

Tidings of Comfort and Joy: Yule 2008 Edition

by StormySkize

Hermione and Severus celebrate their first Christmas as husband and wife, and Hermione's parents come for a visit. No angst here. This is unabashedly sweet and fluffy, just as a Christmas story should be. You may need to brush your teeth after reading this one!

Holly and Ivy and Green Silk Brocade

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: None of these wonderful characters are mine; I simply enjoy playing in the universe created by J. K. Rowling. No copyright infringement is intended, and no money is being made.

Author's Note: This was written for the Potter Place Yule 2008 Challenge. I choose prompt number 3:

Revisiting Friends. If you have an established story, give us a one-shot tale to complement it so we know what your characters are up to for Christmas.

As always, special thanks go to my long-suffering beta, JuJuJenn. Any mistakes, however, are mine alone.

Holly and Ivy and Green Silk Brocade

Hermione moved a silver fork a millimetre to the left, turned a crystal goblet a quarter turn to the right, and then picked a microscopic piece of lint from the creamy linen table cloth.

She stepped back two paces and studied the elegantly appointed table with a critical eye. She moved the fork back to its previous position.

She reached for one of the meticulously folded napkins, but before she could pick it up, a hand reached out and closed over hers, keeping her from completing the action.

"Leave it alone."

"I just want to make sure the folds are even."

"You've refolded them three times already. They're perfect. Everything is perfect."

"Do you think so?"

Hermione's bottom lip was caught between her teeth, and her brow was furrowed.

"Let's sit for a few minutes," Severus said as he led her to the small sofa that sat in front of the fireplace.

"Don't you have something on the stove?"

"It's fine for a bit."

He sat down and urged her down next to him. He draped his arm across her shoulder and held her tenderly.

And then he spoke in a gentle tone that his students would have sworn he was incapable of producing.

"Hermione, your parents have sat with us on the floor, eating pizza from paper plates. Do you really think they'll notice how the napkins are folded?"

"That was different," Hermione insisted. "We were renovating. No one expects linen napkins and crystal at times like that."

"But this is our first real dinner party. And it's Christmas Eve. And I can't believe my parents didn't go to France this year to ski. They always go to France at Christmas!"

"Perhaps they wanted to spend Christmas with their only child instead," Severus said. "They did invite us to join them."

Hermione curled a hand protectively over her lower abdomen.

"I can't ski now. And if we'd gone and I hadn't skied, they would have been suspicious. I love skiing."

"I must confess, I don't understand why you haven't told them about the baby. I think they'll be pleased to hear the news." He kissed her temple softly.

"Pleased? They'll be over the moon especially my mum."

"Then why are you keeping it from them?" he asked.

"I'm not keeping it from them, exactly. It's more that I'm keeping it between us."

"I'm not sure I understand the difference."

"Once people know about the baby, she belongs to everyone. For now, she's ours only ours. We don't have to share her."

Severus placed his hand over her slightly protruding belly.

"Her?"

"It's a girl, Severus. Madam Pomfrey told me yesterday. I was waiting for the right moment to tell you. I hope you're not disappointed."

"Why would I be?"

"Don't all men want a son?"

"Two years ago, I would have scoffed at the idea of becoming a father. I truly believed that those things that other men took for granted a loving wife, a warm, comfortable home, a child were forever beyond my grasp."

"Two years ago, I felt the same way," Hermione said. "You saved me."

"We saved each other. That's why I could never be disappointed no matter the child's gender."

Hermione smiled up at him. "We'll tell my parents tonight. I'm sure they'll think the news is a much better gift than the wine subscription."

"I don't know ... your father rather likes the wines I've chosen in the past."

"He has, hasn't he? Still, I think a grandchild might edge out a chardonnay."

"Speaking of which, I'd best go open that bottle of cabernet sauvignon so it can breathe properly before we serve it."

"Is there anything I can do in the kitchen to help?" Hermione asked as she got to her feet.

Severus arched an amused brow at her. "Really, Hermione."

Hermione's lack of culinary talent was legendary.

"Right ... I'll check the salad forks again."

"Actually, you can answer the door," Severus said. "Your parents have just passed through the outer wards and will be knocking any moment."

Hermione turned toward the front door as she too felt the slight ripple in the wards that protected the house at Spinner's End.

She opened the door and caught her father with his hand raised, just about to knock. He had a small stack of boxes balanced in his other hand.

"Happy Christmas, Dad," Hermione said.

"You always catch me, don't you, princess?" Richard Granger said with a rueful smile as he shifted the boxes.

"It's magic," Hermione replied with an answering smile.

"Merry Christmas, Hermione," Elizabeth Granger said from behind another pile of boxes.

"Mum! What's all this?"

"Oh, just a few decorations for your new parlour, that's all."

"We've a tree," Hermione said.

"I know, I know. But you need some holly and some ivy garlands. And some candles. Remember when you were a little girl? On Christmas Eve we used to listen to Christmas carols and drink eggnog while we decorated. Even when we were in France, we always brought a few things with us to make the room at the inn seem more personal."

"I remember."

"We've missed that. We've missed you."

Elizabeth was blinking rapidly, holding back her tears.

"Severus won't mind, will he? Maybe I should have asked before we brought everything over."

"I'm delighted to see you, Elizabeth," Severus said as he came up behind Hermione. "I'm sure the parlour will look properly festive when you're done."

He took several of the boxes from Elizabeth's arms and stacked them on the sofa.

"As it happens, the eggnog is ready to be served, and I'm sure we can find some Christmas music on the wireless."

For the next hour, Elizabeth Granger directed her husband, daughter, and son-in-law like a general commanding his troops. Garlands of holly and ivy were looped over the doorways and along the mantle. Severus used Temporary Sticking Charms to keep everything in place. A dozen red and green candles in frosted glass globes were arranged on the dining table, the side tables, and the mantle. Sprigs of mistletoe were hung from every doorway. A shining gold star was added to the top of the small Christmas tree that Hermione and Severus had set up in the small front window.

"Oh, that's lovely," Elizabeth said as she stepped back from the tree.

"Are we done now?" Hermione asked with a smile.

"Almost."

"I don't think we can fit in one more decoration."

"Oh, I think you'll find room for these," Elizabeth said as she handed Hermione a long, flat box. It was wrapped in green foil and had a fancy silver bow tied around it.

"It's almost too pretty to open," Hermione said as she sat on the sofa, the box on her lap.

"I'll open it," Severus said as he reached for the box. Although he would have vehemently denied it, he was fascinated by the family ritual he had become a part of.

"No you won't! It's mine!" Hermione said as she playfully slapped his hand away.

"Actually, it's for both of you," Elizabeth said.

"Oh, well, in that case, come sit next to me, and we'll open it together."

Slowly, almost reverently, Hermione untied the shimmering silver bow. Severus used a carefully applied cutting charm to remove the paper without tearing it.

Hermione folded back the tissue paper to reveal two perfectly matched green silk brocade Christmas stockings.

"I embroidered your names on the cuffs," Elizabeth said.

"Oh, Mum, they're beautiful," Hermione said as she lifted them carefully from their tissue paper nest.

"I thought they'd look nice hanging on each side of your mantle."

"They're lovely, Elizabeth," Severus said as he stood and took them from Hermione. He affixed them to the mantle. "Thank you."

"There's one more thing," Elizabeth said as she handed Hermione another box. This one was much smaller than the one that had held their stockings, and it wasn't wrapped.

Hermione lifted the lid from the box, and then she gasped as she lifted out another stocking. It was also green silk brocade, but there was no name embroidered on the cuff, and it was a quarter the size of the other two.

"You are pregnant, aren't you?" Elizabeth asked, almost shyly.

"We were going to tell you tonight," Hermione said. "How did you know?"

"It was actually your father who noticed."

"I'm not showing yet," Hermione said, turning toward her father.

"Not showing ... glowing," Richard Granger said.

"What?"

"When you and Severus came over for dinner a couple of weeks ago, you seemed ... different. You seemed, I don't know, calmer, more peaceful."

"After you'd left, I realised what it was. You had that same look about you that your mum had when she was carrying you."

"Oh, Daddy."

"Well, I'd say the occasion warrants something a bit stronger than eggnog," Severus said as he moved toward the sideboard. "At least for three of us."

"It's a good thing I like eggnog," Hermione said as Severus poured Glenlivet into three glasses and topped off her glass of eggnog.

"To Hermione and Severus," Richard said solemnly as he raised his glass. "And to the little one who will be with us next Christmas."

After their toast, they all sat again and sipped their drinks.

"We've just found out that it's a girl, Dad," Hermione said a few minutes later, "but we haven't chosen her name yet."

"I've always been partial to Shakespearean names, myself."

"Yes, I know," Hermione said with a smile. "But her name won't be Hermione."

"It could have been worse," Elizabeth put in. "He was also considering Goneril and Mopsa."

"You wouldn't have ..."

"I only considered them briefly; common sense prevailed."

"Not to mention my threat to divorce him ..." Elizabeth added.

"The wizarding world is rather more tolerant of unusual names," Severus said, "but even so, Goneril might have raised a few eyebrows. There are, however, several Shakespearean names that are less common without being too strange. Names like Nerissa, Miranda, and Olivia."

"From *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*, and *Twelfth Night*, respectively," Richard said. "You're fond of Shakespeare as well, Severus."

"I am."

"As soon as we've decided, we'll let you know," Hermione said.

"I'll embroider her name on her Christmas stocking before next year," Elizabeth said. "Perhaps we can start a new tradition of hanging the stockings together."

"What about your yearly trip to France?" Hermione asked.

"We talked it over," Richard said. "We've decided that France can wait until after Christmas. We'd rather spend Christmas Eve with you and Severus. And the little one, of course."

"We'd like that, wouldn't we, Severus?" Hermione asked as she turned and smiled at her husband.

Severus Snape, who didn't remember a peaceful or happy Christmas a real family Christmas looked at his wife and her parents and felt a sense of acceptance that he'd never experienced.

"I can't imagine a better way to spend Christmas Eve," he said.

It was several hours later when Hermione awoke to find herself alone in the bed she shared with Severus.

She shoved her feet into her slippers, put on her dressing gown, and went in search of him.

She found him sitting on the sofa, staring at the mantle.

"Waiting for Father Christmas?" Hermione asked as she sat down next to him.

"Why does everyone think that all Slytherins like green?"

"I don't think my mother picked green silk brocade because you're a Slytherin. I'm not even sure she knows that green and silver are your house colours. She simply thinks that green is a festive colour for Christmas.

"I thought you liked the stockings."

"I do. It's just ... Never mind. Let's go back to bed. It's not important."

"It's important enough for you to be sitting here brooding. Tell me," Hermione insisted.

Severus considered this for a moment, and then he spoke.

"I never had a Christmas stocking when I was a child."

"I know."

"You gave me one last year. You gave me this one."

He reached into the pocket of his dressing gown and drew out the red woollen stocking she had given him the previous year.

"You kept it ..."

"Of course I kept it. I was going to hang it on the mantle tonight along with this one."

He took a second stocking from his pocket.

"You've taken up knitting in your spare time?" Hermione asked with a smile.

"No, but I still know how to do a transfiguration charm. I duplicated the stocking you made for me so that we'd each have one."

Hermione swallowed the sudden lump in her throat.

"They're not as fancy as the ones your mother brought."

"My mother meant well. She didn't know we already had stockings. She knows how important family traditions are. If she had known, she never would have got us those other ones."

"We're stuck with them now, though, aren't we? We'd hurt her feelings if we didn't put them up," he said.

Hermione got to her feet and went to the mantle.

She carefully removed the green silk brocade stockings with their names so lovingly embroidered on the cuffs.

"We'll have two traditions," she explained as she took the two red woollen stockings from his hand and just as carefully hung them from the mantle.

"My Mum and Dad will come over on Christmas Eve and we'll hang the green stockings. And after they leave, we'll put our own stockings up.

"Are your transfiguration skills up to another red woollen stocking? I think our baby would like to have one that matches her mum's and dad's."

And so it was that every Christmas Eve after that first one, Elizabeth and Richard Granger would come to Spinner's End.

They would drink eggnog and listen to Christmas carols. They would drape the holly and the ivy garlands, hang the mistletoe, and light the green and red candles. They would hang the green silk brocade stockings with "Hermione" and "Severus" embroidered on the cuffs and after that first Christmas Eve, the smaller stocking as well, the one with "Portia" just as lovingly embroidered.

And every Christmas Eve, after Elizabeth and Richard left, Hermione and Severus would carefully remove the green silk brocade stockings from the mantle and hang up the much smaller, much plainer red woollen stockings.

The End

