. I might need to Floo Poppy if the potion was at fault."

"Severus, I'm not pregnant," she said, watching his face crumble. *What on earth?* "You seem disappointed," she said cautiously.

"I, well, I suppose I am. Does that surprise you?"

"Well, yes, I wouldn't have expected you to be keen on the idea of becoming a father. I thought you hated children. And why weren't you more surprised by the idea?"

"Hermione," he said, grabbing her hand and fiddling with the ring upon her finger, "I've been thinking quite a bit about our future. I know you want children. No, don't argue; I've seen the way you look at any small child holding a book. I'll admit the thought was a bit shocking at first, but it's grown on me. I want to have a family with you."

Hermione burst into tears and wobbled over to straddle his lap.

Severus clutched the sobbing witch to his chest and teased her, "I can only hope those are happy tears and not tears of desperation because you'll be saddled with my spawn."

"Of course, they're happy tears, you idiot." She sat back a bit and looked at him with concern. "I don't want to have a baby for at least a couple of years."

"Of course. We have quite a bit to practice until then," he replied, reaching up to stroke her breast.

And practice they did. Several times. They were so sore the next day that they vowed to adopt a more regular schedule of practice to prevent future injury.

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New Year's Eve found Severus and Hermione curled up on the sofa. Severus stared into the fire, his sleeping witch tucked under his arm. This year had turned out quite unexpectedly. On rare nights like this, when he reflected upon what his life had become in the past year, he couldn't help but feel a giddy sense of having cheated fate. Never, in the darkest days of the war, had he suspected that something like this awaited him. Not for the first time this year, he felt something burble up inside of him that he suspected was joy or perhaps hope. For the first time, he accepted it for what it was rather than blaming the sensation on indigestion. How was it possible that he had such happiness and hope in both his present and future?

The witch snuggled next to him had played no small role in his metamorphosis. Though he would never admit it, even to Hermione, he was infinitely grateful to Minerva for that blasted book club gift. Hermione was correct. They wouldn't have renewed their acquaintance without it. In turn, he wouldn't have confronted all of his anger without it. He wouldn't have rejoined the land of the living without it.

Still, it wouldn't do to let Minerva think that her meddling had been appreciated. Severus had followed Hermione's wishes, giving Molly some innocuous bath salts imbued with a Draught of Peace the perfect thing for a grandmother intent on setting up shop as a wizarding day care centre. But Minerva was another story. George Weasley had provided him with his finest invention yet: wrapping paper which cloaked any charms or bewitchments on the package within. It was only right that Minerva receive his copy of *The Witches of Gifford*, charmed to force her to read the book in one sitting upon opening it. The parchment she had sent him lambasting the book's many faults was over three feet long.

Severus yawned and looked down at the slumbering Hermione. Nostalgic as he was, he didn't relish spending another night on that blasted sofa. He scooped her up in his arms and carried her down the hall to what had become their bedroom, thankful that she wasn't awake to hear the Weightlessness Charm he cast. He slid into bed beside her and, as he drifted off to sleep, acknowledged that for the first time in his entire miserable life, he was looking forward to the new year.