

All the Time in the World

by juniperus

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Severus winced as he pulled the scarf tighter 'round his neck against the bitter chill. Full of venom, the wound was still angry and weeping, months after it should have healed.

Still, he was alive. And grateful for the preparations he had made for the slim possibility of his own survival. It was one time he'd listened to Albus' advice and not regretted it, later.

She, on the other hand, had not been under the old man's Machiavellian thumb all those years. She had felt no compunction to follow his direction without inserting her own formidable intellect and personal integrity. She also ignored the natterings of her colleagues, preferring the peace of her book-filled office to opaque social niceties, gossip, and speculation.

It was something else for which he was deeply grateful.

Severus stopped and smiled, despite himself. His tiny cottage was well-hidden three-quarters of the year, but in winter the cheery visage—golden glow spilling from the windows, smoke merrily dancing from the chimney, and the sight of fresh snow on the thatch—could be clearly seen through the bare trees.

Home.

He continued through the snow, pausing to stomp the snow off his boots as he reached the door—a door that opened at the sound of his arrival.

"You requested a tree, my sweet," he said and smiled again. Smiling was becoming a habit, he'd noticed.

"It's beautiful, Severus!"

He found himself with an armful of appreciative woman, warm and smelling of ginger and cinnamon. Even though—or, perhaps *because*—he knew his prodigious nose was cold, he buried his face in her neck. When she squealed and tried to pull away he held her closer, breathing deeply of the scent of gingerbread and *her*.

"Happy Christmas, Aurora."

She blinked away the happy tears threatening to overflow their banks. "It's, love... because you're alive and we're together. Free. *Finally.*" She brushed the snowflakes from his hair before stepping back to pull him into their home. "I've mulled some wine—come in and get warm. We have all evening to decorate the tree."

"All the time in the world," he agreed as he stepped inside and closed the door behind him.