

A Christmas Cauldron

by ladyofthemasque

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Notes: I couldn't do "A Christmas Carol" and keep it NC-17, in the HP universe. I tried. The attempted plotline collapsed like a soufflé being baked in the middle of a heavy metal concert. I also had a hard time picturing Snape "as giddy as a school-boy" after having been visited by the 3 Ghosts of Christmas--the man deals with ghosts every single day! To him, they're not wondrous spirits of power and majesty sufficient to alter a man's soul. They're ghosts, and they'd damned well better respect the Potions Master, or else!

However, I wondered what it would be like for him to watch some version or variation of "A Christmas Carol", and how he'd react to viewing it. Of course, one could already anticipate the inevitable comparisons waiting to be drawn between him and Ebenezer Scrooge. That, too, was hard to try to bake into even a cheesy soufflé of a PWP, let alone a yummy chocolatey one...until I was in the mood to watch the Muggle movie listed below, and was suddenly struck by the following plot-bunny inspiration...which took me only 3 hours to write, including getting it beta'd.

Happy Holidays! ~Lotm

She had been doing this for ten years, now. Torturing and tormenting him with those...*things*. Somehow, between the time she had left Hogwarts at the end of her seventh year--triumphantly one of the wizards and witches involved in the downfall of the Dark Lord, the same as him--and her return as a highly accomplished Transfigurations Mistress eight years later, she had figured out a way to make Muggle artifacts work despite the anti-electronics interference that always hovered around heavily warded locations, such as Diagon Alley, the Ministry of Magic...and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Somehow, Hermione Granger had managed to make a Muggle deeevee dee player work, and figured out how to turn it into a sort of movie projector.

And though Albus had retired--into the Minister of Magic office, no less--and Minerva had taken over the job as Headmistress of Hogwarts, the redoubtable old lady had softened in the head, permitting Hermione to hold "Movie Nights" during the school term. At first, it had been just once a month, but now it was every Saturday night without fail. Dates were made among the student body, and relationships could be sealed or broken. About the only good thing Severus had initially found in the horribly Muggle activity and its near-instantaneous popularity among the whole student body was that it was now a very effective disciplinary tool: mess up in a classroom, and a teacher could not only take off House-points and assign detentions, but even threaten to suspend a student's Movie Night privileges. There was even an added incentive to see who could earn enough House-points to win the House Cup, because the curly-haired witch responsible for this mess promised that whoever won, that House got to vote on which movie to see on the night before everyone packed up to leave for the summer. Otherwise they could offer suggestions in the Movie Night box, but the final selection depended upon her whim.

He'd liked the fact that Movie Night was now an additional way for him to rule his classes with an iron fist, even as it had irritated him; with a few hisses about Saturday nights, and dark threats about how many cauldrons needed scrubbing whenever the weekends came rolling around, his students were suddenly that much more inclined to

pay attention and take care with their potions-crafting. Professor Granger had found the perfect gilded carrot to match his obsidian stick. Annoying as hell, but there it was.

He'd tried to get out of it, and had succeeded three times in escaping being roped into chaperoning Movie Night. Until the Christmas holidays loomed, and a lot of the faculty as well as the student body departed for the holidays. Not Professor Granger, though, and not her infernal enchanted deevie dee device. And there were enough students remaining behind that Minerva, in her infinite wisdom...though infernal insanity would be a closer appellation...decreed that Severus *had* to chaperone Movie Night, which had fallen on Christmas Eve that year.

The movie in question was a musical piece of absurdity entitled *A Muppet Christmas Carol*. It had strange, colourfully contrasted animations called "muppets" that flapped their mouths in a horrid imitation of talking, golem-things that caused gales of laughter through the student body, and lots of teasings that even first-year students could charm puppets into acting more lifelike than the Muggles who had created them. And the storyline was an agony; even in the wizarding world, the story of *A Christmas Carol* was known to some degree. Severus had already learned to loathe it, because of the inevitable comparisons between himself and the protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge. Thus he had found himself essentially trapped in the teacher's lounge with the tale. The Great Hall was usually used for Movie Night, but there were so few students this time around, Minerva had deemed that the padded old chairs and pair of fireplaces flanking either end of the longish chamber would keep all of the students comfortable and warm.

Still, with everyone's attention on the images projected onto the large sheet Hermione had charmed to hang on the wall, Severus could sit and attempt to read a book, doing his best to ignore the movie between the occasional need to patrol the room, making sure the students weren't getting into storage cupboards, or snogging in the darkness of a room lit only by the two fires and the images flickering across the bleached surface of the sheet. It was during one of his perambulations along the backside of the semi-circle of chairs set up to face the sheet and its images that it had happened. The scene--and he remembered this so very well--was the one in the Fozzibwig Rubber Chicken Factory, for the Christmas Party scene. As the older Scrooge looked on, the young Ebenezer had bumped shoulders with a fetching young woman, and their eyes had met.

The soundtrack had muted, showing how the rest of the world had ceased to exist for those two, and the expressions in the eyes, faces, the whole body language of the two young actors had portrayed a wonder and a longing that had pierced his own heart...because Severus knew that moment oh, so well. He'd felt that same pang of recognition, the dimming and muting of the rest of the world, the moment of sole concentration upon another individual, so deeply concentrated that nothing else mattered in that one shimmering moment. The moment Professor Hermione Granger had returned to the school in the week before the year had started, and he had seen her at the orientation meeting prior to hashing out the schedule of all the courses being offered for the coming term.

She wasn't a child anymore. Her time in the Department of Mysteries had helped to mature her, physically and mentally. She wasn't the young miss in the movie, and the other woman's curly chestnut hair was only a rough facsimile of the real thing--as comparable to her as the young Scrooge could be compared to Severus, with that light brown hair and modest-sized nose--but the movie captured instantly that breathlessness he'd felt on seeing the twenty-six-year-old witch, that skip in the beating of his heart that reminded him he *had* a heart in his chest. He hadn't said or done anything to acknowledge that moment, however; nor had she said or done anything herself. In fact, Severus might even have dismissed the sensation, save that it would return intermittently to plague him with unvoiced, irksome longings.

He'd dealt with the matter by avoiding her as much as possible. He was too old, too harsh, too bitter, too set in his ways, too this, too that, to reach for what he wanted, to soothe the ache in his chest whenever he was around the smiling, laughing Transfigurations Mistress. And then the movie, the sneaky, underhanded, absurd Muggle movie had dealt him that undeserved blow, reminding him of that moment.

The movie hadn't stopped there, however; it progressed to another spurious Christmas Day in Scrooge's past...and that poignant song, filled with such regret and sorrow that he hadn't even realized the tears were streaming down his face until he'd been forced to fetch a kerchief from the pockets of his robes to blow his nose. A quick, wary glance around showed almost no one watching him in that moment of vulnerability. Almost no one...save for her.

Severus had retreated to his chair, stoically refusing to admit that he'd cried by word or deed, and refused to budge to either patrol or watch the rest of the projected film for the rest of the night...though his ears pricked at every word, every song thereafter. Once the children had been herded out of the room at the end of the movie--with its sappy musical ending and all, turning that same regret-filled melody into something 'happy' for the finale--Severus had stayed where he was, letting the darkness conceal the tears that had returned to dampen his cheeks.

Until a shadow had come between him and the fire nearby, and a pair of lips had gently covered his own for one startled, shimmering moment, before moving on to sip the saltwater from his fallow, care-lined cheeks.

Ten years, she had been doing this. Movie Night. And every Christmas Eve--however many other movies were shown during the term-break to the students who remained in the school over the holidays--she played the movie *A Muppet Christmas Carol* in the teacher's lounge. Every year, she made sure there was a seat for him in the shadows at the back of the room, placed with the other seats positioned carefully so that he could see the screen without his view being obstructed by anyone else, nor himself observable by the other occupants in the room, unless they blatantly made the effort to do so. They rarely did look back at him. Those that were caught up in the tale didn't bother to turn around; those that weren't were quickly thrown off the urge to look early in the passage of the film by the sight of the Transfigurations Mistress cuddling with the Potions Master in an overstuffed armchair widened into a sort of loveseat for the two of them. So his dignity was usually preserved when that one scene came around, and those bothersome, undignified tears started to flow. No matter what had happened in his life, that scene, and the song that followed it, always made him cry.

This year, when the movie came to an end and Hermione rose to start ushering the students--clad in their pajamas and dressing gowns--out of the lounge and back to their dormitories, a small, blue-clad figure detached itself from the chairs in the front row and padded on rapid, slippered feet straight back to him. Crawling fearlessly into his lap, the little girl snuggled into his shoulder. Severus gently blocked her hand before she could suckle her thumb. She was five years old, too old to still be suckling her thumb; lately he had taken to coating the digit in question in a hotsauce-like potion to convince her to stop, though she was struggling to stop on her own. He hadn't coated it tonight, though, because she was eating popcorn with her fingers like all the other, older children.

Instead of attempting it again, she merely clutched at the lapels of his black robes, nuzzling her cheek into his wool-covered chest. Cradling her close, Severus stroked the dark ringlets from her forehead and cheek as those equally dark eyes drifted shut, then covered her young hand with his much larger one, catching and holding it gently as it loosened with the slackness of sleep.

When the little girl was completely limp, he gently shifted his grip, lifting her in his arms. He could've used *mobilicorpus* at times like this, which would have been easier for dealing with doorknobs and such, but never did. Instead, he gently carried his daughter to the third-floor suite he and his wife had moved into eight years ago, a compromise between his former dungeon quarters and her own initial choice of a tower abode. It didn't take long for him to tuck his young daughter into her bed; leaving her to sleep, Severus warded the room to let him know if she woke and needed her parents in the night, and returned to the teacher's lounge. Settling back into the chair he had vacated, he waited.

It didn't take long; a shadow blocked out the light from the fire, and a pair of warm lips--flavoured with popcorn and peppermint--brushed against his own. Pulling his wife onto his lap, Severus ignored the tears stinging his eyes. She was his, and he would not end up like the protagonist of the movie. He would not wind up a lonely old man. Neither would he be as giddy as a schoolboy, nor turn over a leaf nearly so abruptly as Scrooge had done. It was true he had reformed the worst of his old ways to some extent, but a good portion of that had simply happened when the Dark Lord had died for good, and he'd no longer needed to maintain his pretenses of being a Death Eater, nor needed to coddle the students of his House in the attempt to curry favour with their families so that he could spy upon them all the better. Gone were the overwhelming fears and frustrations of those days. The rest of it...well, a man as deeply in love with his wife as he was could be excused for wanting to change his character, just enough to please her without losing his long-set sense of self-identity.

Besides, she *liked* him when he was 'sarcastic, and yet snarkily sexy', whatever that meant. Ten years of loving her, of being loved by her, and he still didn't understand what she saw in him, what attracted her so strongly to him. Severus wasn't going to complain, however. She was his, and he was hers, and the yearly viewing of this one Muggle movie was the homage they paid to the anniversary of their relationship. As she sipped the tears from his face, kissing them away even as they spilled free, Severus pulled her down onto his lap, cradling her in a different way than he'd cradled their child. For one thing she straddled his lap almost aggressively. For another, their mouths met again, lips parting, tongues tangling in a near-silent mockery-parody of the way they often verbally sparred with each other, both of them too intelligent,

too stubborn, and too proud to woo quietly or peacefully even a decade later.

As it was, the quickly heating nature of their embrace almost made Severus forget the necessary precautions. Tearing his briefly mouth away, he fished out his wand and locked the door as she kissed his temple, cheek and jaw, then warded the lounge for silence. The length of holly clattered to the floor as she recaptured his lips, nipping the lower one into her teeth before pulling on it until it popped free. A near-silent sound escaped him, not as quiet as a breath but not nearly as loud as an actual groan; he loved it when she did that to the various parts of his body--his lip, his earlobes, his fingers...and points lower down.

He let her fingers impatiently tug at the buttons of his clothes; how could he object, when his own hands had the same goals? Her teaching robe was tossed to the floor; his slumped down his back. Her gown slipped off her shoulders, exposing the slopes of her bra-covered breasts; his frock-coat and shirt tangled around his elbows, leaving him temporarily trapped at her mercy, though he didn't protest one bit when she used his temporary helplessness to lick the too-sensitive discs of his nipples, making him shudder.

Freeing his arms, Severus pulled her gown further down, unbuttoning it further. She reached back as he cupped her breasts, pushing them into his hands even as she pushed off her footwear; following her lead, Severus toed off his own boots, sitting forward so that he could nuzzle her cleavage, licking the valley of warm, lightly scented flesh. She was wearing the perfume he had concocted for their sixth-year wedding anniversary, and he breathed deeply the scents of roses, sandalwood, and patchoulli, with hints of jasmine and jonquils and a drop of vanilla to blend it all together. At least she was wearing it in that spot; sometimes she brushed herself with one scent here, another scent there, giving him an olfactory road-map to their relationship, starting with the flowery, herbal scent of her hair, for which he'd crafted cleansers and detanglers to smooth out her locks into manageable, silky ringlets in the earliest days of their association after that night, so many Christmas Eves ago, and ending up with the musky perfume that was her own natural concoction, the scent of her desire sipped directly from the source that rested between her thighs.

A flick of her own wand widened the expanded, overstuffed chair even further, Transfiguring it from a demi-loveseat to a broad, bed-like fainting couch. Riding the shifting of the furniture with barely a thought of acknowledgement, Severus stripped off the rest of her gown, her bra and knickers, then lay back and lifted his hips, assisting her in the removal of his trousers and underclothes as she slid them down his legs. For a man of his years--even counting for the fact that wizards tended to live longer, slower-aging lives than Muggles--Severus was thrilled to see the admiration in her eyes for his lean, flat-stomached frame as she sat back on his thighs, enjoying the view of his lightly furred chest and the erection that jutted up from his groin. When her fingertips feathered over the hot skin of his penis, it was difficult for him to hold back the urge to moan. Even with a Silencing Charm blocking all sound from escaping the room, Severus still felt too constrained to let himself express every last nuance of their lovemaking.

Until she scooted down the lounge, settled between his thighs, and licked their inner curves, teasing him. His breath escaped noisily as his brow pinched in a frown. His hands tangled in her upswept hair for a moment, then plucked the pins holding her curls knotted in a chignon, casting the bent bits of metal to the age-worn, polished wood of the floor with impatient little clatters. Loosening the wound knot of hair, he sighed louder as she rewarded him by licking and nibbling on his scrotum, making the skin of it tighten and his penis twitch in sympathetic need. She stayed there, licking the sensitive, ticklish seam between pelvis and thigh, tonguing his testicles, breathing on his shaft, until he tugged her to her goal with a soft, impatient groan. When she wrapped him in her mouth, warm and wet and so bloody talented it wrested an actual chest-reverberating groan from his throat, it was so tempting to explode right then and there, but he refrained, gritting his teeth and tightening his buttocks until the urge to ejaculate passed.

To reward her, he dropped his arm, fumbling on the floor for a moment until he found his wand again. A flick, a murmur, and her body lifted into the air, swiveling with her mouth and hands acting as the fulcrum. Settling her over him, Severus accepted her weight with a sigh, then a groan as her unique, natural perfume assaulted his senses with the musk of her desire.

He might have chosen to be on top, another time, but her confession of roughly two months ago had negated that idea. Her frame had softened somewhat with motherhood, but Severus preferred her that way; he had always preferred his women to look like women, and not like young girls; pregnancy had widened his wife's hips and cushioned her thighs a little, and it had given her lower belly that soft curve that said *woman* to him. A curve that had enlarged slightly but perceptibly in the last month or so. Her breasts were ripening again, too, and the mere thought of his wife's sexy body going through all the changes of a second pregnancy was enough to make him want to worship every last inch of her. Burying his mouth in the warmth and wetness at the juncture of her thighs, Severus groaned as her musky-salty dew bathed his nose, his lips, his tongue.

Sometimes it was a race to see who could arouse the other one more, in a sixty-nine like this; sometimes it was a challenge to see who could build the fires slower but higher than the other. Tonight was simply a matter of throwing whatever pleased each of them into the brew, giving it a good stir, and seeing what they made together. Severus loved the taste of her; he enjoyed the feel of her shuddering over him, the distracted way she slowly forgot to suckle his shaft--which was a good thing for him, since he wanted to save himself for the finale--the way she squirmed and dampened further as he continued to lick and nip hungrily at her innermost folds. He didn't mind the weight of her body; he liked the feeling of her being on top, liked giving her almost all of the control; she was a clever woman, and knew exactly what to do with every iota of leeway he allotted to her.

When their passion had been roused to a fever pitch--when she had shuddered three or four times from the ministrations of his mouth, while he gritted his teeth whenever she remembered to lick and suckle--she righted herself in relation to him, straddled his waist, and sank back onto the shaft he aimed with a quickly placed hand. Squeezing-tight softness enfolded him, hot and slick. Releasing himself as she sunk down inch by inch, Severus teased the undersides of her pregnancy-sensitized breasts, then gently--very gently, even this early in the pregnancy--tweaked her nipples between his thumb and forefinger. She gasped and spasmed around him, triggered into another temblor of desire. Sliding his hands quickly down to her hips, Severus ground up into her, making her moan from the stimulation.

A roll of her hips made him grit his teeth, breathing heavily. A buck of his own loins made her gasp his name, as they ground and rolled and rocked together. Their hands caressed, their mouths met and mated, their bodies intertwined, until his touches and thrusts shuddered through her in a final orgasm, culminating with the gasping of her love for him.

That did it. That always did it, for him. It was as if Severus physically couldn't cum without her confession of love, even though he voluntarily worked on his self-control, holding himself back for so long before this point. He hadn't climaxed until her confession that first time in this room, either. She'd ambushed him with those gentle kisses, strapped him in place with her gentle caresses, chained his flesh to the chair when she'd unbuttoned her clothes as she'd straddled his lap, and caged his heart within the beating of her own as she'd ridden him that very first time, both of them moving in near-silence, until she had shattered his control by whispering in his ear that she'd loved and admired him for a very long time.

Now, with similar words echoing in his ear, Severus flooded her womb with his seed, gasping out his love for her as she moaned and writhed on him, enjoying each pulsing, wet thrust. He gripped her hips and flexed roughly into her, bouncing her over his body until she collapsed, crushing her breasts to his chest. Their mouths met and mated while she rode him to the last dregs of his pleasure, while she shivered with the aftershocks of her own. Hearts pounded together, as she sagged limply against his chest.

Kissing her forehead through the curls splayed over his chest, Severus whispered his love one more time, shivering with pleasure as she returned his words in a sated, almost sleepy murmur. Only once in the past ten years had they actually fallen asleep in the Transfigured chair and forgotten to awaken in time to return to their own quarters, but then that was why the locking charm and the sound-warding had been cast. For his part, though he knew they had to return so that they could be there when their firstborn woke with all the glee and energy of a thoroughly loved child on Christmas morning, Severus was quite content to lie there, his wife's body limply blanketing his own, only the strength in the way she clung to him letting him know she hadn't quite fallen asleep.

No, he wasn't ever going to turn out like the Ebenezer Scrooge of that musical-film, losing the love of his life and only finding his soul's redemption late in his life. Nor was he ever going to need a visit from three spurious spirits to change his life as radically as the film's protagonist had changed. The Past ten years of happiness had been more than ample compensation for the forty-plus years of misery that had preceded them. The Future would take care of itself, and would continue to do so for as long as he took care to express his love to his wife in all the ways she loved best, praising and challenging her intellect, giving her little gifts, taking his turns in caring for their daughter--soon to be their children--and so forth.

The Present was being spent exactly as it should be: wrapped in the arms of the woman he loved.