

Bliss

by Savva

Severus Snape doesn't do Christmas dinners. Or does he?

One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Gift For: StrongHermione

Warnings: Occasional sarcasm, innuendoes.

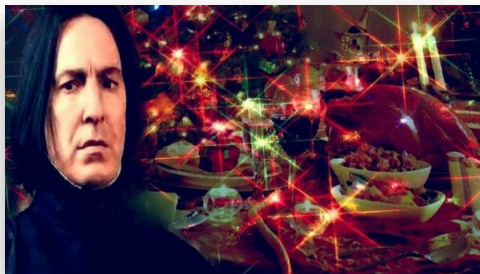
Prompt: Hermione's large extended family hold a massive Christmas celebration every year. They are quite close, lots of aunties, uncles and cousins and loving but formidable grandparents. How does Hermione's new (wizard) partner cope with the Muggles and their traditions? (I'm sort of thinking along the line of My Big Fat Greek Wedding if inspiration is lacking, but go where your muse takes you)

Must Haves: Happy ending, Hermione-centric, sex scene(s) is okay but don't feel there has to be one, only if it fits.

Squicks: Violence; too much angst; bashing (it is Christmas, we'll give everyone a break)

Author's Notes: I'm afraid this didn't come across as Hermione-centric as was requested. I blame Severus, because apparently, he enjoys being a centre of attention every now and then. Huge thank you to my wonderful beta AmyLouise.

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Bliss

Severus Snape had been ill-tempered for as long as he could remember. Maybe he had been born that way, with a little scowl plastered on his tiny, bluish face. Or maybe

not. For all he knew, no one around could either confirm or refute that theory. In any case, by his forty-fifth year, he was definitely a professional grouch and, frankly, he was all right with that. He loved being grumpy. That role suited him, and it kept annoying people away...what could be more perfect?

Lately, however, since he had...perhaps foolishly...allowed a bossy little witch to conquer his heart and invade his life (and his quarters), it had become increasingly difficult to find cause for a good old grumble. A very worrisome situation indeed, because one cannot just suddenly stop being moody or grumpy...it can be quite dangerous for one's health, and weaning from such an addiction ought to be slow and gentle.

Today, luckily, he had plenty of reasons to be broody. It was an irritations-galore haven for his grumble-thirsty soul. First, it was Christmas, which in itself was reason enough to be annoyed. As a child, he'd never learned to love that season of supposed collective joy. He hadn't even tried, to be honest, maybe because jingle bells always had given him the hell of a headache. Over the years, his dislike had quite predictably grown into full-blown enmity, and although, for the two past Christmases, he had managed to find the skimpy-clad, curly-haired witch under his tree (allegorically speaking), he still loathed that blasted holiday, if only out of habit. He hadn't got over that life-long tradition of despising Christmas just yet. The necessity to spend this Christmas day with Hermione's extended family made it even more exasperation-worthy: a celebration in the company of a dozen distant relatives was dangerously close to being his worst nightmare.

Therefore, at that particular moment, sitting in the Grangers' living room amongst the hasty preparations for a family dinner, he felt free to brood to his heart's content. As he hadn't the slightest desire to participate in the holiday fuss, he found himself a dark corner right after their arrival, forgoing awkward introductions. Despite his efforts to disguise himself as a piece of furniture, though, he still felt over-exposed and utterly foreign amid this gingerbread-scented Christmas bliss. Even from his corner, the Grangers' house still seemed too loud, too bright, and too crowded to him, and after a mere thirty minutes, he terribly missed the soothing quietness and coolness of his quarters in Hogwarts.

The fact that some chubby toddler, probably Hermione's niece or nephew...he couldn't really tell...was occupying his left foot and had been slobbering saliva over his black boot for the last twenty minutes didn't help matters, either. He groaned and muttered '*Scourgify*' for the umpteenth time, worrying exclusively, of course, about his boots and not about the wellbeing of Benny (or was it Jenny?).

Glaring at the gigantic pine tree that stood across the hall from him, decked to the nines, and unsuccessfully trying to free his foot, Severus exhaled audibly through his nose. *How could he willingly submit to such torture? How?* His treacherous mind immediately provided him with a vivid image of his wife's pert, heart-shaped bottom, reminding him of exactly how his consent had been torn from him. If memory served him correctly, he had agreed quite eagerly. Bugger!

He stifled a sigh. Oh well, at least none of the relatives had tried to engage him in conversation yet, most certainly due to his masterfully-chosen location and camouflage. Feeling a hot drop of sweat trickling down his spine, he cursed and undid the top button of his frock coat. Why his mother-in-law insisted on keeping the temperature in the house almost at boiling point was beyond him.

"You have a very long nose," he heard from somewhere on his left. With his best scowl at the ready, he turned toward the voice, only to find a little girl standing in front of him. She looked about five, though he couldn't be sure, as he wasn't really an expert. Her ruddy plump face adorned with heavy black curls bore an expression of eager curiosity, somehow reminding him of Hermione when he had met her for the first time many, many years ago. The girl's hazel eyes were locked on him, and his customary scowl did nothing to deter her from studying his face. "I like it," she declared decisively after a moment and unceremoniously climbed onto his lap, momentarily wrinkling her freckles-covered button of a nose at the sight of Benny, who was still happily occupied with Severus's boot.

"Merlin," muttered Severus under his breath, feeling trapped and already slightly claustrophobic.

Once the girl had settled comfortably on his lap, she refocused her attention on him. "I'm Jenny," she said. "What's your name?"

"Severus," he snarled, purposely baring his teeth. *That should do it*, he thought smugly.

Jenny's eyes widened, and Severus was sure that she would run the next second. However, she uttered a thoughtful "Hmm" and tugged on his bottom lip. After scrutinizing his teeth for a moment, she announced, in a solemn and very grown-up manner, "You need braces for your teeth. My mum can make them for you. She has all kind of colours, even pink! And, you need to floss every day. Do you floss? You should." She wiped her chubby fingers on Severus's frock coat and sniffed. "You smell funny, just like my mum's spice cupboard. I like your hair, though." And she heaved the same fingers that just had been inside his mouth into his hair. "Black," she said, "just like mine, only without curls. I hate my hair so much." She pulled one of her ringlets to demonstrate her point. "Does it hurt to brush yours?"

Speechless and dumbfounded, Severus only managed a slight shake of his head before the girl continued, "Yeah, that's what I thought. It hurts to brush mine." She sighed. "You are my Auntie Hermie's new husband, right?"

He nodded, sincerely hoping that someone would rescue him from this interrogation soon. Apparently, he was absolutely powerless against bossy little girls. Moreover, all kind of uncalled thoughts began to fill his head, as he looked at her pretty face. He couldn't help wondering how *his* daughter, if he were ever to be blessed with one, would look. Would she be as bossy as this little, over-talkative creature?

"Ah, here you are, Severus." There it was, his supposed salvation. It came in the form of Hermione's grandmother, and suddenly, he regretted his hasty wish for rescue. He had met Maria before, and in all honesty, had found her rather intimidating, though he would never mention that tiny fact to anybody. "Jenny, sweetheart, thank you for keeping Uncle Severus company," she said, shooing Jenny from his lap. The girl gave Severus a kiss on the cheek and ran away, taking her little brother with her and leaving him alone with the Granger matriarch. Freed, Severus immediately stood up, discreetly glancing around and trying to determine an emergency escape plan.

"It's time for you to think about your own little princess, Severus," said Maria, looking at him with a patronizing smile. "You aren't getting any younger, you know."

Severus was about to retort with something snappish when Hermione appeared on the threshold. "Grandma, Severus, dinner is ready," she called.

Thank Merlin, thought Severus. "Shall we?" he murmured in his most velvety voice and gallantly offered Maria his arm. Here, he could be intimidating as well!

Maria glanced at him and chuckled. "Very smooth, my dear boy, very smooth. Now I can see what my granddaughter found in you. I remember dating a boy just like you in secondary school," she said and accepted his hand, though not before she gave his right buttock a quick, playful squeeze. He almost let out a whimper, but luckily caught himself in time.

Hermione's worried eyes met him the moment they entered the dining room. "Are you all right?" she mouthed. He nodded and escorted Maria to her seat at the head of the table. He and Hermione were seated at their designated place a few minutes later, and Hermione's small hand found his under the table and squeezed it reassuringly. A happy buzz filled the room and the feast began.

The rest of the dinner went almost uneventfully, though Severus did need to use nonverbal sticking and levitating spells when his mother-in-law stumbled over Benny's toy with a plate of stuffed turkey in her hands. His quick thinking was rewarded with a gentle pat on his knee, a discreet kiss on his temple, and a soft, whispered, "Thank you."

By the end, he had to agree that celebrating Christmas with his newly-acquired relatives wasn't as excruciatingly terrible as he had imagined it would be. The atmosphere at the table was warm and inviting, and he even managed to relax enough to throw in a few wry one-liners, making everybody snigger.

Once they finally got home, unable to wait any longer, he made love to his wife right in front of the fireplace. Later, when sweaty and content, he basked in postcoital bliss; Hermione clasped his face between her palms and whispered, "I love you, Severus Snape."

Love you, echoed in his mind. And he truly did love her more than he could ever tell in words. For her, he would endure that Christmas dinner year after year, over and over again. Heck, he might even agree to wear pink braces for her.

Then again, maybe not.

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