

You Only Cross My Mind in Winter

by Subversa

He makes this pilgrimage every year at Christmas, but nothing ever comes of it. Will it be different this year?

I. Pathetic Pilgrim

Chapter 1 of 5

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I. Pathetic Pilgrim

The snow fell lazily, almost as an afterthought, from the fraught grey clouds overhead. Afternoon in the park boasted only happy, family-types this day before Christmas. Fathers, charged with keeping the children out of the way, pushed swings and stood at the foot of slides and threw balls in the company of their progeny. Teenagers stole last minute meetings with their friends before being consigned to the doubtful felicity of family celebrations. Lovers strolled, hand in hand, oblivious to all others, enjoying the festive, holiday atmosphere of the small neighbourhood park.

One dark, solitary man moved on the periphery of the scene, somehow neither present nor absent. He lurked in the trees and patrolled the edges of the green, now ankle-deep in snow, seeing everything and nothing at all. Those in the park, for the most part, did not notice him, as if some magic spell hid him from their eyes.

Well, of course it did.

Severus Snape stalked impatiently through the Muggle neighbourhood, Disillusioned and further protected by both a Muggle-Repelling Charm and a strong Notice-Me-Not Spell. He loathed his presence here, and even more, loathed himself for being unable to stay away. It had been three years since he had chanced to see her here one day near the Solstice. Since then, it had been his custom to humiliate himself annually with these pathetic treks to Wanstead, to watch for her again, as if he were a bird enthusiast on a quest to view the endangered species, Bushy-Crowned Know-It-All-icus.

He scowled and kicked at a rock, watching it bounce over tree roots and disappear into a small drift. He had been in the area on business that day three winters ago, and on impulse, had walked from the High Street down to a small play park. It had been a fine day then, unseasonably warm, with the sun shining in a cloudless blue sky—quite different from today's snowy misery. The park had been relatively deserted, and he had seated himself upon a bench, under cover of a strong Disillusionment Charm, to enjoy the quiet. Christmas was a difficult time of year for people laden with family and friends—for a solitary man burdened with neither sets of dependents or supplicants, it was ... brutal.

She had strolled into the park from the High Street, as well, a diminutive figure in brown boots, blue jeans, and a short, cranberry red coat, her crazy brown hair lifting from her shoulders and blowing about her face with the intermittent gusts of wind. It had been the work of mere seconds for him to recognise her. His stomach had clenched, as had his hands in his pockets.

Now, his fists clenched in memory of his distress, and he did another visual sweep of the area, though he had never seen her again, since that day. Yet by the simple act of strolling through this park before his eyes, she had made his pilgrimage an annual event, as he hoped against hope to see her again.

For what? he mocked himself. *It's not as if you have the stones to approach her now, any more than you did then. Pathetic!*

II. Irresolute Past Present

Chapter 2 of 5

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II. Irresolute Past Present

Their association was strictly Order-related; there had never been anything *personal* about it. Yet this interminable winter, oppressed by the ongoing war, was a time of recurrent meetings with her, attended by frequent discussions and equally frequent disagreements.

'If you cannot see to your cauldron without babbling, Miss Granger, you may go. I will do it instead,' he snapped waspishly, decanting the contents of his cauldron into clearly marked phials.

'I scarcely see how you can view my questions about the genesis of this Nerve Regeneration Potion as babbling, Professor,' she replied.

He glanced to her sharply, hearing something in her tone of disrespect—but all he saw on her countenance, rapt as she counted her anti-clockwise strokes, was a sort of gentle amusement. He bristled, a sneer marring his face. What business did this girl have mocking him? She might not be his student any longer, but the differences between them, in both age and station, dictated that she ought to speak to him with respect and deference.

She glanced up then, catching him out as he studied her, and she smiled, the warmth spreading from her up-curved lips to her dark, expressive eyes. 'If you don't care to discuss it while we work, perhaps you can tell me about it later, over a drink.'

His eyes dropped as he felt the unwanted flush of colour in his cheeks, and he busied himself with corking the phials and cleaning his cauldron, taking the opportunity to turn his back on her. 'It is my custom to go to the Three Broomsticks for a drink on Saturday nights,' he replied, neither encouraging nor discouraging her.

'I know,' she murmured, and he thought he heard amusement again, but he refused to turn to see her face until he was fully in charge of his own again.

They left the castle at the same time, though he would not characterise them as being *together*; it was simply a matter of both of them deciding, independently, to go down the pub for a nightcap. Miss Granger, however, did not seem to grasp the reality of their joint seclusion, for she assailed him with verbal prods until he was forced to return them, and their stroll through the snow under the bright Scottish moon was productive of conversation, as well as two sets of tracks, side by side, in the snowy lane.

The wind picked up, blowing bitterly against the woollen coats and mittens of those daring the outdoors, and the smaller children were gathered and herded away by anxious parents. Severus stirred from his reverie and refreshed his concealing charms, beginning to thread his way again through the trees and about the perimeter of the play park.

That first night, walking with her to the Three Broomsticks, enduring the perpetual conversation, had been the first of many snowy Saturday nights with Hermione Granger. They had spoken of countless things, learning to match their gaits as they walked and practiced the parry and thrust of verbal sparring—and many were the times when the gates of Hogwarts had loomed on their return too soon to suit him, for in conversation with her, the distance might have been ten times farther, and still he would not have been bored. It had never been personal—that would have been inappropriate—but it had, at times, been ... engaging.

Then had come the end of the war. He had left the school to found his own business, and their association had come to an end.

He shook his head, disturbing the plain black scarf wound about his throat against the icy air. He was the worst of fools—an *old* one.

It had only been in retrospect, as years had passed, that he had come to wonder. Had it all been ... impersonal? Had he not, at times, detected merriment in her?—and was it not possible that her gaiety had been an indication of ... well, of *attraction*, rather than mockery?

Surely it wasn't *impossible*.

Was it?

Desolate, he scowled at his feet, watching each boot pressing into the freshly fallen snow, until the solitary set of prints ended where they had begun, in the copse of trees in the play park in Wanstead.

Dear Merlin, dusk was falling. How he wished, as he had done each year since, that he had more work to occupy him in winter—that it was less of a null season for his business. It left him far too much time to think and to feel, always a dangerous combination.

Another Christmas Eve was coming to an end, and she wasn't coming—but even worse, he wasn't going after her.

III. Frozen Fantasies

Chapter 3 of 5

He makes this pilgrimage every year at Christmas, but nothing ever comes of it. Will it be different this year?

III. Frozen Fantasies

He came to a snow-frosted bench—the one upon which he had sat the day he had seen her here—and beneath the bench, he saw an irregular shape shrouded in a small drift. Frowning, he nudged it with his boot and saw what appeared to be a child's black patent slipper. He bent to investigate, and with his ungloved hands, he brushed a coating of snow away from a carrier bag with the feet of a doll protruding. He flicked his fingers, clearing the snow from the bench with a wash of wandless magic, and he sat down to consider his find.

The child's toy slid from the bag onto his lap, where it laid stiffly, bright blue eyes staring at the sky. It wore a blue coat with its shiny black slippers, but snow had got into the bag, and there were patches of damp upon the fabric. The damp had also affected other parts as well, it would seem, for its golden hair stood out from its head in a bushy mass.

The corner of his mouth quirked in something close to a smile, and his fingertips touched the doll's locks. Just so would Miss Granger's hair become under the influence of the slightest humidity. Nights when pellets of ice fell upon the castle roofs and coated the crenulated parapets, his workroom would be full of steaming cauldrons, and he, working in his shirtsleeves, would often look up to see her with a line of sweat upon her brow and the soft brown of her hair kinking and curling about her face like a living organism.

One long digit twirled a lock of the doll's hair, and he pursed his lips in thought. What if he had slipped behind her and gathered her hair at her nape, securing it out of her way with an unspoken charm?

'Oh, thank you, Severus,' she said, turning from her cauldron to glance up at him, one hand touching the smoothly bound hair, a self-conscious smile upon her lips.

'You're welcome, Hermione,' he answered, gazing meaningfully into her eyes, and with a sigh, she swayed into his arms, and they kissed.

'Oh bloody bugging hell,' he muttered in disgust, wrenching himself from his puling thoughts. As if he would ever have sacrificed an evening's work of cauldrons full of necessary potions for the sake of a stupid kiss!

Scowling now, he stared out into the swiftly darkening evening. On the streets of Wanstead, the lights from the houses cast welcoming glows upon those hurrying home, but in the park, still the teenagers lurked in clusters of jovial raillery. He grimaced. How many times during those last desperate months of the war had he seen her about Hogsmeade or in Diagon Alley with her *friends*? It was true that she had never been particularly boisterous or otherwise inappropriate in the company of her two shadows, but he had never deigned to recognise her at those times. He would look away and cross the street or turn his back, so he would not have to see her conversing with persons—boys! Men!—other than himself. Had he only imagined her eyes, trained upon the back of his head or the side of his face with the heat of burning coals, willing him to notice her? Why had he not done so? Had he been so afraid that she would *not* meet him with the appearance of pleasure—with the same constant kindness and regard she accorded him in his workroom and in the taproom in the village?

What if he had possessed the courage to approach her one of those times?

'Hello, Professor!' she said when he caught her eye, and as he approached her, she excused herself from Potter and Weasley and met him halfway, her hands extended. 'I hope you've been well.'

Taking her hands, he gazed down into her face, the warmth of her brown eyes like a balm to the wound he ever carried with him. 'I'm certainly well now,' he said, allowing the emphasis of his words to convey his message. 'Would you care to join me for a warm drink?'

And she slipped her hand into the crook of his elbow, turning her back on her friends and strolling away from them on his arm, a soft, vibrant presence at his side.

'Merlin's midden!' he swore as a knot of laughing kids swarmed by, and they gave the bench wide berth, as startled by his vehement utterance as he had been by their sudden surge of humanity in his vicinity.

And then he was left alone in the park with no company other than the lovers walking hand in hand, their heads close together, apparently immune to the dropping temperatures and the increasing wind. A sour taste crept into his mouth, and he gritted his teeth against the bitter envy he felt.

'It's all right for them, isn't it?' he said to the blank-eyed doll still lying across his knees. 'They have someone to walk with—someone to talk to—someone they consider *worth* talking to.'

A laugh, happy and pealing like a bell, was borne to him on the wind, and under his resentful eye, the man took his girl in his arms and spun her in a joyous dance in the Christmas snow. In his mind's eye, the woman became Miss Granger, and she was dancing with Ronald Weasley—just as she had done at the Ministry Gala six months after the fall of the Dark Lord. Severus had stood amongst other Order members, feeling stiff and awkward in his dress robes, wondering why he had come to this place to endure the inane speeches and asinine conversation. Had it been to see *her*? To *talk* to her? Well, he hadn't done it, had he? Not either thing.

'Some war hero!' he muttered.

Instead, he had sulked on the periphery, dodged away from her when she chanced into his area, and left early. He had only seen her once, since then—three years ago, on Christmas Eve.

But what if he had stood still when she was close to him, instead of fleeing? What if she had come up to him to say hello, and as the next song began, he had done the natural thing, and asked her to dance with him?

'Thank you, Professor—I'd be delighted!'

He placed his hand at her waist, taking her smaller hand in his own, and they began to turn together, moving gracefully in the steps of the dance, drawing the eyes of everyone present but having eyes for no one but each other.

'You look very pretty tonight,' he said, enchanted.

'Thank you,' she answered, a blush staining her cheeks, making her prettier still.

And she danced the rest of the night with him, talked only to him, and at end of the evening, she asked him to take her home.

'Just like some sickly romance novel,' he snorted, repulsed. 'And not even a good one, at that.'

The things he had done in the war—in the service of Albus Dumbledore—had been done of necessity. But those acts now lauded as bravery did not begin to represent the real man he was—the coward too fearful of rejection to even take a chance on acceptance.

The last of his Disillusionment Charm wore away, and he stirred to see that the snow had ceased to fall, and the steady wind had blown the clouds away. The light had been lost in the west, only to be replaced by indifferent, twinkling stars inhabiting another lonely night.

IV. Reckless Reality

Chapter 4 of 5

He makes this pilgrimage every year at Christmas, but nothing ever comes of it. Will it be different this year?

IV. Reckless Reality

Christmas Eve in Wanstead, with snow on the ground and the air frigid with wind which had blown the snow clouds out to sea. A solitary figure remained in the small neighbourhood park, oblivious to his surroundings as he pondered his inchoate desires and his obvious shortcomings. It is thus that he was startled by the arrival of another solitary soul ...

'Sir?'

Jerked with no warning from his brooding, his eyes rose to her face, confusion clearly written upon his features. It was Miss Granger, looking down at him with wide eyes, her mouth forming a silent 'o'.

'Severus!' she breathed, and his heart tripped into double time whilst he sat and gaped stupidly up into her face. 'But ... why are you here?'

At last he found his voice, as well as his volition, and he stood, unmindful of the inanimate passenger across his knees. 'I might ask you the same question,' he replied with all the dignity he could muster, but he had lost her attention, for she quickly bent to retrieve the fallen doll.

'You found it!' she cried, the words floating up to him as he stared down at her bent figure.

She was here—*here!*—and he was as tongue-tied as a boy.

She straightened again, dusting the snow from the doll. 'She's not hurt too badly,' she said, as if to herself, and a sure wave of her wand restored the doll to its original condition, hair smooth, clothing pristine. She held it up as if to show it to him and smiled happily. 'See?'

But he couldn't look away from her face.

'Sir?' she said again, concern in her tone.

He dragged his eyes from her face to flick a glance at the doll. 'I see no difference,' he said stiffly, and was disturbed to catch a flash of hurt on her face. What had he done wrong?

'Of course you don't,' she said, her chin lifting, her lips settling in a firm line.

Nervously, he wet his lips. She had seemed pleased to see him, but now she had withdrawn. How to draw her out again? 'Aren't you a bit old for dolls?' he inquired in a ponderous attempt at humour.

'It's not for me,' she protested. 'It's for Victoire Weasley—all the other children are opening their gifts, but I must have left this here earlier today. The shops are closed, and I couldn't buy another one—I've been retracing my steps ...'

He listened to her, the words unimportant. She was speaking in his presence, and he soaked up her voice like a dry sponge exposed to a trickle of water. The streetlight revealed she was clad in her cranberry red coat, wearing ivory coloured knit mittens and a matching cap, pulled low to protect her ears from the biting wind. Her brown hair spilled, loose and bushy, past her shoulders, and her lovely face was tinged pink by the cold.

Miss Granger glanced about the park, as if to ascertain they were its only inhabitants. 'Do you live near here?' she asked, still trying to make sense of his presence. 'My parents' house is just down the street.'

'I do not,' he replied, 'but perhaps it is fortuitous for the sake of your doll that I chanced to be here today.' Still, he tried for a note of lightness, but it was foreign to him and sounded stilted to his ears.

Miss Granger grinned, banishing her earlier reserve. 'Yes, we both owe you thanks!' she said. 'Now, you must come with me to Grimmauld Place to give Victoire her doll—there are so many of us now it's easier to meet there than at the Burrow.'

He stiffened and drew breath sharply. Willingly go to Potter's home, already crowded with Weasleys? He thought not. 'I do not care for parties,' he said, and it was the absolute truth.

Her hand in its mitten touched his upper arm, and she came one step closer, gazing up into his face. She smelled of the cold and of wood smoke from a fire somewhere, but it was the peppermint oil, undoubtedly from a boiled sweet, that he smelt on her breath when she spoke. 'I know you don't care for parties,' she said. 'We haven't seen you since the first Ministry Gala—everyone will be so happy to see you.'

She stepped closer still, and he forgot the obvious lie she had uttered as her eyes pled and her tone coaxed. 'Please come with me.'

He would follow her anywhere—walk from London to Hogwarts, even—to have the opportunity to talk with her again, as they had done in the past. But to go to Potter's home—to see the Order members he had virtually ignored for years—what fresh hell was this, that he must choose between humiliating himself and losing her companionship? *Coward!* his mind screamed, and his resolve stiffened against the hated word.

'I shall accompany you,' he said, 'to make sure the doll reaches its intended destination, this time.'

Her eyes crinkled in merriment, and as it had done in his earlier imaginings, her hand was tucked next to his side, and he bent his arm to give her a place to rest it. 'Then you won't mind if we Apparate by Side-Along?' she said playfully. 'To make sure no one loses their way?'

And that was how he came to be at Grimmauld Place with Hermione Granger on Christmas Eve.

V. One Lost, Found

Chapter 5 of 5

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V. One Lost, Found

It all happened so quickly there was really no time for him to prepare his face...prepare *himself*...for the reactions of the party-goers. One moment, he stood in the snowy park with Miss Granger's fingers resting on his sleeve, and in the next, the door to Grimmauld Place was thrown open, and he stood in a hallway suddenly crowded with familiar faces he could have happily gone his entire life without ever seeing again.

'Look whom I found!' Miss Granger cried to the group at large, her shining eyes fastened on his face.

'Professor Snape!'

'Severus!'

Arthur Weasley and Kingsley Shacklebolt stepped forward, hands outstretched, and Severus found himself in the unenviable position of accepting these seemingly enthusiastic welcomes or not...and refusing was really not an option, was it? *She* had brought him here, and it would reflect badly on *her* for him to reject the advances of her friends. Had he not stood at the side of the Dark Lord and shaken hands with vile, despicable creatures of the Dark? At the very least, these people had fought on the side of the Light...had been loyal to Albus Dumbledore...and for all his faults, the Headmaster had wanted the best for the wizarding world, never mind his methods.

So Severus shook hands, exchanged hellos, and when the flurry of greetings had passed, he followed the crowd into the sitting room, where he saw Miss Granger placing the blue-eyed doll into the hands of a small, silvery-haired girl...no doubt the daughter of Bill Weasley and his part-Veela wife. The child hugged the doll with one arm and threw the other about Miss Granger's neck.

Arthur stood at Severus' shoulder and smiled benignly upon the spectacle of his granddaughter receiving her dolly. 'I thought Hermione had misplaced the doll,' he said quietly.

Severus responded without looking away from Miss Granger. 'She inadvertently left the doll in the park, but retracing her steps, she found it again.'

'How like Hermione!' Molly Weasley marvelled, moving between the two wizards, and Severus was uncomfortably aware of her speculative gaze. 'Isn't it just like her to return for the one who was lost and to search until she found him.'

Arthur looked down at his wife, puzzlement on his friendly face. '*Her*, you mean, my love. The doll is a "her".'

'Of course,' Molly murmured, turning away with a suspiciously merry smile. 'That's what I meant.'

'Nick a cup of Christmas punch, Severus,' Arthur encouraged, nudging him towards the refreshments. 'I'll be right back...must see to the sprogs.'

Arthur hurried over to separate two ginger-haired ankle-biters, and Severus sidled to the drinks table, slipping behind Fred and George Weasley before they knew he was there.

'Good evening, gentlemen,' he said silkily. 'Tell me...will *you* regret it if I drink the punch?'

Two identical grins turned to him. 'The punch is safe,' George assured him, 'but...

'...don't touch the mince pies,' Fred finished.

'Thank you,' Severus said dryly, taking up a cup of punch.

'Any time, sir,' Fred assured him.

'We learned everything we know about potions-brewing from you!' George added.

Severus took a sip of punch and regarded them with one raised brow. 'That is a charge you could not prove before the Wizengamot,' he pointed out.

Then the twins melted away, and he saw the reason why in the person of Minerva McGonagall. Swallowing nervously, he stood straighter.

'Well, Severus?' the old woman demanded in a querulous tone.

'You look well, Professor McGonagall,' he lied.

'What do you have to say for yourself?' she interrupted, glaring up at him. 'Have you forgotten how to write? Is that why you never respond to owls?'

She continued to scold, but he did not hear her. Miss Granger stood across the room with Ronald Weasley, and it was evident he was remonstrating with her. As he watched, Miss Granger raised one hand, as if to halt Weasley's tirade, and in that moment, her eyes met his. When she found him looking at her, her cheeks flushed, and she smiled at him, a gesture which knocked the breath from his lungs.

'It's like that, is it?' Minerva said wryly.

Suddenly alert to danger, Severus tore his attention from Miss Granger and glared down his nose at his former teacher and co-worker. 'I beg your pardon?' he said repressively, but the old witch simply chuckled at him.

'The child always fancied you, though only Merlin knows why,' Minerva said reminiscently. 'When you wouldn't have her, she spent almost two years trying to make things work out with Ronald.'

The crystal punch cup fell from Severus' suddenly nerveless fingers and hit the thick rug, spattering his and Minerva's shoes before rolling out of sight under the sideboard.

'Oh, *honestly*, Severus,' Minerva said, and with a flick of her wand, she cleared away the spilled drink before sweeping away from him to find more pleasing company.

'She's right, you know, sir.'

Feeling as if he were being assaulted on every front, Severus turned distracted eyes on Harry Potter, who gave him a half-smile before bending to retrieve the fallen crystal cup.

'I suppose you think you know what you're talking about, Potter,' he said, his customary expressionless mien hanging by a thread.

'When the two of you worked together,' Potter explained, shoving his spectacles back up his nose, 'Hermione tried hard to get your attention.'

Severus suddenly wanted to hit Potter right in the face. 'Don't be ridiculous,' he hissed.

The twit infuriated him by laughing. 'I know what I'm talking about,' he said. 'We were roommates, then...I heard about it in more detail than I wanted to.' The expression in his eerie green eyes changed. 'I don't know where she found you, but I'm glad to see you, sir. You belong here, with the rest of us. Still, she's my best friend, and I won't have her hurt.' He frowned. 'So if you're not up for it, you'd better leave her alone.'

'Are you two becoming reacquainted?'

The retort, to tell Potter to bugger off and mind his own business, froze on Severus' lips as he looked down at Miss Granger, who stood now at his side, as if it were her natural place in the world.

'Yes,' he replied, feeling tremendous relief to have her attention again. 'Did the doll reach her final destination?'

'She did,' the young woman agreed, turning her back on Potter, thus excluding him from the conversation.

Severus saw Potter roll his eyes and shake his head before crossing the room to join a throng of the younger Order members. Severus didn't want to stay here, at the party, and share Miss Granger with all these people. He wanted her on his own, wanted her undivided attention, wanted things he could neither identify nor articulate. Gathering his courage, he said, 'Miss Granger, would you...'

But she cut across him, taking his hand and pulling him behind her as she walked out of the sitting room. 'I need your help in the kitchen,' she said.

Stupidly, he followed her into the corridor and down to the entry hall, then down the narrow stone stairs to the kitchen, conscious only of her bare hand clasp on his, this first contact of flesh on flesh burning through him with white-hot intensity. In the kitchen doorway, she stopped and turned to face him. The becoming flush in her cheeks had gone pale, and in the faint light of the oil lamp, her eyes were anxious, even as her lips trembled. Severus drank in every detail, the fruition of a moment long anticipated yet never expected ringing so persistently in his mind that he was unable to think clearly.

'Look out for the nargles,' she said, her voice sounding strained and breathless.

Severus noted that she had twined the fingers of the hand he held with his, an action of tremendous consequence with too many possible interpretations for him to quickly analyse...but she was waiting for his response, and he forced himself to concentrate. 'What's a nargle?' he asked, hearing his own voice, rough and uneven, without recognising it.

'They infest the mistletoe,' she said, and he followed her gaze up to see the beribboned sprig hanging from the doorway.

He was rattled, but he was not beyond reason...he could see that she had deliberately led him away from the others, brought him to a relatively private spot, and stopped with him beneath the mistletoe. It was an invitation, a celebration, and a challenge all rolled into one; the only question was how he would respond.

With an exercise of will beyond any he had ever assayed, he bent his face and pressed his lips to hers. Oh, he was not adept at kissing, but it seemed not to matter at all. The whimper she uttered when she wrapped her arms about his neck was galvanic. His arms gathered her to him, and he dared to trace the soft cleft of her lips with the tip of his tongue. She opened to him, and he lost himself in her. Their tongues touched, sliding each along the length of the other, and then they began to practice the art of thrust and parry, duelling as they had ever done on their long winter walks, communicating with racing hearts and desperate hands the things between them for which there had never before been words.

When at last their lips parted, they stood with foreheads pressed together, lightly gasping, clinging as if to the only solid entity in a world of suddenly shifting realities.

She found her voice first and said, 'Why were you in the park?'

Without thought, he cupped her cheek with the palm of his hand and said, 'I was looking for you.'

She turned her face into his hand and pressed a kiss there. 'Yes, I would,' she said.

He gently raised her chin until her eyes looked into his. 'Yes you would? What?' he asked.

'Upstairs,' she answered, as if that were a full and acceptable answer.

His lips curved into a half-smile, and he shook his head, almost apologetically, to show he did not understand her.

Slowly and very distinctly, she reminded him, 'You were asking me, "Miss Granger, would you" when I interrupted you and brought you down here.'

He laughed, the sound soft, scarcely more than an exhalation of breath. 'But I didn't finish the question,' he pointed out, feeling euphoria building in him, an elation beyond anything he had ever experienced.

'It doesn't matter,' she said serenely, twining her arms about his waist and pressing her cheek to his chest. 'Regardless of the question, the answer is yes.'

They walked along Grimmauld Place, hand in hand, unmindful of the cold. They had no definite destination, except to go there together, no definite planned activity, except to do it together, no immediate intentions to be anything, except *together*.

Upon the earth on Christmas Eve, two walked side by side beneath stars no longer indifferent, but now complicit in the magic of the night, and the moon shone upon the twin tracks of footsteps in the snow.

A/N: Love and thanks to Shug and DeeMichelle for beta reading and to MagicAlly for Brit-picking, even if I didn't always take their advice!

The title of this piece comes from a song by Sting, which appears on his new Christmas album. The inspiration came from the lyrics of the song, combined with a Christmas skit from a very old television program. In the skit, a bum (homeless person in today's parlance) finds a Raggedy Ann doll lying in the snow in the park, and he fantasizes that she is a real girl who is sitting, walking, and dancing with him. At one point, she even becomes "real" ... well, you can see how that would make me think of Severus.

SubHub had a strong hand in shaping this story, and many details come from our own winter courtship, during which we did quite a bit of walking, both in and out of the snow. I had a cranberry-coloured coat.

Thanks to you all for your reads and reviews. Merry Christmas!