

It's A *Not* So Wonderful
Life

by Pearle

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Not mine. All characters and settings belong to JKR, et al. I promise to return them when I finish playing with them. Well, most of them anyway.

Disclaimer It's A Wonderful Life: Also not mine. The idea, character of Clarence, and quotes from the movie belong to Frank Capra and American films. No profit is being made from their use.

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It's A *Not* So Wonderful Life

Severus trudged slowly up the path to Hogwarts from the Forbidden Forest. He pulled his cloak tighter, the freezing wind whipping the tails of his winter cloak around his legs. The warming charm he'd cast less than an hour ago had already worn thin as the frigid air buffeted his body. The basket of freshly cut mistletoe, dangerously filled to overflowing with the fragrant plant, swayed heavily in the wind.

'Ruddy holiday.' Severus swore under his breath as he maneuvered the basket through the front doors of the castle.

"You need to get that looked at."

"I'm fine. Been worse. Who are you?"

"I'm your guardian angel. I'm here to help you."

Severus looked at the old man and burst out laughing. "Started celebrating early, have we?"

"No, really, I'm your guardian angel."

"Of course you are. I imagine I've kept you busy these last few years. If you're an angel, where are your wings?" Severus managed to stand and started brushing off the snow that clung to his cloak. Large fluffy snowflakes drifted slowly around the pair, the fresh snow mingling with those flakes already on the ground.

"You have kept me busy, but the whole situation down here has been hard on all of us. You have no idea of the paperwork I've had to fill out." The old man shook his head as he thought of the forms he'd have to fill out now if he didn't accomplish his mission. "Anyway, I'm here to help you. So I can earn my wings. Shouldn't you have someone check that cut?"

"I'm fine. It's merely a superficial wound." Starting back down the path, he dusted the snow off his shoulders again, stopping to rub the spot on his left forearm where his Dark Mark had been. The Mark had faded to a faint silvery outline, twinging every so often to remind him of his past. "I believe I am beyond help."

The old man, surprisingly agile despite his age, fell in step with Severus. "That's ridiculous, Severus. No one is beyond help. Shouldn't you be returning to the castle to finish the potion?"

Severus stopped and glared at him, his wand suddenly appearing in his hand. "Who are you?" he hissed.

"I told you, I'm your guardian angel. The powers that be have noticed you seem to be more and more despondent lately. I was sent here to help you. I know you've thought about ending your own life."

"How could you...?" It was true. He had thought he would be better off dead, but he hadn't told anyone. "I see. I must still be unconscious. You aren't real. In that case, come. We're going to Rosmerta's to get pissed. Granger will finish the potion."

"Lovely witch, Miss Granger. And you do know she cares for you?"

Severus glanced sideways at the man. "Hmp, I must be channeling Albus. You sound suspiciously like him."

"My name's Clarence. I did see Albus not too long ago. He said to send you his best. About Miss Granger..."

"Yes, yes, fine witch. I'm sure she cares deeply for me. I'm sure I can muck up her life as well as I have my own. Make it just as worthless by association."

"That's just it. Your life has value to it. You just don't believe it. You have no idea how many people you've helped, Miss Granger included."

Severus stopped, the lights from Hogsmeade twinkling ahead. "Enough. I don't know what you're playing at or who you are, but I think it's about time you left. All those 'people' you say I've helped, I'm sure they would've been better off if I'd never been born."

"What did you say?"

"I said: I wish I'd never been born!" Severus yelled, snarling at Clarence. *Barmy old coot*, he thought.

"Never been born, of course." Clarence looked to the night sky. "Well, what do you think? Yeah, that will do." A sudden gust of wind shook the trees. "You don't have to make a big deal out of it. All right, Severus. You got your wish. You've never been born."

The Potions master sighed; at this point, he decided if he wasn't unconscious, than Clarence was mostly likely harmless and more than a little delusional. He probably should Floo St Mungo's and let them have a look at Clarence. It's possible someone was missing the old man by now. Maybe Rosmerta knew him. It was a thought. "Are you from around here?"

"No, not really. Your head's stopped bleeding. Your hair's dry, too."

Gently, Severus touched the back of his head. He scowled when he couldn't find a trace of the cut. "As I said, merely superficial."

"No, Severus, your head's stopped bleeding because you've never been born. The snow's stopped falling, too."

The dour man brushed the remaining snow from his shoulders, his hand automatically moved to where his Dark Mark was, expecting the twinge that normally accompanied his previous movements. But the pain never came. He looked questioningly at his left arm.

"There's no Mark there. You were never born."

"Right, I was never born." They'd reached the Three Broomsticks at the edge of Hogsmeade. Severus pushed the door open and motioned Clarence in. "Come on, even without the snow, it's colder than I'd like."

Rosmerta's bartender, Mike, was behind the bar polishing glasses. "What'll it be?"

"Have a seat." Severus gestured to two stools in front of the bar. "Has Rosmerta left already? I wanted to speak to her?"

"Rosmerta? Don't know anyone by that name. She one of the new ones?"

"New ones?" Severus frowned in confusion.

"I don't have all day, what do you want?"

"Oh, my, it's been so long. Maybe some nice mulled wine?" Clarence rubbed his hands together in anticipation of the wine.

"Just give us both an Ogden's."

The bell over the door sounded as the wind blew against it. "Oh, someone made it. Every time you hear a bell, it means an angel got his wings."

"Clarence, I'd keep quiet about the wings if I were you." Severus looked out the front window of the inn, even with the snow covering the window; he should have been able to see the lights of the little village. "Mike, why is Hogsmeade so dark?"

"Hogsmeade? This is Bellaville."

"Bellaville?" An odd chill ran up Severus' spine. He'd figure out what to do with Clarence when he got back to Hogwarts. Something funny was going on. "Come on, Clarence. I want to get back to the castle."

"You're staying up at the castle?" Mike looked thoughtful as he watched Severus fish in the pocket of his cloak for change.

An odd feeling that something was wrong had come over Hermione while working on the Pepperup Potion, more than a feeling, a compulsion, really. The harder she tried to ignore it, the stronger the feeling became until finally, she couldn't ignore it at all. She would take a quick look at the path, a cursory glance to prove that nothing was wrong, and then she could go back to her potion making. But something had been wrong. Her heart had jumped into her throat when she spied the still body of the Potions master sprawled across the snowy path.

Moving carefully, Hermione tried to rouse the unconscious man. "Professor? Can you hear me?"

He could feel the cold ground at his back, the pain in his head throbbing in time with his pulse. The pain? Severus' eyes snapped open. "Hermione? Is that really you? How did we escape? Where's Clarence?"

"You must have hit your head harder than I thought. Hold still and I'll levitate you back to the castle."

Abruptly the agitated wizard sat up, dizziness stilling his movement as the world swam briefly before settling itself once again. "Let me see your neck."

"My neck?"

"Let me see your neck."

The witch, though confused, complied with the odd request, raising her head so he could see her neck more clearly.

"There's no collar. Thank God, there's no collar." Severus' hand stroked the smooth column of her throat. "Is Minerva still Headmistress?"

"Of course Minerva is still Headmistress. You haven't been gone that long. Come on, can you stand? I want to get you back to the castle. You've had a nasty fall. Let me take care of that cut, and then we'll do something for the concussion I suspect you have." Hermione helped him stand, brushing off the clumps of snow that clung to the back of his cloak.

Severus looked up at the night sky. "It's still tonight. That means the Yule Ball is still tomorrow." He stopped on the path and grabbed Hermione's hands. "Hermione, will you go with me?"

"Now I know you have a concussion."

"Will you go with me to the ball? Has someone asked you already?"

"No, no one's asked me. If I agree to go with you to the ball tomorrow, will you come back to the castle with me now?"

"I know you think I've lost my mind. Maybe I have, but you didn't see the world I saw. Thank God, Potter won. Potter, is he still here? I have to thank him." Severus took off at a brisk pace. "Well, come on. We can't stay out here all night. I need to brew more Pepperup so we'll both be free to go tomorrow. What was I thinking, leaving it only half done?"

Hermione stood wide-eyed watching his retreating back.

"Are you coming?" Severus had turned back and grabbed Hermione's hand. He started back up the path again, pulling the unresisting witch with him. "Did you say Potter was still here, or did he leave?"

"Harry is at Ginny's. They'll be here tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? I suppose that will be soon enough to thank him. Ah, here we are." He pulled open the side entrance. "Ladies first."

The door closed behind them with a bang. "Maybe I should just take you straight to the hospital wing." Nonetheless, she followed him down the corridor and back to the lab.

"Don't be ridiculous. I have too much work to do to go to hospital. My head is fine. As I told Clarence, it's just a superficial wound. Clarence, I wonder what happened to him?"

"Before you do anything, I want to look at you. Sit down." Hermione indicated the chair next to his desk.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"What do you think happened out there?" He was right. The cut wasn't really that deep. Even his eyes seemed clear.

"I was in another world. Voldemort had won. Potter was dead. Albus... his body was... You were... a slave..." He couldn't bring himself to tell her the details, not now, maybe another time, maybe never. He belonged here; he knew that now. He'd been given another chance at life.

Hermione's hand flew to her throat. "Oh, my God. Thank goodness it not true."

Severus nodded in agreement, gazing deep into Hermione's eyes. Her eyes held hope, and friendship, and maybe something more. "Hermione." He pulled the witch to him, his fingers threading through the curls at the nape of her neck. Softly, he brushed her lips with his before deepening the kiss, his tongue seeking entrance to the hot cavern of her mouth. He could feel her melting against him, his desire for life, for her, heating his blood. His tongue plundered her mouth as his other hand wound its way around her waist, pulling her tightly against him.

Hermione's hands came around his neck as she held on for dear life, her blood pounding in her ears. She moaned, her knees growing weak as lust flooded her veins. Her stomach clenched, she could feel his erection pressed against her, his hand kneading her bum, chasing all thought and logic away.

"Severus."

"I was wrong. There are a lot of reasons to be happy. I'm just not sure I know how to be happy. Will you help me?"

Hermione smiled. "I think I can do that."

A loud thud in hallway, followed by the sound of a bell ringing made Hermione jump. "I'm sorry about that, Severus. I told Harry to use stronger sticking charms. I'll remove the wreath."

"No, it's fine. Leave it. I guess Clarence got his wings after all."

"Do I want to know who this Clarence person is?"

Severus shook his head and smiled. "Just a new friend of mine. Shall we finish the potion?"

"You should do that more often. You have a nice smile."

"Thank you. What's this?" Severus picked up a bright green sheet of paper that was sitting off to the side of the workbench. Details of the Yule Ball, complete with moving images of a band, moved across the paper.

"That's the flyer I had the elves put up in the common rooms. We set up two stages for the ball this year. We'll have the Weird Sisters, of course, they're a tradition at Hogwarts, but Zuzu's Petals is one of the hottest new and up coming bands around. We were lucky to get them."

"If you say so." Severus checked the flame under the cauldron and released the stasis charm Hermione had cast. "It shouldn't take too much longer to finish this."

"And after that?"

"Perhaps we can get to know one another a bit better." Severus leaned over and gently kissed the witch.

"I'd like that."

"So would I."

It really was a wonderful life after all.

~fini~

A/N: The story borrows heavily from the film of almost the same name. It seems Frank Capra's holiday story didn't move fast enough when the holiday plot bunny sunk its teeth into me. Bits and pieces of the dialogue are from the movie, as is the character of Clarence, the angel. You can find quotes and a synopsis of the movie here: http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/It's_a_Wonderful_Life.

A grateful thank you to my wonderful beta, the amazing Southern_Witch_69 (who is still under the weather hope you feel better soon). The mistakes, however, are all mine.

To one and all: Happy Holidays and a wish for a happy, healthy New Year!

~Pearle

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