

Merry Christmas, Dudley

by Savva

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One

Chapter 1 of 1

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This little one was written for TycheSong. She dared me to write a Dudley Dursley story. So, here it is, an unthinkable, a Dudley & Hermione romance story. Please, don't kill me.

Prompt: He thought he would have to spend Christmas alone, until he...

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Merry Christmas, Dudley

It was cold, very, very cold. It was that special, crisp, biting-into-your-bones cold one can only find as far from the Gulf Stream as he was at that moment. Dud shrugged his shoulders and sped up, since his classic Burberry coat was powerless against the frost of Moscow in December. The Marriott Hotel, where he had lived for the past fourteen months, was situated only three blocks from his office, and yet, every time he felt that he could barely make it before his teeth began to ache from that effing frigidity.

It was funny that, despite the cold, life was bubbling and buzzing in full force on Tverskoy. With its old streets already decked for the holidays, the city around him was alive and magnificent. Dud, however, couldn't care less about the beauty that surrounded him...it was too bloody cold for that. Plus, it was the twenty-fifth of December, and he wasn't quite in the mood, to be honest. It wasn't his first Christmas alone, and it wasn't his first Christmas in Moscow either. Yet, every year, somewhere around this time,

he always felt nostalgic, and, bloody hell, did he hate it.

Alas, there was no way around it. With dreadful certainty, he could already feel that the hard lump, which had lodged in his throat since this morning, was growing. It was going to get only worse from there on in, he knew that for sure...he would be miserable for the next twenty-four hours or so. He felt so awfully foreign here, in this place, which was bright, expensive and completely alien to his soul. Damn, he missed home so freaking much! At the thought of England, Dud's throat became constricted to the point that it was hard to draw breath.

He grimaced. *It's that freaking arctic air, not some illusive nostalgia*, he told himself as he finally entered the brightly lit vestibule of his hotel, the obnoxiously majestic marble interior of which did nothing for his state of mind. He cursed under his breath and went straight to the bar, where the bartender named Misha silently poured him his usual double Jack Daniels. Dud had a nagging suspicion that one go wouldn't do today, though: he had a long and torturous evening awaiting him.

At twenty-nine, Dud Dursley had travelled more than some and seen quite a lot. He had left his home at eighteen because he just couldn't stand his parents any more. Maybe it was the youthful maximalism that had been triggered in him by that horrifying moment with the Dementors. Maybe it was something else entirely. The fact was that, at some point, something forced him to think long and hard. And when he had done that, he came to the realisation that he simply couldn't live the way his family had lived. His father disgusted him, and his mother ... Well, he pitied her, of course, but mainly she repulsed him. And so he left at the first opportunity.

He went to London and began his independent life. It was tough, and he had a few rough moments, but he survived. He worked as a busboy and delivery boy. He slept on a park bench and frequently skipped meals. He even fought in underground bare-fisted boxing matches for money. That particular venture didn't turn out well, though. Ironically, he just wasn't vicious enough and ended up bloodied and terribly beaten. His broken nose was an eternal reminder of that phase of his life.

In time, he acquired friends and went to university, studying during the day and working at night. There, he discovered that he was rather good at math, and so he went into finance. It took him about six years to finish his education, but he did it eventually. He even allowed his parents to come to his graduation, though their meeting wasn't pleasant at all. The moment Dud informed them that he had enlisted in Voluntary Service Overseas and was going to Tajikistan for eighteen months, his mum burst into tears. Dad yelled at him for a good half-hour and finished his rant with, "I knew it! Those bloody wizards have messed up your head. You are not my boy any more. You are just a waste of space now, useless!" And that was the last time he had seen them, even though he wrote to mum every once in a while, just to make sure that they were all right.

The year and a half that he spent in Tajikistan was remarkable in its significance for him. It happened that he worked with a group of Russian teachers, and they were the most interesting bunch of people he had ever met. They taught him Russian and gave him their books to read. Night after night, he listened to them as they passionately debated with one another about the meaning of life. They mesmerised him with their strange philosophy and constant soul-searching.

When his term of volunteering ended, Dud returned to London and found himself a job in trading. Apparently, he was good with money, brilliant, even; perhaps it was his special gift. Customers liked him, and the management was pleased with his performance. His knowledge of the Russian language came in handy, as well, and that's how he had ended up in Moscow, managing the company's eastern trade.

In other words, all in all, he was satisfied with his progress and wasn't complaining. He just truly hated that blasted holiday, and he really missed his grey, wet and so-bloody-wonderful homeland. He wasn't the only foreigner in Moscow, of course, and he had befriended a few expats here. They, however, had all gone home a few days ago. Dud, on the other hand, had two Christmas cards in his pocket...one from Harry and one from his mum...but ultimately nowhere to go. So he was sitting here, in the Marriott on Tverskoy, steadily getting pissed.

By the time Dud finished his second Jack Daniels, the bar was filled with people. He passively observed all the stunning girls who stopped by for a cocktail after work and happily chirped and laughed with their friends. How on earth Russians managed to achieve such a high concentration of absolutely gorgeous women per square foot eluded him. It was definitely some kind of mysterious Russian phenomenon. He had a theory that it was a government conspiracy. They probably had Special Forces, who specifically picked those beauties across the country and brought them to the capital. *Who knows? It's a pretty big country*, he mused, chuckling to himself.

He knew one thing for sure, though: he was so damn sick of their cool, northern perfection, it hurt. Over the last fourteen months, he had tried to date a few of them. It hadn't been easy even to get noticed, but he had succeeded, though he couldn't quite pinpoint why. Those girls were notoriously selective, after all. Perhaps, with his light blue eyes and his tall, muscular frame, he looked somewhat acceptable.

All three women whom he had succeeded in interesting enough to go on a date with him, were gloriously impeccable and ... completely, utterly, annoyingly incomprehensible. He felt like a ninny with them. He couldn't even begin to fathom what was going on in their flawless heads; he couldn't decode the feelings reflected in their calm, blue eyes. They were enigmas to him, like the freaking Snow Queen in that Andersen tale. Dud sighed. Today, especially, he felt an acute need for someone warm, lively, and, preferably, at least a little bit imperfect.

He was gazing bleakly at the stylish, expensively-clothed crowd in front of him, contemplating a third glass of his double Jack Daniels, when he heard a female voice ordering a glass of sauvignon in English. Intrigued, he turned toward the voice and saw a young woman with warm, dark-chocolate eyes, freckles on her pert little nose, and a mane of mahogany curls, who looked not only heart-achingly British but also peculiarly familiar.

He had seen her before, he was certain...but where? Being tipsy enough to forego the formalities and depressed enough to be beyond caring, Dud stood up, moved to the stool closest to her, and went ahead with the most banal pick-up line of all time. "Do I know you from somewhere, 'cause you look awfully familiar?" he asked, without a hint of a smile. She spun towards him sharply, obviously surprised to hear that particular line in that particular place. Her brown eyes studied him intently for a few seconds, and then she replied, causing him to go all hot and tingly as her soft, melodious voice reached his ears.

"I'm not sure, actually. You do indeed look somewhat familiar. I just can't quite recall." She smiled openly at him and added, "Ah, let's just start from scratch, shall we? I'm Hermione..."

"Granger," he blurted out before he could stop himself. Of course! Damn! She was *the* Hermione Granger, Harry's famous friend! He had seen her not so long ago in Harry's wedding pictures. Bigger! Of all people! What on earth was she doing here!

Looking a bit miffed and startled, Hermione muttered, "So you *do* know me. Hmm, and you are?"

"Dud," he stuttered, and coughed. "Dudley Dursley," he finished, expecting a snappish rebuke to come his way at any minute.

He could clearly see a shadow of recognition dawning on her, and her eyes narrowed with wariness. Luckily, that moment was rather fleeting, and the next second, her natural courtesy took over, and she exclaimed, "My goodness, of course, you've changed so much, almost unrecognisable. What are you doing here? Oh, I remember now. Harry did mention something about your living abroad." And, after a few seconds of hesitation, her lips curved upward in a light smile.

Dud blinked, breathed out with relief and beamed at her. He was so deliriously glad that she hadn't sent him to hell or somewhere else equally unpleasant. He knew that she most certainly was more than capable. The girl was a witch, for God's sake. "I work here. I wonder, however, what are you doing here, in Moscow and alone on Christmas?" he asked, grinning happily and, he suspected, idiotically at her.

She snorted and rolled her eyes. "Well, I was studying Rasputin's parchments, here in the Kremlin library, and as usual, lost all sense of time and missed my, um," she paused, "my ride. So I'm stuck here until tomorrow morning."

Dud watched her with growing fascination. Hermione's smile and voice were doing a variety of wonderful things to him. The hard lump in his throat was now barely noticeable, and his mood was lightening with every passing minute. Gazing appreciatively at the long hair that curled and fluttered around her face, he suddenly asked, "Are you married?" and frowned at his own total lack of subtlety. Now he had done it, he thought. To his surprise, Hermione just laughed, and the peals of her laughter instantly turned him into a big and fuzzy teddy bear.

"No," she said, still giggling. "I'm free as a bird," she added. "Except I'm pretty much married to my work. Tell me about yourself. How did you manage to end up here?"

The genuine interest in her eyes made Dud forget about his double Jack Daniels and start talking. He wasn't big on telling stories about himself, but Hermione Granger somehow managed to coax everything from him. She listened and asked questions. She smiled and frowned as his story went on, and at one point, she reached towards him and covered his big, boxing-damaged hand with her delicate and slender one. After that, Dud would have told her anything she wanted, as long as she kept her warm, soft palm pressed against his knuckles.

Alas, the bartender broke the magic by telling them that the bar was about to close. Blinking in bewilderment, Dud took in their surroundings and realised that they were the only ones left. He then fixed his gaze on Hermione and muttered, stuttering a bit, "Would you like to come up to my suite? I ... um ... I have biscuits and tea." He felt with embarrassment that his cheeks were flaming. He still had a sweet tooth, though he didn't indulge himself often. It was more a question of personal discipline for him.

"Sure," she answered lightly and jumped from the barstool, giving him an opportunity to appreciate her soft form hugged by a knitted, maroon dress. She threw her coat over her arm, and said, "All right, lead the way, Dud."

His heart made a somersault at her words, as he hastily stood up and guided her from the bar to the lift. They made it to his room with the smallest amount of awkwardness possible in their situation, mainly because Hermione was continuously babbling about the beauty of Russian architecture.

Once inside, Dud took her coat, shrugged his Burberry off his shoulders, and threw both garments on his bed. He then busied himself with making tea, and Hermione dropped her beaded purse on the coffee-table and made herself comfortable on the leather sofa in the living area of his suite. In a few moments, a coffee-maker produced hot water and the tea was almost ready. It had actually taken Dud a few months to get rid of that horrible taste of coffee in the water. Thank God he had finally done that, because otherwise he would have felt even more self-conscious. It was bad enough that he didn't have any loose tea. Alas, those pathetic tea bags would have to do.

When he entered the room, with two cups of tea in his hands and a tin box of biscuits under his arm, he didn't spot Hermione right away. The sofa was empty, and panic clasped his throat. "Such a beautiful city," he heard her soft voice from across the room. She stood in front of the window, watching the snow slowly wrapping Moscow in its white, shimmering blanket.

He quietly placed the cups and the box on the coffee-table and walked to her. Stopping a mere inch from her, he glanced out the window. The scenery was truly magnificent, but Dud just couldn't focus on it, not with her jasmine-scented curls so close to his lips. The blood was pulsing wildly in his temples, and he wanted to kiss and touch her so bloody much that he was forced to clench his fists painfully in order to keep himself in check. Self-control had never been his strongest trait.

As if sensing his inner battle, Hermione turned around to face him. That move annihilated the inch of safety he had left between them, and now there was nothing that could stop him from kissing her. He did, and to his astonishment, she didn't recoil from his caress. On the contrary, she wound her arms around his neck and returned the kiss. She didn't protest when he pulled her knitted dress up, though her breath did hitch sharply when he pressed her bare back against the ice-cold window. He then took her into his arms and brought her to the sofa, where he gently laid her on the smooth black leather, rolled down her warm woollen tights, and removed her shearling boots. He sat on his heels and gazed at her lying there in a scanty silk slip, all creamy and soft, like the epitome of everything he had ever wanted and needed. She smiled at him, and the little dimples on her cheeks made him forget how to breathe.

His suit and shirt were off with lightning speed, and his shoes, socks, and underwear followed shortly. The next instant, they were kissing, and her fingertips stroked the hard planes of his chest. Soon, he was between her thighs, drowning helplessly in her warmth, whispering something delusional in her ear, and moving, moving, moving. When he finally collapsed next to her and dropped his heavy head on her shoulder, Hermione hugged him tightly and whispered into his sweat-damp hair, "Merry Christmas, Dudley." He wanted to ask her *'why'*, but his tongue refused to obey him, and he just clasped her to himself and drifted into slumber.

When he woke up the next morning, she was gone. Frankly, he wasn't really surprised. Somehow, he had known that she would disappear with the first ray of sunlight. For all he knew, she might have very well been a figment of his imagination. Not that he deserved a Christmas present, anyway. He was, however, a bit alarmed to find himself in his bed and not on the leather sofa in the living room. But he soon dismissed that thought as well. Hermione Granger was a witch, after all; some oddities were to be expected.

For a while, he simply lay in his bed, not inclined to step back into the mad world that surrounded him just yet. Eventually, he did get up and, doing his best to ignore his heavy heart, shuffled to the loo. It was only when he came out of the shower that he noticed a message written on his mirror in red lipstick. There were numbers and a few words:

Phone me when you get back in London. H.

Dud drew a sigh and chuckled. It was time to go home.