

# A Christmas Alone (or, Letting Go)

*by Keppiehed*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

Awww! A sadfic about love and loss during the yuletide. Harry lost his heart... will he ever be the same again? This one will wring a tear from your tender hearts!

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Prompts: #12(Snarry: Harry tries to find the perfect present to help him confess his love to his teacher), #28(A Christmas Alone, sadfic) #39(After 20 years of bliss, Harry and Snape reminisce about what the ornaments on their tree mean, no need for canon pairing); list 2: #4(snowfall), #7(tinsel), #10(fireplace), #18 (baubles), #39(spiked eggnog), #57(mulled wine)

A/N: This was written for the mini-fest Christmas Challenge! A big, heartfelt thank you to the great job my beta did on this. Without her guidance, this would not be nearly as shiny a finished piece as you see before you. Thank you to Literaryspell. Any mistakes left are my own.

Harry stood at the window, watching the snow fall gently outside. His hands gripped the edge of the counter, and he could see his own countenance reflected in the glare of the panes. His glasses were a little bit askew, as always, but he ignored that. He let his eyes glaze over as he stared at the swirling patterns that the eddies made, the flakes doing a graceful dance in the frigid air. It was mesmerizing, and he got a little lost in it. He realized it was dark in the kitchen around him. The shrill ring of the phone broke the silence and brought him out of his mindless reverie.

He gazed at the appliance on the wall as if he had forgotten what it was for. It didn't often ring these days. He couldn't bring himself to cross the room, a short distance, just to pick it up and answer it. Even the few simple steps seemed like too much effort. Hopefully it would stop soon and leave him to his misery.

A woman's voice called out to him, out of place in the wasteland that was now his home. Hermione. He had forgotten. What was she saying? He struggled to focus. "...we are running late, Harry, what with this beastly weather and all. I just wanted to let you know. It will be about an extra forty minutes, that's all, but Ron and I will make it as soon as we can manage. Where are you? I hope you didn't get caught as well." The silence stretched out, and he detected her worry, but he stayed put. "So, just ringing to let you know. We'll be there shortly. Bye."

Harry sighed. He turned and looked around his house. It had once been cozy and appealing, alive and warm with love and laughter. Now, it was barren and empty. He didn't have the energy to do anything but sit in the dark, staring at the walls. He could barely make himself presentable for his job. It took all of the effort that he could muster to walk and talk, smile and nod like his heart hadn't broken and turned to dust in his chest. He was a shell of himself and what he used to be, but that didn't matter now.

It was Christmas again already, Harry thought with a stab of pain, vaguely surprised that anything even had the power to hurt him anymore. He wasn't keeping his promise,

but what did that matter? Somehow, it did, but he couldn't bear to uphold traditions now. Maybe next year. Or the year after that. Someday.

Hermione and Ron were coming to visit out of pity, he supposed. He had no one else, now. After the war, Molly and Arthur hadn't been the same, not with the loss of their son. He certainly hadn't made it any better with that business with Ginny, but that couldn't have been helped. They were all different after that. Things changed, and he wasn't sorry for it. He was regretful that he had hurt some people, and that the Weasleys couldn't forgive him, but that was just another price to pay. He had gotten his rewards, too.

Ron and Hermione stood by him, and he had gone on with his life. After he and Professor Snape had come to terms with their feelings for each other, nothing had ever been the same. He never looked back. Harry sat heavily in his chair in the living room and let the memories engulf him like a warm blanket on a cold night. They were all he had now.

His favorite was last Christmas. He hadn't been able to think of it before; the memory was too dear, the grief too near, the thought so precious to him that he dared not ruin it. He took it out now, the reminiscence a delicate bauble from a curio cabinet, and examined it from every angle, as if he were seeing it for the first time, as if he were there and reliving it...

They had made a big deal out of the holiday, like they did every year. Christmas meant a lot to the both of them, and it seemed like every year there was just one more ornament or one more decoration that found its way into the house. Severus pretended to be exasperated about it, and Harry teased him back, and it got to be a joke between them. After twenty years together, they had settled into a life of bliss that was envied by everyone who knew them.

"Harry, I do believe that the party this year was a resounding success," Severus said, raising his glass of mulled wine in a toast to themselves, "even if our guests could hardly find a place to sit amongst all of our... so tasteful yuletide trimmings." His voice held gentle mockery.

Harry grinned. He threw himself into the overstuffed armchair that was deemed his and slung one leg over the arm of it in an attitude of careless relaxation. "Yup. Everybody had a good time. We know how to throw a party, that's for sure!" He reached over for a half empty mug of spiked eggnog and took a sniff. "Thanks in no small part to your home brew. What do you put in here, anyway?"

Severus lifted a delicate black brow in his trademark gesture. "You know I won't give up my secret, even now, Harry." He sounded amused.

The smile died off of Harry's face at the unwelcome reminder of things he had been trying to forget. Severus had been sick, and it was not getting any better. In fact, it appeared to be worsening, and the disease accelerating at an alarming rate. The healers had detected a mass a few months ago, and there was nothing they could do. Harry refused to believe it, and he stolidly ignored any of the news, chatting cheerily about his work, taking over any of the things that Severus couldn't manage. It was almost impossible not to see the effects, though, and all of the guests had been shocked at the marked difference in him in such a short time. He had lost weight and was so weak. It was clear that he was failing, and rapidly.

It should have cast a pall over the party, but it didn't. Harry refused to lose heart. He was dogged in his devotion, and in his determination not to see the worst. A cure might be found. It may not be what the healers thought. He would not acknowledge the gravest outcome. He couldn't!

Severus knew better and thought Harry was being a fool, but there was no talking to him. They carried on with their regular yuletide celebrations. Severus let him have that. He didn't have the heart to take the joy from Harry's face. He might be dying, but he couldn't bear to watch Harry die with him. He was a selfish bastard. He wanted to see the world happy while he was still in it. His lip curled a little sardonically at himself. He was getting so sentimental at this late stage in the game!

"What?" Harry had looked over at him and noticed his expression, attentive as ever.

Severus was quiet for a moment. "I am content. I was just considering that and remembering our long life together. Remember when we got that first tree? And I was looking at the ornaments. The purple one there always reminds me of you." He reached over, and with a slight smile, picked a stray thread of silver tinsel out of Harry's black locks.

"Really?" Harry pushed his glasses back onto his nose. "I would've thought the red and yellow lion that roars 'Gryffindor!' when you pull its tail!"

Severus grimaced. "From Ron, if I am not mistaken?" he answered dryly.

Harry grinned. "Of course. He didn't want you to forget."

Severus rolled his eyes. "As if I could."

Harry squinted at the tree. "I like the wedding bell." His tone was quiet.

"Yes, that was our first ornament," Severus answered carefully. They had been married on the winter solstice. The bell always held a place of honor at the front of the tree. Harry's eyes looked suspiciously teary, so Severus continued smoothly on. "I think you have entirely too many trinkets for yourself on there. Take that golden snitch..."

Harry swallowed gratefully and focused on the adornment in question. "Rightfully so! That one is special! It comes apart like a real snitch, with wings!"

Severus snorted. "And wrecks the room until it is caught. I always detested that one in particular. A nuisance, I say."

Harry ran his hand through his headful of hair, making it stand up haphazardly. "There is one I always liked." He blushed a little. "The potion bottle."

Severus' face transformed with a knowing look. "Oh, yes, I remember that well. A favorite of mine. That was what brought us together in the first place, was it not... *Mr. Potter?*"

Harry's blush deepened, but his breath stilled in his throat at those words.

Severus was amazed that after all these years Harry still had the innocence to be embarrassed about certain things and to still be affected by him, but he fully intended to take advantage. "A certain young student of mine was looking for a way to show me his affection. You were so young... all green eyes and so uncertain..."

"I agonized over the perfect gift for you. I didn't know what to get. I had no idea, you were so dark and imposing, everything seemed silly and stupid. In the end, I settled on that stupid Christmas tree ornament, just because I could engrave on it." Harry's voice was strained.

"I was so stunned. I read that, and we never looked back." Severus finished. He cut his eyes over to Harry. "Mr. Potter, come here."

Harry shuddered. They had not played this game in a long time.

"You will do as I say." His voice was soft and dangerous.

Harry felt himself turn to jelly. He slid off of his chair and stood on his knees before Snape. "Yes, Professor?"

"I require assistance with my... problem." Snape's voice was low and liquid, the kind he knew Harry liked. He gestured at his lap, and the raging hard-on he already had. "You will... accommodate me."

"Yes, sir." Harry licked his lips. He reached over and freed Snape from his trousers, both of them moaning a little at the increased contact. In this matter, they had always been well matched. He fondled him gently and heard Snape make a moan, but then he was anxious to taste him. Harry leaned down and gently licked the tip of his erection.

Snape sucked his breath in. Harry swirled around the tip awhile, taking his time. He was a bit of a tease, but he was very good at what he did, and the wait was worthwhile. He wet his lips and worked slowly down the shaft, keeping his lips taut, imagining his mouth was his other hole, and working it slowly. He took him in, relaxing his throat muscles until nearly all of Snape was encased in Harry's warm, hot mouth. Harry just paused a moment to let him feel that, then moved his tongue around. This seemed to drive Snape wild. His hips were bucking almost immediately. Harry grinned in triumph.

"Wait... unh... Mr. Potter... too soon. You are too good. I want to come inside of you." Snape's voice was breathless, something that Harry didn't hear very often. That alone made desire flare up in him even more strongly. Regretfully, he gave a few more bobs, and then let Snape go with a cheeky *pop*.

Snape's eyes were dark with passion. "Well, well, Mr. Potter. It seems you need a lesson. Come here so I can give it to you."

Harry leaned in for a kiss, tasting the mulled wine. Snape started slowly, tracing the edges of Harry's lips, but soon they were both deeply involved, tongues dueling. Harry felt himself go lightheaded. He still wanted this man with a fever, even after all of this time. It was incredible. He felt a fire light in his belly as if someone had set spark to tinder, and it flared up uncontrollably. He had to have it, now. He felt the control slipping away. "Please," he said, breaking the kiss. "I want you."

Snape growled low in his throat and reached for his wand, which was never far from hand. "*Divesto*," he nearly snarled in his haste, and suddenly, all barriers of cloth were gone. Another quickly muttered spell, and Harry felt himself lubricated. "Kneel, Mr. Potter," Snape tried to sneer, but his voice was filled with lust.

Harry turned around on all fours, needing no direction, or preparation. "Yes, Professor," he whimpered.

Snape positioned himself, but before he plunged in, he paused. "Do you want me?"

Harry was nearly shaking with need. "Yes."

"Then say it," Snape directed.

"I want you," Harry whispered.

"Beg me for it," Snape ground out.

Harry got harder and felt himself dripping. "Please, Professor, I need you. Now!" He was nearly crying.

Snape leaned over Harry and traced his jawline almost gently. "Then you shall have me," he said, just before he plunged in, almost brutally, but that was how Harry liked it. He had to bite his lip to keep from crying out, from pain or pleasure, he didn't know; maybe both. In a minute, it didn't matter. He was groaning anyway. Snape reached down and stroked Harry's cock in time with his thrusts, and though it didn't last long, it couldn't at that pace. They both came simultaneously in a grand climax that made them see stars together.

Later, they magicked the mess away, but elected to curl up on the floor and just stare at the tree and the lights it made in the darkness. They were both silent, but Severus reached out and captured Harry's hand in his long, skeletally thin one. Harry suddenly felt choked up. They just lay there. Harry tried to will the hateful tears away when he heard Severus finally speak.

"Promise me something, Harry."

Harry propped himself up on an elbow and forced a grin. "Anything, Severus. You know you have only to ask."

Those dark eyes stared back at him, the depths unfathomable. "Promise me you will not pack all this away forever. You will keep Christmas alive, after I am gone. For yourself. You will honor the traditions we have made. We have a life here. It won't die with me."

Harry felt his smile break, his heart crack in two. He couldn't seem to understand things, the words had lost all meaning. He felt life slow to a stop, and he was left alone inside this moment that turned surreal. The reality of what was happening was too great to be borne by any human being. It hadn't even happened yet, and already the grief might stop his heart and suffocate his breath. How could this happen? How could the world go on without Severus in it? He looked down upon his great love, the man for whom his world was worth living, and there was only one answer. His eyes blurred with tears, the ache in his throat so sharp he could barely speak, but he could only do one thing. "Yes, I promise."

The relief in that face made it all worth it, and Harry promised himself that he would hide his own sorrow from this man. He had the rest of his broken life to live in agony. The last gift he could give him would be to ease his mind.

A sharp gust of wind against the windowpanes brought Harry back to the present. Here he was, still sitting in the dark. Alone, waiting for Ron and Hermione to come and babysit him. He rubbed his face. He felt a thousand years old. It was Christmas again, and he had not kept his promise. It was too hard.

The glitter of something caught his eye, and Harry frowned. What was that? He had taken down anything colorful or joyful in the months after Severus' death, wanting to shroud himself in bleakness. If he felt barren on the inside, so should he be surrounded on the outside. Yet, the sparkle of something familiar and bright crimson caught his eye from under his desk. Harry felt a flicker of long suppressed curiosity, and he got down on his hands and knees to investigate.

He reached his hand under the desk, and his fingers closed around something hard and smooth. Drawing it out into the light for closer inspection, his heart lurched. It was the potion bottle ornament from so many years ago, the first gift he had ever given Severus! How had it come to be here? It must have fallen when he'd wrapped up the decorations last year, and he hadn't noticed. Seeing it now, it was as if Severus were standing there with him. He had never been able to recall him so strongly before; he could almost see him, his long face and slightly big nose. Pale skin, dark hair... Harry's heart yearned, and he closed his eyes for a moment, mastering himself. His fingers turned the smooth bottle over and over, and when he opened his eyes, his eyes fell upon the inscription.

*To Professor Snape, whom I treasure among all others. May you accept this token of my esteem. Have a Merry Christmas! With much love, Harry.*

Harry's eyes streamed with tears when he remembered how stunned Severus had been to receive that from him! Where had that brave boy gone? What would he have missed out on if he had been too scared to take that step? Here he was, hiding in his house, a shattered and broken soul.

Suddenly Harry realized that this was forever. Severus wasn't ever coming back. He wasn't doing any good to himself or anyone else by turning his back on the world. He could grieve and still live his life. He could have his sadness, it would never go away--but he could still go on with life. That would not dishonor Severus. That was what he had wanted. That was what he had asked Harry for. Harry had just been too stubborn to see it.

There was a knock at the door. Hermione and Ron. It was as if he had woken from a long nap. He looked around his cheerless place and saw nothing to indicate welcoming friendship or holiday spirits. He was sorry that he didn't have more than companionship to offer at this time of year, but that would have to do. That was better than nothing. He took a deep breath and went to go meet his friends.

Before he did that, though, he looked at the bottle in his hand, and he gently set it on the mantle above the fireplace, right in center, where he would be sure to see it frequently and think of Severus. He paused a moment. He had to let go. He could almost see Severus standing right in front of him. "Goodbye, my love," he said quietly. Severus seemed to bow stiffly in that formal way he had, and fade. Harry felt unexpectedly lighter.

Harry turned and went to the door. Ron was there with Hermione. They were shivering in the winter chill. "Harry...it's good to see you!" Hermione said, stepping in.

Harry let them into his home. "It's good to see you, too," he replied. And to his surprise, he found that he meant it this time.