

The First-Footer

by juniperus

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Neville started at the firm *knock, knock, knock* on his door. He glanced at the clock as he hurried across the room – half-past midnight.

It took all of his strength to not allow the whipping, whistling wind to wrench the door from his hands, holding it open just wide enough to allow the tall, dark figure – and a great deal of snow – to enter.

"I...", Neville mumbled breathlessly as he fought the door closed. "I didn't think you'd come." He stared at his bare feet in a puddle of melting snow before looking up at his guest. "I *hoped*, but..." He trailed off.

"As I told you last week, a Hogmanay first-footer is supposed to be tall, dark, and *handsome*. But as thorough a student as ever, you persisted in your folly - so here I am." Severus Snape turned to leave.

"And as *I* told *you*," Neville replied, "as far as I am concerned, you fit the description."

Severus raised a single eyebrow at this statement. As he looked down at the hand grasping his arm, the other joined the race to his hairline.

"I meant everything I said in your office last week. But if you want to go, now... you can." Neville loosed his grip. "But I have whisky to warm you."

Severus' brow furrowed, but he made no move to leave. "Whisky?"

Quick as a wink - and a mumbled *Accio* - a bottle flew into Neville's hands. He poured and whispered, *Estus Liquidus*, before he handed his guest a mug with two fingers of now steaming whisky and summoned a bit of Gryffindor courage. "Not just whisky... but it's a start."

Severus' cheeks turned the same hue as that of his still-cold nose as he accepted the drink. He looked at Neville over the edge of the mug as he sipped. "Is that so?" he rasped.

Neville said nothing - largely because he was too shocked at himself to speak - as he poured himself some whisky and met the eyes of the man before him.

He motioned towards a settee next to the crackling fire. "A good New Year to you, Mr. Snape." Neville's tone was casual, but his eyes asked the question his impetuous invitation one week previous merely implied.

Severus' cheeks colored once again, but met Neville's eyes as he replied, "Perhaps, Mr. Longbottom... perhaps *it will* be." He walked to the fire and looked at Neville expectantly before taking a seat.

Neville smiled to himself as he followed suit. "Yes, I think it will."