

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

by Bluestocking

Even amidst the cold of winter, there is always a reason to hope. A seasonal Snape/Granger romance, written for Grangersnape100's Comfort and Joy Challenge.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: The characters belong to Rowling and not to me. I'm just having a bit of fun with them and not making any money in the process.

Hermione surveyed the Great Hall and beamed, cheerful and slightly tipsy. As fairy lights twinkled, students and teachers were boisterously merrymaking, revelling in good company.

Voldemort was dead, her apprenticeship was a success, and they were all enjoying the happiest Christmas in years.

Almost all, she realised, spotting a dark figure in a darker corner—unnoticed, excluded. Armoured in black wool, he stayed his distance and stared at the celebration.

Perhaps it was only from the wine, but Hermione's heart felt very full.

He was always so alone... and it was *Christmas*—

She rose from her chair, but he'd already fled.

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She found him in the gardens, still and black as midnight. His head bowed and fists clenched as the wind ruffled his limp hair, his face as bleak and desolate as any wintry moor. The charmed rosebushes surrounded him, heavy with flowers, blossoms blood-bright against the snow.

"You'll catch your death," Hermione chided.

"One can only hope."

"Please come back inside..."

"Why? I have no *cheer* to offer. My presence wasn't noticed; it can hardly be missed," he snarled.

She caught his freezing fingers. "You're wrong. *I* noticed. *I* missed you."

His hands were cold, but his lips were warm.

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She held him close in the moonlight, trying to thaw his chill.

She worried that perhaps the frost went all the way down to the very core of him.

"Why?" he murmured into her fuzzy curls. He sounded dazed and oddly young.

She patted his back, feeling the sharp, fragile bones beneath all his layers.

"Because I like you. Because it's Christmas. It's the season of *hope*."

He shuddered. "There's no hope—not *now*..."

Hermione looked at the jewel-like roses, beautiful and vibrant despite the unforgiving winter.

"It's never too late to hope," she whispered, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

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She held Severus' hand, lending him her silent support as they returned to the castle.

Light, noise and laughter spilled out the opened doors of the Great Hall, evidence of a celebration too jubilant to be contained. As they neared the festivities, she felt his body tense, his footsteps reluctantly dragging. He gripped her hand like a man dangling on the edge of the abyss.

Hermione met his frowning gaze with her own resolute one.

"You can do this," she reassured him.

"Who says I want to?"

She had watched him for too many years to believe such misdirection now.

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Despite his sneering, the dark, anxious look in his eyes gave the lie to his worries. Like any wild creature, his snarls were calculated to cover his weaknesses.

"You do belong here," Hermione said, willing him to believe her. "They'll welcome you, if you'll let them. You only have to try. You aren't afraid to try, are you?"

She hid her smile at his indignant look; he couldn't abide being called a coward.

Of course, he wasn't one. He was, she thought, brave beyond measure.

"*Afraid*," he scoffed. "Of *them*?"

Hand in hand, they marched into the Great Hall together.