

# Stories by the Fireside

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## 1-Jan

Chapter 1 of 1

Charles Dickens helps bring Hermione and Snape together.

Curled up in front of the staff-room fire, Hermione was dozing under an afghan when nimble fingers snatched the book she had been reading from her lap.

"What's this?"

His voice hadn't changed much from the days when he was still her professor. Cold, indignant, sometimes harsh. But the Severus Snape standing over her plush perch with a bemused half-smile was proving himself daily to be something else entirely.

"*A Christmas Carol*," she scowled, unsettled from his sneaking entrance. "Heard of it?"

The frown that settled on her coworker's face was startlingly pained.

"Father never approved of Dickens. Too fantastical."

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She instantly regretted saying anything at all. Snape could have seen for himself what the book was without her snide remark recalling a childhood he had clearly kept hidden for a reason.

"No," Snape murmured, continuing unbidden. "The ghost of Marley and his spectral counterparts smarted too much of the unholy magical world he could never bring himself to understand."

This revelation had left Hermione gob-smacked. And this from a man married to a witch, with a wizard for a son, Hermione thought darkly, wishing with all her might that she could have one quick go at old Mr. Snape.

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Watching Snape sink, uncharacteristically flustered, into a divan across the rug from her, spreading his papers out on an adjacent desk, Hermione had the frightening urge to rush over and hug him. Scarier still was the desire to press her lips to a brow that had, to her knowledge, known little of such tender touches.

"Perhaps he was afraid he would find Scrooge to be too close a parallel to his own life?" she ventured after many moments of oppressive silence.

"Miserly, cruel, unloving and unloved," Snape scoffed sardonically without looking up.

"No," Hermione replied gently. "Ultimately open to reform."

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To this, there was no reply. But the sight of him putting quill to paper, blotting out his students' poor attempts at coherency with hard, red strokes, was too much for her to bear.

"Well!" she exclaimed, nearly causing him to upset his ink pot.

"Well?" He eyed her suspiciously.

"Well," she intoned. "You can't be allowed to remain in the proverbial dark any longer. Dickens is one of the Greats, and *A Christmas Carol* is arguably his best work."

"Do you propose to read to me, Miss Granger?"

"Precisely."

When he didn't immediately refuse, she took it as an encouragement.