

Advent Calendar

by TeddyRadiator

This challenge was suggested by of_anoesis at LiveJournal. Each day of Advent was represented by a snippet from a well-known Christmas carols or song.

A Song A Day...

Chapter 1 of 1

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The following drabble series was written over the course of the month of December 2012, based on an Advent Calendar Song challenge. Each day, we were given a snippet from a familiar Christmas song, and were supposed to write a drabble based on it. I further challenged myself to make it a serial, and *further* challenged myself by writing it in alternate first persons. Why yes, I *am* a masochist! I had no idea what I would write until that day, and I trusted that my Muse would deliver.

Disclaimer: I make no money from this work - all characters belong to JK Rowling.

Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

1 - Mistletoe & Wine

"So once again, Hermione, why did you drag me here?"

The combination of cool disdain and pretended indifference would have infuriated me two hours ago when I was sober, but elf-made wine has always gone to my head like a niffler heading for Hagrid's pants.

"Because it'll be fun! Remember fun, Severus?"

He grunts noncommittally. Then again, he's pissed as well. "The bloody point, Granger?"

His eyes follow mine up to the mistletoe overhead. The resulting smirk looks dead sexy through my wine-goggles.

He pulls me close. "Is this the point in which you have your wicked way with me?"

2 Scumbag

Is this really happening, or is Granger some alcohol-fueled fantasy? She's so warm and soft in my arms. I close my eyes, sure it's a dream. I hold her tightly, trembling with anticipation.

"Oh, Severus," she whispers, and our lips touch...

Suddenly she pushes away from me. Her voice is harsh with disgust. "Ugh! What's that smell?"

When I see what I've actually kissed, my rage instantly burns the alcohol out of my brain.

"Kissee-kissee-kissee!" A shrill voice cackles.

"You scumbag!" I roar. My hexes follow Peeves down the hall, the mistletoe still peeking from between his bony, transparent arsecheeks.

3 - Wrap It Up And Send It

Then Severus was gone, striding after that berk, Peeves; anger and sobriety radiating off him in splendid, dark waves, robes billowing, hair flying. If he wasn't so bloody sexy, he'd be a walking cliché.

I looked up where the mistletoe had been, and sulked. I'd been trying for years to get the man to notice I was more than a bushy head and a waving hand. Well, since I'd returned as a Hogwarts professor, at least. Tonight was the faculty Christmas party; students had gone home - it was the one chance to let down our hair and have fun.

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Actually, we were a pretty short-haired bunch to begin with. Except, of course, the mysterious, double agent-cum-spy-cum-hero-cum-enigma that was my former professor and now colleague, Severus 'I-might-be-a-changed-wizard-but-I-still-think-you're-all-dunderheads' Snape. Somehow, he'd managed to do the unthinkable and survive, even thrive, post-war. I thought he was knicker-wettingly, groin-grindingly fab.

True, he still treated me like something he wished he knew how to magically remove from the bottom of his shoe, but that would change. I'd worn my second best bra-and-knickers ensemble tonight to make sure of it. I was on a dead-cert promise, until Peeves' arse decided to come between me and paradise.

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Perhaps I was being too subtle. Looking around the deserted hall, I listened for signs of his wrath. My chance to kiss Severus had been rudely interrupted. If I didn't get to snog him tonight I was going to break someone.

With just enough residual wine in my system to give me a reckless edge, I had a brainwave. Snape's quarters were just down the hall; I could lie in wait for him; when he returned from blasting Peeves into the next solar system, all fresh from the fight and looking flushed and sweaty, I'd be draped over his bed.

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He'd sneer at me with those blazing, dark lustful eyes, and I'd be dead fanciable and come hither, and he would dive on me like a grindy low rustling up a cod. It would be fast and furious and thrilling, and tomorrow post-hangover I'd give him the chance to redeem himself in style, bedroom-wise.

I practiced my huskiest voice as I headed for his quarters. "Come here, you sexy beast," I commanded, my voice whisky rough and two octaves lower than usual. I sounded awfully good.

"Pepper-Up will take care of that cold, dearie," suggested a hag in a nearby portrait.

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### 4 - Snowflake's Hope In Hell

Peeves was now a greasy spot of ectoplasm on the floor, and I walked back to the hall where this whole mess started. Hermione was gone.

Every carefully laid plan, every intricately detailed scheme had gone awry this holiday season. I had to face the truth; I had a snowflake's hope in hell of getting the new Transfigurations professor into my arms. My luck with Gryffindor witches was holding true as usual.

I decided to cut my losses and go to bed. I needed a whisky and a mouthwash chaser. I had entered that kiss prepared for tongues, you know.

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### 5 - Boughs of Holly

Now, this *should* have worked.

In the cold light of day, the plan may have carried room for error, but taking all variables into consideration - preparation, situation, emotion and blood alcohol levels, a blind man could see the potential for success.

The little green and silver bows, the transfigured little knickers, the do-me shoes - I was festooned for shagability. All I had to do now was wait for Severus to return to his room, and claim his kiss on any or all of the three strategically-placed sprigs of mistletoe.

If only I hadn't passed out before he arrived...

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### 6 - Virgin

The moment I entered my quarters, I knew she was there. She'd broken my wards clumsily; they sat awry, like a door hanging off its hinges, just warped and compromised enough for a tiny witch to slither through.

With a pounding heart, I moved through my private space, at once irritated and flattered. Gods, these Gryffindors didn't have a shred of finesse. On the other hand, I hadn't had my end away...

Let's just say it had been so long since my old fella had been on the business end of a witch he had almost regressed back to virginity.

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I wanted to believe that Granger fancied me; after all, we'd done this little dance for quite awhile now, not that she had ever been aware that the Slytherin waltz was being played in double time. For my part, I had observed and paced myself, waiting for the right moment, watching as she and that oik Weasley entertained the Wizarding World with their spectacular breakup, then bided my time when she returned to Hogwarts to teach.

It would not do to appear overly eager. My days of trailing pathetically down the hall after a Gryffindor girl were thankfully behind me.

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I wasn't some lovesick leannen sidhe anymore; I had earned the right to live with a little dignity. Dignity was my watchword, my mantra. The question was, where was Granger? She was nowhere to be seen, however...

There was a trail of discarded clothing, which started just inside the door. I followed it, picking up garments as I walked, my heart beating harder and faster with each item I

collected. Dress robes, little black dress, stockings, suspenders...

There was an empty bottle of good firewhisky lying on the floor just inside my bedroom. She'd consumed it all...including, apparently, the cork.

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She was sprawled on my bed, in what might have once been considered a provocative pose. Silver and green ribbons tethered her wrists and ankles to my bedposts. Her stilettos had gouged a hole at the bottom of my silk duvet. She had a sprig of mistletoe on her left breast, one on her right knee, and one on the end of her nose. She was snoring, she was drooling, and she dangled like a marionette left behind by a deranged puppeteer.

At that moment, she shifted, snorted and farted in her sleep. I sighed.

I was, quite possibly, in love.

7 Drummer

Pa-RUM-pum-pum-pum...

Apparently, while I was sleeping, a marching band paraded into my head and they're currently playing Scotland The Brave in double 4/4 time. I'm also pretty sure a baby dragon curled up in my mouth and died.

I further know for a fact I'm dying. I have the mother of all pounding, self-inflicted headaches.

I also notice as I blearily rise from my deathbed that I'm in my own room, and there's something attached to my hand. No matter how I try to flick it away, it remains as tenaciously stuck to my palm as one of Voldemort's bogies.

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My neck creaks alarmingly atop a spine that some demon has emptied of spinal fluid and replaced with ground glass. Focusing is painful. The nightgown I'm wearing is LOUD.

Even smiling at the vial in my hand hurts, but I'm grateful. I am, bless Snape's little cotton socks, glued to Sober-up Hangover Potion.

It's one of his miracle cure-alls for the type of masochistic self-medication I've indulged in. Well, after all, it's his fault. If he weren't so dead sexy I wouldn't have destroyed my liver with his cheap rotgut waiting for him to come and take advantage of me.

~~~~~

I could kiss him, but not with this mouth. My breath is its own Unforgivable. I drink, swallow hard, and wait for my suffering to end. My head blessedly clears.

That's when I see the note attached to the hermetically-sealed vial in my hand. In Severus' spidery, crabbed copperplate, it reads, *trust this will not go amiss. And while I appreciate that there wasn't that much firewhisky left in the jar, what in Merlin's name were you doing with that cork?*

Cork? What is that great oaf babbling about co...

Oh.

I look guiltily down at my knickers. *Well...*

8 - Frosty

I am the most popular Wizard at Hogwarts on the morning after the night before. All and sundry, from Pomona Sprout to Hagrid, come to me, with sheepish, pleading smiles and trembling, outstretched hands, ready to sell their alcohol-poisoned little souls for a remedy only I can produce.

On these occasions, I am unusually vociferously loud in my enquiries, and I tend to gleefully slam my laboratory door repeatedly as I fetch the Hangover Potion, even though I don't actually store it there. I can almost see them shrivel like salt-doused snails as I dangle their salvation under their noses.

~~~~~

They have come and gone; even I'm forced to admire the recuperative effects. Dying, pitiful excuses for human beings show up at my door; proud, light-footed Wizarding folk leave, happy to be amongst the living again.

There is a knock on the door, a latecomer. I play a little game with myself; will it be Poppy, whose pride forces her to try her own potions before giving up, or is it Minerva, with her famous head for Scotch...

It is Granger, looking battle-fatigued and still clutching the Potion bottle I glued to her hand with that industrial strength Sticking Charm.

~~~~~

She has on a snug Muggle cardi, misbuttoned, which does extraordinary things for her breasts, and a pair of Muggle jeans which could legally be declared skin, except they're unzipped and hanging on her slender frame. My eyes roam over her body hungrily. Gods, the tempting little minx barely dressed herself before coming down here to finish what she started.

Last night had been a bit of a mess, but I had a feeling she was about to make up for it; in fact, this witch could make up for a lot of shortcomings in Toby Snape's little boy's life.

~~~~~

She holds out her hand, and I grasp it and pull her close. I have rehearsed this moment; I know all the variables, the responses, and exactly how to react to them.

I will say, "You still owe me that kiss, Granger," in my best low, throbbing growl (I've practiced), and she will be on me like Dumbledore on a sherbet lemon.

"You still owe..."

"Sorry Severus, I don't mean to be rude, but can you unstick this fucking bottle? I can't brush my teeth with my left hand."

Well, *one* of us has to be the adult, here.

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## 9 - Nine Ladies Dancing

They are waiting for me in the Three Broomsticks, like a coven on the piss. I cringe as I perch on the barstool, ordering tea. Anything stronger will render me useless.

"So, what happened then?" someone asks. I'm not sure who; I'm too busy basking in the glow of my own humiliation to take much notice of the details right now.

"When? Right before I nearly blinded him with my hangover breath, or after I told him that he'd forgot to give me my wand before levitating me to bed, dressing me, and gluing a hangover potion to my hand?"

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"Did he act offended?" Aurora Sinistra asks.

"A bit," I admit. Gods, the look he gave me downwind...

"Was he sharp to the point of rude?" Poppy inserts.

"He was somewhat on the terse side."

"Was he in a bad mood?" Rolanda asks, yellow eyes flashing.

"How would you know the difference?" snorts Madam Rosemerta, plunking three firewhiskys, two butterbeers, a gillywater, cooking sherry, a cream stout and my tea on the table. We all grab at them like we've never seen liquids.

"Did he insult you?" enquires Pomona.

"He said Voldemort had shat things more pleasant than my breath."

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"I'd say you've as good as pulled, Hermione dear," Minerva says, smiling. "Foul mood, rude, insulting. Well, it's obvious, isn't it? The man obviously adores you. He's practically made love to you, girl."

"I knew this would happen." Sybil Trelawney's morose voice wafts up from the corner, where she is seriously molesting her sherry. Everyone silently looks at her for a moment, then turns back to me.

"Aaaaanyway," Septima Vector interjects, "now you need to take the bull by the horns. Strike while the wizard is hot."

"But he told me to take my wand and fuck off!" I wail.

~~~~~

There is a collective gasp from the group, and eight witches eye me with various shades of envy, disappointment and smugness. Galleons change hands, drinks are bought as consolation prizes, winners pat shoulders commiserally. "Will someone tell me what's going on?" I demand. I note I'm not on the receiving end of either money or drink.

Minerva laughs as she collects a small bag from a very grumbly Madam Hooch. "We were wondering when he was going to stop pussyfooting around. I knew he would eventually.

"Severus is terrified of being hurt, Hermione. The quaffle's in your hands, my dear."

~~~~~

She looks at me sympathetically. "Forget all you know, Hermione. Go with your gut. There's a wizard at Hogwarts right now waiting for you to make the next move. What's it going to be?"

I look from witch to witch. Each one has taught me, in their fashion, and each one welcomed me back to Hogwarts like a friend. Each one knows Severus Snape far better than I, and yet I'm the one who's totally smitten with him.

*Merlin's sagging ballbag. I'm in deep smit.*

"I want to make him my wizard," I whisper. "Have I completely bolloxed things up?"

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## 10 - Deep And Crisp And Even

She is in her study, reading. She doesn't look up as the door swings open to admit me. Outwardly, I have never appeared so serene. A black swan am I; gliding in as if on casters.

I am paddling for dear life.

"I trust," I begin, and clear my throat, dignity incarnate, "I trust you are much improved."

She sighs and closes her book. Hermione Granger doesn't pop a bookmark in a gravid tome for just any wizard. Apparently I haven't completely ruined things.

"Thank you," she says softly, primly.

The silence stretches before us deep, and crisp, and even.

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How do I let her know that seeing her tied to my bed like an early Christmas gift, knowing what she offered, so thrilled and terrified me I was up all night with thoughts of what might have happened had Peeves not ruined things, had she not marinated her brain in a vat of booze? How can I admit I was so busy staring at her jubbies I forgot she even *had* a wand, much less that she might need it to cancel the Sticking Charm?

Does she honestly think things like this happen to wizards like me every day?

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The silence is killing me, in much the same way I've probably killed my chances. I was so unnerved, and so I performed true to type and made a fool of myself, wrapping myself around her like the Giant Squid, like the shabby little pervert I am, then all but throwing her out when I realised she wasn't there to snog the great Severus Snape.

Gods, I am such an old fool when it comes to Gryffindor women. Even after all I've done, the gods gave me one last chance to find a bit of... something, and I destroy it.

~~~~~

I decide to leave while I still can at least remain on speaking terms with her. I have no desire to give her the satisfaction of knowing that she has managed to make me feel like...

"What on earth is going on in that head of yours, Severus Snape?"

I pull the tattered remnants of my dignity around me. "That is privileged information, witch."

Suddenly, she smiles at me. "You know that I'm teasing you with my petulance, right?"

Weak with relief, I look at her with what I hope is cool, calculating intent. "I know. I'm being surprisingly indulgent."

11 - Sweet Silver Bells

The prat. I could hex him, but: smitten, remember?

Gods, I'm pathetic. I sigh, and dredge up my Gryffindor courage. "I guess I must have looked pretty stupid, huh?"

He looks puzzled. "Granger, what are you talking about?"

I cringe. "You know perfectly well."

He crosses his arms in *that* way. "Gods, you're really going to make me spell it out, aren't you?" I grumble.

"If I'm to give you an honest answer, I will require the question," he counters, softly.

I snort. "Tied to your bed, you dolt! I know I looked stupid, but must you rub it in?"

~~~~~

Severus could not look more unconcerned. This somehow makes it worse. I've just made a fool out of myself in front of the one man in the Wizarding world I really want to be considered at least partially cool by. Then I remember who I'm talking to.

I'm screwed.

"I did, didn't I? I made a complete and utter arse out of myself last night! Gods, don't tell me I did my Celestina Warbeck imitation again! What did I do? Don't tell me I sang!" It took years to live that down after my last drunken escapade at the Burrow.

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"Well, in a manner of speaking." His thin lips twitch. "You farted in the key of D."

I feel my heart shrivel and curl up on itself. You only get one good chance with a wizard like Severus, and I've wrecked mine. Before I burst into tears of humiliation, I make a break for it, dashing strategically for the exit. He captures me instantly.

"Steady on, Granger." he says, with a voice like velvet. "It takes more than a well-tuned fart to cross my eyes."

I'm glad he's holding me up; my knees give way as my mortification is complete.

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He gives me a look that's almost charming for Snape, and pulls me close again. "Actually, it made me laugh. One of the few things I've had to laugh about in a long time."

I sniff. "Is that the worst of it?" I ask.

"Yes," he answers, and rubs his large nose in my hair. "And I only laughed because up to that point, you were far, far too perfect for me. You were lying in my bed, all tied up like a beautiful goddess to be ravaged."

I relax a little more in his arms. "A goddess, you say?"

~~~~~

His laughter vibrates in my chest, as full of promise as sweet, silver bells on Christmas morning. "Yes. A naked goddess; far too good for the likes of a lecherous, old reprobate like me. That fart put us on a level playing field, as far as I'm concerned."

I laugh and snuggle closer, breathing in his scent. Maybe I haven't completely screwed things up. At least, not yet.

A thought hits me. "Wait. Did you say I was *naked* in your bed last night?" I pull back enough to look up to him. "How in Merlin's name did that happen?"

~~~~~

He gives me a look of pure Slytherin innocence. "I'll be happy to let you review the events in a Pensieve."

"I'll bet. Tell you what: after dinner, why don't I meet you at yours with a bottle of elf-made wine, and we'll reenact the moment, minus Peeves and the farting?"

He gives me a look of pure smolder. "And leave out all the good bits? Where's your sense of adventure, Granger?"

"Must've left it back at your place, along with my wand and my underwear."

He freezes. "Yeah, you didn't think I'd missed those, now did you?" I smirk.

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## 12 - Star Of Wonder

I have looked around my chambers for the tenth time, and changed my robes three. A glance at the clock tells me Hermione will be here any moment. I have no idea what is to happen; I am a man who's learned to hope for the best and expect the worst and therefore I'm never disappointed.

I look at my face in the mirror, and wonder if I'm aiming too high. She is out of my league; that much is certain. But she was *my* bed, I remind myself. *She* came to *me* first.

Either she's interested, or *Imperused*.

~~~~~

My wards chime her arrival, and I open the door to a woman who, apparently, has joined some sort of holy order. I have never seen a more repressed, buttoned-up, severely tailored robe on anyone except me. Hermione stands there calmly, as I take measure of the situation with a sinking heart.

Expect the worst seems to be the order of the evening, then.

"Did you at least bring the wine on your way to the nunnery?" I bark, hating that I sound so disappointed.

She looks at me in stunned, perturbed surprise, glances down at her robes, and laughs.

~~~~~

"Pot, kettle, Severus. I thought after the last time I was here, you might find this a refreshing change."

She breezes past me into the room, shoving a bottle of elf-made wine into my chest. "Break out the glasses, Snape. You're going to need it."

I am a spy. I have sat, still as stone, watching things that made Tom Riddle swallow hard. My face is an impassive rock of granite immobility. I can barely contain myself from kicking up my heels. Granger's feeling bolshy. This can only be a good thing.

"Still doesn't explain the habit, though," I retort.

~~~~~

With another throaty laugh, Hermione turns back to me. "I wore this very proper robe, because I didn't want everyone to see what I have on underneath. This is for your eyes only, Severus."

With a tasty bit of wandless magic, she vanishes the robe to reveal a sheath dress underneath. It is made of iridescent material that changes from green to silver as she moves, and it fits her like a second skin.

She performs another bit of spot-on wandless magic to catch the wine bottle falling from my nerveless fingers. "Focus," she laughs.

Focus? I have stopped breathing.

~~~~~

She slinks toward me, hair tumbling in luscious waves, dress flashing like scales on a mermaid, and pours the wine. I drink it without tasting it; my mouth is watering for another libation altogether.

We drink in silence, eyes locked. She takes my wine glass. Leaning over, she whispers, "Do you like my dress, Severus?"

"I think you know the answer to that question, Hermione." Good. The old voice still sounds rock steady. Good.

She gives me a rich smile. "Because it has a special feature. I Transfigured it based on your magical signature. Can you guess what it does?"

~~~~~

At this point, I don't care if it's calibrated to attract migratory seabirds. I just want her in my arms, but the moment I place my hands upon her shoulders, I understand why Minerva McGonagall bragged on her so much.

Every part of the dress I touch melts away, revealing her glowing, silky skin beneath. "You really were a star Transfigurations student, weren't you?" I say, and her breathless, pleased laugh puts us back on a level playing field again.

Inspired, I do a bit of showing off myself, and conjure a full-length mirror, and turn Hermione to face it.

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She watches as my hands glide down the side of her body. Green and silver fade, revealing cream and gold underneath. Her skin is warm beneath my moving hands, and I carefully choose where I touch. I uncover her slender arms, then smooth my hands over her shapely calves, pausing only to remove the pointy, edible-looking shoes.

Her back is revealed next, and as my fingers drift over her curvy bottom, she shivers, and so do I. I press against her, uncovering a handprint-shaped expanse of skin on her belly.

This is the most erotic foreplay I have ever experienced.

~~~~~

I step back and admire my handiwork. Hermione is blissfully, completely nude, except for the iridescent cloth that covers each breast, and the apex of her bare thighs. I am not known for my patience, but wonders of this magnitude do not happen to me every day, and I am loathe to rush it.

I watch in the mirror as I stand behind her, and reach around to cup her lovely breasts in my palms. The sigh that leaves her heart-shaped mouth will haunt my dreams forever. And then those sweet globes are bare, soft and heavy in my hand.

~~~~~

I gaze at her gorgeous breasts hungrily. They are round and firm and her blushing nipples are so tight and hard I could cut diamonds on them. I turn her around to face me, sinking onto my knees, and we moan together in sheer delight as I take her velvety nipple in my mouth. I trail wet, desperate kisses down her belly.

She smells like my Amortensia.

I have decided to lick the final triangle away. The fact that this star of wonder was once my annoying little student melts away with the last tiny scrap of green and silver.

~~~~~

Somehow we've ended up on my sofa, and I am quickly learning what makes Granger scream with pleasure. She is deliciously dirty-mouthed when aroused. I don't care if she shatters glass. Hell, I don't care if she farts again. I just want to live and die happily here, on my knees, buried between the silken thighs of this beautiful witch who wants me.

I am inspired; most porn isn't this wonderful. Oh, Merlin, she comes like a demon. I'm sure she shags like one.

And she's all mine... "Gods, I love you, Hermione!" I moan deliriously.

We both freeze.

"What?"

13 - Christmas Card

Blimey, I must have misheard him. Severus' voice is muffled by his, um, activities, and I am a bit stoned with pleasure, so I won't embarrass myself by saying what I think he's said. Whatever he's said, however, freezes him in his tracks.

Then the evil git ceases his fantastic assault upon my person, and he looks at me with the strangest expression I have ever seen on his face. It doesn't help that his eyes are absolutely inky with fading lust. To be honest, he looks a bit, well, panicked.

Merlin, it's not like I have teeth down there.

~~~~~

"I said, 'look above you'", he rasps, wild-eyed. Obediently, I raise my eyes. A beautifully rendered sprig of mistletoe hangs suspended over my head, looking like a picture print by Currier and Ives. Severus can be the biggest git in the world, then stun me sideways with tenderness.

He rises upward, and covers my lips with his. They are amazingly soft and warm and tangy, and it's all I can do not to tell him how much he means to me. My heart blooms, and tears prick my eyes. I don't want this to be just a Christmas pity fuck.

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### 14 - Hanging Up Your Stocking

I screwed up royally, but I think I got away with it.

As I look up and see that I have indeed conjured mistletoe, I nearly faint with relief. As blind with desire as I am, I could have thrown anything up there to distract Hermione from the fact that I'd made a complete arse out of myself. What would a magnificent witch like her want from a broken-down old wreck of a wizard like me?

Still, it's been years since I've even wheedled in a pity fuck. If that's all I can get this Christmas, I'll consider myself lucky.

~~~~~

The gods weren't exactly kind to me, but I have been told on occasion that I'm a good kisser. I pour every bit of passion and desire I have for her into that kiss, and those sweet lips of hers are heaven. Suddenly I don't care if all she wants is this one night. I'll give her the best night of her life.

She is so soft and beautiful. I pull her closer, telling her I love her with every sweep of my lips. I've made a fool out of myself, but I'm determined to make up for it here.

15 - Two Front Teeth

When Severus finally pulls away from that toe-curling kiss, I am breathless, boneless and defenseless. I've never been kissed with such all-encompassing, intense, ruthless concentration. That kiss is about technique, lust, arousal. He's showing off.

And that's when I know. He's only in it for the sex. If I stay, I will want more than he's willing to give.

He means more to me than I will ever mean to him. If I stay one more moment, I will really give him something to laugh about after I leave.

"I have to go," I mumble, blindly reaching for my wand.

16 Angels

I am stunned. What the fuck did I do *this* time?

Hermione pushes me away, dressing so quickly it's hard to believe less than thirty seconds ago she was naked and I was as close to heaven as I'm probably ever going to get.

She is scrambling around, and I see tears in her eyes. I grow angry. What is she upset about? I should be the one feeling put upon. And, as if on cue, *am*.

"Do you plan on informing me as to the exact manner in which I have offended you, Professor Granger?" I ask, coldly.

~~~~~

"You haven't offended me," Hermione replies, rooting around for one of her absurd shoes, while giving me an enticing view of her saucy bottom. Properly shod, she throws on her nun's habit and heads for the door. "Thank you for a most enlightening evening, Professor Snape," she sniffs.

I watch her go, and something hits me between the eyes - like an angel wielding a sledgehammer. It is white hot, and full of pain and fear.

I'm not going to let her get away with it. This is the last time I lose a witch to something I can fix.

~~~~~

Wandlessly, I slam the door in her face. "Oh, no, Granger," I growl, and crook my finger at her. "You're going no place until you tell me why you were absolutely fine until forty-five seconds ago."

"I'm still fine," she insists stubbornly.

"Thestral shit," I retort. Suddenly I feel old, foolish. Defeated, I open the door. "Go, if you wish. But the least you can do is tell me what I've done wrong."

I wince. "Am I a crap kisser?"

"No!" she shoots back, scornfully, then looks away. Her voice softens, and grows wistful. "You were wonderful."

"Too wonderful."

17 - Raise A Glass For Everyone

I look into his accusing, dark eyes, and I see genuine hurt. *Gods, I am such an idiot.*

"You'll get no argument from me, witch," he mutters, and I realise I've either spoken aloud, or he's read my mind.

I take a deep breath. "Okay, you want to know the truth?"

"Wouldn't have asked, Granger," he growls, looking both frustrated and so vulnerable I feel guilty.

"I'm afraid."

I've never seen a look of complete bafflement on Severus' face before. It's kind of endearing, really.

"What on earth are you afraid... oh." He slumps a little, and takes my hand.

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"I think I understand." He leads me to his sofa, and we sit down exactly where a moment ago he was....

"Would it help you to know that I myself have had enough sexual experience to know how to be gentle?" Snape gently adds, "I wish I had known sooner."

Understanding dawns, like sunrise over a hangover. "Had known what, Severus?" I ask warily.

"You're a virgin, and frightened."

I burst out laughing.

"What?" he says, his tender compassion draining away. When I can't stop laughing, he grows cross. He's looking rather insulted.

"What, pray tell, is so fucking funny?"

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"We aren't in a Victorian novel, you mentalist! I'll have you know I've had several lovers."

His eyebrows rush together. He looks, if possible, even more confused. "So, are you telling me you're a tart, then?"

When my head explodes from the pressure, I hope he gets covered in the pieces. "Gods, you are so fucking infuriating!" I shout, jumping from the sofa. "I'm not a tart, you idiot! I'm in love with you and I don't know if you feel the same and I'm afraid you just want to be fuck buddies and that's not enough for me and you're being a complete prat about it!"

~~~~~

My babbled speech hangs in the air over our heads like wilting mistletoe. In the ensuing seconds, I start to wonder if I have somehow transmogrified into a basilisk. During my little speech, Severus seems to have turned into stone. I have never seen anyone so still.

I think perhaps I should just leave.

He comes out of his trance with a little shake of the head. "Sorry, but you have me thoroughly flummoxed. Exactly what was all that about? Would you mind repeating everything you said after I called you a tart and before you called me a prat?"

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## 18 - Tidings Of Comfort And Joy

I am lying in the dark, in that sweet, soft netherworld between sleep and awake. It is a nice place to be, and I think I must be dreaming. A soft snore negates that.

Then a soft, springy curl shoots up my nose, and I realise I am very much awake, and the witch lying in my arms is no dream, but a beautiful reality that I am living, despite our frantic, early attempts to screw things up.

I can't say this all that often, but every now and again, I get something right. This is one of those things.

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"I don't want to just be a fuck buddy," Hermione declares stubbornly, as if she honestly thinks I'm going to argue.

"I am prepared to accept that," I counter.

She stills. "Then why are we messing this up so preposterously?" she whines. I shrug, nonplussed.

"Ah. You're just as clueless as me," she says, and the little minx puts her arms around me. "Can we just get on with falling in love and leave our brains out of this for once?"

I nod stupidly. Thinking has always been my downfall. My heart has always been more eloquent than my head.

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Is love perfect all suave and graceful and lyrical, like the erotic literature I peruse from time to time out of boredom or the need to brush up on my skills?

No, it's messy and moronic and pitted with more landmines than Dumbledore's best-laid plans. It's taken years of frustration and heartache to realise that the best we can really expect of life is to blunder about like the rest of the world, making every mistake in the book, trying to find our place in it.

My place is beside this little witch with mad hair and madder life.

~~~~~

Hermione snores and drools in her sleep, which is rather disgusting. But it's also endearingly real.

I realise love isn't perfect. It's mundane sometimes, and must be tended like a weedy garden. It's thrilling and terrifying, like great sex, and fragile as a homesick child.

It's comfortable, like my favourite pair of dragon-hide boots. It's homely and routine like afternoon tea, as silly and moody as a delicate potion.

I am prepared to live with that, and nurture and brew it until it's real. After the misunderstandings of the past few days, I want the normality of her crazy love.

19 - Yuletide Gay

We decide not to be coy; most of the staff know about us already. They've been laying out more bets on how and when we get physical than on who will win the House cup.

To my surprise, Severus is the one who suggests we enter the Great Hall together, hand in hand. "If it bothers them, screw it," he growls. "It's Christmas." He gives me one of those black-eyed, hot looks, and my thighs go up in flames. I'm surprised my robes don't spontaneously combust.

"I'm not ashamed to be seen with you, and if you feel the same..."

~~~~~

I grab his hand, grinning like a fourth-year Hufflepuff on a first date, and we enter the hall. Forks pause on the way to mouths, pumpkin juice spurts through noses, a young Slytherin staying over for the holidays has to be levitated upside down and swatted to dislodge the toast he inhaled upon our arrival.

"Things are going awfully well," he murmurs out of the corner of his mouth. I nod regally, and we sashay toward the Head Table like debauched debutantes.

"Shall we really give them something to talk about?" he asks glossily.

"Yes, please," I answer, giggling madly.

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## 20 - Kissing Santa Claus

I stop in the middle of the Great Hall, pulling Hermione into my arms. She looks at me with a mixture of delight and utter terror, and I'm sure I am wearing the same expression.

"I am about to do something vastly stupid," I whisper, and she nods.

"I triple dog dare you," she says. The fear in her expression is replaced by joy, and she flings her arms around my neck even as I touch my lips to hers.

~~~~~

The collective gasp of all present is all but drowned out by the sound of blood rushing in my ears.

Hermione doesn't let go, so I kiss her with the bravery of a Gryffindor, the expertise of a Ravenclaw, the tenderness of a Hufflepuff, and I cop a feel just to represent my own house. I am kissing Hermione in front of all, like the word Slytherin has never been invented.

There is a distinct silence in the room, I realise. It is broken by a discreet clearing of a Scottish throat, and a diminutive chortle of a dueling master I have known since I was eleven.

"Shall we exchange our galleons now, or at the gift exchange?" Flitwick says.

21 Chimney

"I know exactly why you did it, Severus Snape..."

Minerva is not amused. We have been called onto the carpet, as they say, for our public display of affection in the Great Hall.

I glance at Severus, feeling like a puppy being swatted for piddling indoors. I want to laugh; I've just had a night of the best sex of my life. I really don't give a monkey's.

"What I don't know is why you did it in front of a large contingency of students! Students whom we spend quite a lot of time discouraging from performing those very same..."

~~~~~

We are both having a hard time not responding, and we know when we do, we're only going to make matters worse. Minerva has smoke pouring from her nostrils like a dragon.

"If even one of them complains and the Board hears about this..."

"Minerva," Severus begins, his tone so bored he sounds stoned. "If the fucking Board gets its fucking knickers in a fucking twist over a fucking kiss..."

"Tell them to fuck off," I interject.

"Thank you, Professor Granger," he drawls.

"You're welcome, Professor Snape," I answer.

She huffs. "Och, you're as bad as each other."

~~~~~

We stare at one another in silence. The silence is just short of excruciating....

I am the first to go. I can only look at Severus' upward creeping eyebrow for a matter of seconds before I am giggling like a loon. Minerva quickly follows, and we laugh as Severus looks on, smirking like a smugly smirking thing.

"Did you see their faces?" Minerva laughs, wiping her eyes on a tartan handkerchief. "I thought Sybil was going to soil herself." She laughs and pats Severus' hand affectionately.

"And you, boy! Showing off like that! Our girl here's been a good influence."

22 Marshmallows

I was never what you'd call a soft touch. I've not had much chance to be, and for the most part, I never had the desire to be. But life has been decidedly strange for me, and as Hermione is so fond of reminding me, my life is more than the events that took place during the first thirty eight years of it.

I leave Minerva's office with Hermione in tow. To the casual observer, she is the one tagging along as I stride down the hall, my steps measured, sure and purposeful.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

~~~~~

In truth, I am being swept along with this gentle tide that started with the whisper of Christmas dreams, and ended with me kissing Peeves' mistletoe-flavoured arse. It is the click of the young witch's shoes to my left and one step behind that keep propelling me forward, and if they were to grow silent, I would falter and stumble.

Like Orpheus, I cannot prevent myself from turning and looking back. I see so much more than the curly head bobbing in time with those staccato heels. I see a future for a man who thought he didn't have one.

~~~~~

I look back to all the things that made me what I am. I held onto them, because I was afraid to dream of things that might usurp them, and then where would I be? Adrift in a land that I could not relate to or trust the land of Happily Ever After.

Hermione catches up. You see, that's what has really happened to me. I lived; I almost died. And somewhere in between, Hermione caught up.

And now I have a reason to let those fears go, and they grow more distant with every step I take with Hermione.

23 - Corn for popping

Hogwarts is a beautiful castle any day of the year. It is breathtaking when it snows. From the top of the Astronomy Tower, I look out over the Forbidden Forest and see a mantle of white.

I am here alone, for obvious reasons. This isn't Severus' favourite place, even after all this time. But looking out at this Winter Wonderland, it is easy to forget this was anything but a lookout point to the stars, and the worst thing to ever happen here was getting caught out past lights out.

I sigh, and turn to leave. Severus is waiting downstairs.

~~~~~

Only he isn't. To my astonishment, he is standing in the doorway, his cloak snapping in the swirling winter wind. Snow lands in his raven's wing hair. He looks romantic and uncomfortable; he's not trying for either.

"You'll freeze your hair off," he says warningly. He has braved this most hated place out of concern for me.

"Do something about it," I challenge.

His cloak unfolds like an angel stretching his wings. "Come here and be warm, witch," he rumbles in a dead sexy voice.

From anyone else, it would sound so corny.

From him, it sounds like Christmas carols.

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### 24 Driving

If there is anything more pleasurable than undressing this frozen little witch and warming her from the extremities inward, I haven't discovered it. I am fully aware that I am relying on a little of that romantic snow bollocks to help prime the pump, but what good is being a Slytherin if you don't learn how to use everything to your advantage?

She grows flushed and warm beneath my hands, and I mentally inventory my potions stores as she returns the favour. She's already past my knees and moving upward; I don't want this to end.

The clock chimes midnight.

~~~~~

"Merry Christmas, Severus," she whispers, pushing me down onto the bed. "I hope you've been a good boy this year."

"Very good," I manage to bleat out, as she slides a warm soft hand over my thigh. She nibbles on my ear, and her lovely breasts press against my chest.

"That's good to know," she purrs, "because I've been very good as well."

"Hmm," I manage with a shiver, trying to decide where to start.

"I expect a very full stocking this year, Santa," she cooes.

My laugh sounds dirty even to me. "I think you can count on it."

25 - You Can Do The Job

And so we found ourselves back in same hall where that whole crazy love started. It had been a long time coming, make no mistake, and I can't say it's always been fun, but it has been Severus Snape, so that probably explains a lot.

We look up at the mistletoe, and kiss. We are stone cold sober, with nary a poltergeist in sight. Just two people who fell in like with one another over the course of two years, then tumbled into love in a matter of a few weeks. Well, neither Severus nor I have ever been conventional.

~~~~~

Severus Snape is the bravest man I've ever known, but I've learned that even asking the time in an offhand tone of voice fills him with suspicion. "So, what happens now, Severus?" I asked gravely.

"Now, as in the philosophical pondering of how cause and effect may determine the course of the universe as we know it; or 'now' as in you and I in the next five minutes?"

I shrugged. "Pick your favourite and run with it."

"We leave this drafty hall and return to my quarters and continue what we've been doing non-stop for the past seven days."

~~~~~

I pretended to consider for all of two seconds. "And is that answer in correlation to the first conundrum or the second?"

He gave me one of those patented Severus Snape 'I'm-about-to-say-something-that-will-make-your-socks-roll-up-and-down' looks. It was preceded by a head tilt/raised

eyebrow combo, and slid over me like a caress.

"I rather like to think it will impact both, pet," he purred. And then he smiled at me.

We were married that following Christmas Eve.

It all started with a botched, drunken kiss twenty-five Decembers ago.

Severus Granger-Snape still remains the best, the sweetest, most precious Christmas gift I ever received.

Happy Christmas to all, and to all, a good night.

Teddy Radiator, December 25, 2012