

Uncharted

by slytherinlaurel

Hermione and Severus unexpectedly find themselves embarking on Yule together.

I.

Chapter 1 of 5

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Disclaimer: Not mine. This is completely a not-for-profit operation.

The entry hall echoed as Hermione let the door fall shut behind her. The shopping expedition to Diagon Alley had been successful, but it was good to escape the lights and buzz of the shopping district. The walk from the front gates had drained everything she had left.

Melting snow wrung the curl from her hair, but Hermione didn't bother casting a drying charm. Slowly making her way up the main stairs, she noticed Severus watching her from an archway.

"You are by no means an efficient shopper, Professor Granger."

Hermione frowned, but held back a retort. After all, she'd probably still be stuck in the middle of that cheer-fueled hoard had she not run into her colleague.

"Perhaps I have a longer list, Professor Snape."

"In that case I should extend my sympathies."

Hermione finally drew herself up to a landing on an equal footing with the man, who was dry and looking far more comfortable than herself.

"I imagine I should thank you for helping me to select a Quidditch tactics book for Ginny."

"It was my pleasure." Severus' mouth curved into the suggestion of a smirk. "It's been many years since I've seen you floundering over books."

A/N: Thank you to my amazing and gracious beta, Nanacu.

II.

Chapter 2 of 5

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"You hardly need to be fussing over the staff room, Professor Granger."

Hermione frowned as she turned briefly towards the remark, but continued to rearrange the garland on the mantle place.

"Most of the staff is already gone. I daresay no one cares."

Hermione set the garland down and turned to eye the man standing by the staff table, arms crossed and mouth in full smirk.

"Did I ask for your opinion?" Hermione snapped.

"I must admit I'm surprised to find you here. Shouldn't you be inundated with Weasleys hopped up on eggnog and sugary confections?" The comment held a bite, yet was not entirely unkind.

Hermione turned around as if to return to the garland, but rather braced her arms against the fireplace.

"And yet you're here?" Snape probed steadily.

"Drop it," Hermione said tartly, trying to keep the breaking note from her voice.

"Fairytale end with Prince Charming rescuing a different princess?"

"Fuck you, Snape." Her shoulders hunched, trying to push back the angry tears that welled up. "You have no idea."

"Don't I? You've seen my most intimate memories, Granger," his voice hissed as he advanced. "You think I don't know about being pushed down a different path?"

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III.

Chapter 3 of 5

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"This isn't how it ends," Hermione barked as she turned to face Severus.

"How utterly idealistic of you," he said, his dark eyes hardening.

"Everything was laid out, everything was exactly as it was supposed to be—" Hermione cringed, hearing the pleading note in her voice.

"Clearly not exactly as it was supposed to be," he challenged as Hermione's face flushed. "Then why are you here? Why come back to Hogwarts?"

Hermione's glassy eyes stared into his as she slowly shook her head. "This is home."

"You could have gone somewhere else."

"No," she whispered.

"This is the last place left on your map?"

"The last place I can remember feeling safe," Hermione said haltingly.

"The last place you remember being the *you* that you imagined for yourself," he stated, stopping his advance to look at her, cautiously searching.

"I need to start over, Snape."

"You can't go back to start over."

"How utterly cliché," Hermione snapped.

"Using an old map won't get you where you need to go," Severus assured her.

"And you?" Hermione paused in her pain as she watched him intently. "There aren't monsters past these borders. Not anymore."

"My map hasn't changed in decades, Granger."

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IV.

Chapter 4 of 5

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The burst of sound caught her by surprise as something bounced off her wards. Cautiously going to her door, Hermione thought it odd that something would roam this part of the castle late on Christmas Eve. Slowly opening the door, a growing sliver of light revealed a box, unwrapped but with a note affixed.

Professor Granger,

Please accept this as my gift to you. Enclosed you will find instructions and ingredients for a Yule candle that I believe you will find pleasing.

Sincerely,

SS

Hermione paused, wondering if accepting this offering was a good idea. While ill-tempered, his spiteful side seemed to have faded in the years since the war. With mild trepidation she decided to proceed, albeit with caution. Carefully removing the ingredients from their package, Hermione set up a cauldron and began to brew the potion that would be poured into the mould he provided.

The instructions indicated a cooling charm could be used to set the candle, and she soon found herself sliding the pillar from its slender mould, inhaling the soft scent of ginger that arose. Taking a deep breath, Hermione conjured a ball of flame and lit the candle before her in a blue starburst.

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V.

Chapter 5 of 5

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Hermione gasped as she felt a tug behind her navel. The momentum brought her to her knees as she landed gracelessly and sent the candle tumbling to the cobblestones.

Looking around, she noticed a black-clad figure standing next to her, looking very much out of place against the whitewashed buildings as he held a white candle.

"Where are we?"

"Somewhere in the Mediterranean, by my guess."

"Why..."

"It takes you to the place you most want to be."

"How can that be when I don't even know where *here* is?" Hermione demanded.

"What did you think as you stormed out of the staff room?" Severus prodded.

Hermione sucked in her breath. "Anywhere but here."

Severus nodded. "This turned out well, I'd say, since it could have sent us to the North Sea."

"You didn't know where it would take us?"

"I believe I already said as much."

"But why are we both here?" Hermione asked, clearly bewildered.

"You thought I would leave that part to chance?" Severus paused and watched a smile of understanding creep into Hermione's eyes. "I've been thinking it's time to sail off the end of the map and was wondering if you'd care to join me?"

A/N: It's my pleasure to offer this to sylvanawood as part of the Slytherin House Yule Exchange. I used all three of her prompts, as follows:

1. Severus helps Hermione buy Christmas presents the recipients actually like.

2. Severus and Hermione decorate the staff room for Yule.

3. Hermione learns from Severus how to make a special Yule candle that has some secret hidden properties that are released when burned: up to the author what that is.

As always, thank you to my amazing beta, Nanacu.