

Christmas Presents

by chivalric

Christmas is not the best time for Professor Snape, and then he is kidnapped on top of it.

One-shot story

Chapter 1 of 1

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Endless thanks to my beta, Dreamy Dragon, who I could persuade to crosscheck this for me just before Christmas. I owe you a big box of chocolate frogs, Dreamy!

It was Christmas Eve and, therefore, the perfect time to mark essays. Severus Snape, Potions master at Hogwarts, sat in his study down in the dungeons, for once absolutely sure that no student would bother him tonight. Most of them had gone home anyway; the few students who stayed at Hogwarts for Christmas had behaved unusually well all week in order to prevent to get caught by his merciless eyes. He hadn't seen a reason to give detention, not even once, and he had to admit he was glad to have a quiet evening.

Marking an essay with a quick 'poor', he allowed himself a small smile at the prospect of spending all day tomorrow down here as well, avoiding the dancing, the merry wishes, the slightly drunk hugs of his female colleagues, and the happiness they all radiated like a bushfire.

He despised Christmas. It was certainly his least favourable time of the year, but then, in another three days, it would be all over once more.

Another dreadful waste of precious parchment was marked with a 'troll'. Surely, his students became worse every year.

Sighing, he got up and stretched his aching shoulders. Maybe it was time for a break. Maybe it was time for a treat. After all, it was Christmas Eve.

Taking a mug off the shelf, he stepped over to his workbench where he found a pot, poured some milk in, and heated it slowly simply by concentrating on the task. When the milk was hot, but not yet boiling, he added cocoa, some cinnamon, and a little bit of chilli before he crowned it with a generous topping of whipped cream and a few sprinkles of chocolate flakes. Sometimes he had a sweet tooth; he didn't give in to it too often, but if he did, he did it with style.

Taking a sip, he momentarily thought about continuing to mark essays, but felt that he couldn't spend as much as even only one more minute on them. Instead, he settled in front of the fireplace, put his long legs near the warmth of the flames and fished with a content sigh for the book he had been reading during the past nights.

When his fingers made contact with the leather-bound volume, he had to endure the extremely unpleasant feeling of a hook that seemed to get hold right behind his navel, jerking him on with irresistible strength out of his chair and out of his room, even out of Hogwarts, pulling him on through the night and to a destination he was unaware of as yet.

A Portkey. Someone had broken into his rooms, had made a bloody Portkey out of his book, and had thus transferred him to Merlin-knew-where.

He landed hard on a wooden floor only moments after he had touched the book, out of breath and with the memory of wind and snow in his face. The sudden impact

brought him down on one knee, but he kept his balance, dropped the book and had his wand out instantly.

Whoever had done this wasn't to survive this intrusion on his privacy, that much was guaranteed.

Sweeping his windblown hair out of his furious face, Snape got up and backed away towards one of the walls, holding his wand steady, his black eyes blazing with cold rage. He expected to get attacked, naturally, and was determined not to let his captor get an advantage over him.

Carefully, he took in his surroundings and was quite surprised to be not only alone in the room but also to know exactly where he was.

It looked quite different, though. Making sure that he was indeed alone, Snape then tried to Disapparate, but wasn't surprised to find wards blocking the attempt. *Very well*, he thought. *I want to know who is behind this anyway.*

The most obvious change in the room was that it was clean, which came close to a miracle after the long time of neglect. No one should have been here for years. ~~He~~ hadn't been here for years. But someone else had, obviously, and had taken care of the cobwebs and the mould. On top of it, this someone had also thrown out the old furniture as well, the rotten carpet and the moth-eaten curtains, the Muggle books and the pictures worth less than a Knut.

A cold finger touched Snape's soul at the sight of this room, even in its changed state. He had grown up here, had tried to hide in this room from his father's fists and his mother's vacant eyes. In the chamber above the living room, he had brewed his first potion, and on this very floor more than four years ago, he had sworn an Unbreakable Vow.

He was in his own house at Spinner's End. Someone had dared to bring him back here, although he had promised himself to never set foot in it again. "Someone will pay for this," Snape growled as he took in every little detail that had changed.

The floor had been freed from its carpet and now revealed the original wooden planks, which helped a lot to chase the dreadful atmosphere away that had lingered in this room ever since he had been a little boy. The windows were sparkling and not covered anymore with the velvet curtains he had hated so much. The walls were painted white instead of dark brown. Instead of the ugliest couch and coffee table one could imagine, there now was a huge bookshelf filled with everything a wizard would need for a quiet evening, and on the desk parchment and quills were piled in abundance. A fire burned and warmed the air he had always known to be nothing but icy, and in front of it waited an armchair to get occupied by the owner of this house.

Amazing changes but he was the owner, and he for sure hadn't done any of this!

Dozens of candles lit the room. Mistletoe hung beneath the ceiling. In a vase on the windowsill, some dark green fir-twigs were arranged, decorated with tiny red and gold baubles. The atmosphere was distinctively Christmassy, but it wasn't overdone. If he hadn't been in such a dreadful mood and feared to get struck down any moment now, he might have even bothered to drop a snappy remark about the gorgeous sight.

"Good evening, Professor Snape."

His head snapped up, and his eyes scanned the room until they found the source of the sentence. Obviously, the events had taken him more by surprise than he had expected as he hadn't heard the door open.

When he realised who had greeted him, Snape was nothing less than stunned to find that it was one of his former students. One whose career he had followed briefly; one who had been extraordinary during her years at Hogwarts and exceptionally talkative as well. A student who had known everything, at any time, and whom he hadn't been able to teach respect at all.

Granger. Hermione Granger.

Taking a step towards her, he didn't lower his wand when he hissed, "*Expelliarmus!*"

Only to find out that she didn't have a wand at all.

Now that took the wind slightly out of his sails.

"If you insist in threatening an unarmed woman with your wand, Professor, please feel free to continue. But maybe, if you are not too scared of me, you would prefer to have a glass of wine instead?"

For the first time in all his life, Snape's jaw just dropped, and he stood, open-mouthed, and stared at the young woman in front of him. Only after a few very long moments, it occurred to him how silly he must look. With a sharp sound of connecting teeth, he closed his mouth and pressed his pale lips together tightly. In the same instant, his wand was gone as well. He wouldn't sink so low to threaten a defenceless witch.

"What..." he started, but stopped dead when she stepped closer and into the light.

He hadn't seen her like this before. He doubted that anyone ever had, actually.

She looked absolutely stunning.

She still was relatively small, reaching up to his shoulders at best, but her body had grown curves in all the right places in the years since she had left school. Her hair had grown nearly down to her waist, but wasn't the messy nest of brown curls anymore. Instead, the long chestnut colour ringlets had been taken care of by a master and streamed in long waves down her back, held away from her face by a plain silver slide formed as a leaf. Her huge amber eyes were sparkling, her dark red lips invited the observer to kiss them, her skin seemed to have the perfect texture and colour of light silk.

And her dress! Her dress was a deep emerald green and went perfectly with her lovely eyes. It was short, tight, and revealed her long legs in the most amazing ways. For a moment, Snape couldn't take his eyes off her fragile ankles, only to let his gaze wander up to her narrow hips, small waist and to become distracted next by the dress's deep neckline that granted a perfect look at the top of her milk-white breasts. Nearly, very nearly he would have gulped.

Once, in her fourth year, Hermione had dressed up to attend a ball at the arm of Victor Krum. She had looked very nice, back then, Snape remembered. She even had turned a few heads, mainly the head of her friend Weasley who nevertheless had decided to marry Brown a few years later.

Were Hermione to go out tonight, to any place, any ball, to the Ministry or to a bar or wherever she wanted to go, she wouldn't turn just a few heads she would break hearts instead.

Snape wasn't impressed. Female beauty did nothing for him, and he was immune to even the most charming smiles.

"Miss Granger," Snape said with a slightly chilly note in his voice. "If you add a few of those baubles from the windowsill to your silly outfit, you might as well go as a Christmas tree yourself."

He had expected a different reaction than the beautiful smile she gave him.

"A Christmas tree wouldn't offer you something to drink, Professor," she said and went to a table where a bottle and two glasses stood. Filling them, she held one of them out to him and tipped her head. "Cheers, Professor Snape."

Stunned, he took the glass from her hand. He felt like being in someone else's dream, a mere observer and unable to influence the events. But that disturbing feeling only

lasted for a moment.

"I don't remember allowing you to enter my house, Miss Granger," he said, his voice cool.

Taking a sip from the wine, he found that it had a strangely sweet flavour Spanish, possibly, and delicious as well as expensive. Putting the glass down, he walked to the door and tried to open it.

Impossible, but when he took his wand out to end this farce, he heard her laughing. Turning, he scowled at her and couldn't deny that seeing her laugh was definitely quite a pleasant sight.

Shaking her head slightly she explained, "You won't get out of here before midnight, Professor. Whatever you try, whichever charm you might use, unless you kill me and therefore violently break the wards I've set up, there is no way out before the twelfth stroke of the clock."

Now that was really something he wouldn't have expected in a thousand years. "You used a Cinderella Charm?" he asked, nearly shouting at her, incredulous at the stupidity of her action. "Why on earth would you use magic that contains so very expensive ingredients and that is so damn complicated to perform and so idiotic at the same time?"

Snape went back from the door and towards her to face the girl who had grown into a woman in the last years. His black eyes pierced hers, but she just looked back at him, unflinching and calm. She took a step back and once turned round on the tips of her toes, arms spread, hair flying, eyes sparkling.

"Look at me, Professor Snape," she said. "Have you ever seen me looking like that before? No don't lie. I know exactly how I look under normal circumstances. I'm a bookworm, a spinster, the boring single friend who can baby-sit whenever needed, the one who has ink-stains on her fingers and her face and who spends her life with books instead of a family."

She took a very generous sip of her wine. For the first time, Snape saw a certain shimmer in her eyes. *Maybe she wasn't entirely sober* *This here is becoming stranger by the minute*, he thought, but she wasn't finished.

"You see, Professor, I couldn't stand the thought of another Christmas with Harry and Ginny and Ron and Lavender and Remus and Tonks and the children and Molly and Arthur, and Neville trying to give me one of his wet slobbery kisses, and the rest looking at me with that *pity* in their eyes! I can see them thinking 'Poor girl, still hasn't found anyone,' and it makes me sick to death, and so I decided that this year I will choose what to do and who I spend Christmas with!"

She reached out and placed her finger right on the tip of his nose, and he found that he couldn't back off anymore as she had cornered him between bookshelf and desk.

"You're drunk," Snape stated in the hope that simple facts would slow her down a bit. False hopes, though. She snatched her hand away, went straight to her glass, and emptied it.

"Of course I am drunk!" she snapped, and her cheeks flushed delightfully. "Do you really believe I would have been brave enough to kidnap you without being completely intoxicated?"

Goodness grief, he thought. *And it is not even eleven yet!*

He went and picked up his glass very carefully, took a sip, then looked round the room again. Next to the bottle stood a tray, filled with sandwiches, canapés, pastries, and crackers. Taking a plate, he filled it, handed it to his captor, then did the same again for himself and settled in one of the big chairs in front of the fireplace. As he couldn't get out of here anyway, he might as well find out what on earth was going on in her head to come up with such an incredulous plan.

"Sit with me, Miss Granger," he invited her, and for once his voice was soft and warm. No use to scare a drunken young lady who obviously had had a go at the wine since the late afternoon.

Frowning at him, she looked at the plate in her hands and sat down opposite him.

Snape nodded at the room. "What happened here?" he asked not out of interest, but to keep her talking.

Another smile, no less beautiful than the last one. The Cinderella Charm was indeed very complicated too complicated for the average witch, but then, she always had been extraordinary and she had mastered it perfectly as he could see whenever he looked at her.

"I was in the neighbourhood during the summer," she started, took a sandwich and devoured it with one bite. "There's a Squib living in the village, and she had a book that had got out of control I'm a bookbinder, did you know that?"

Snape nodded. Granger had been one of the few former students he had kept track of, and it hadn't surprised him that she had found a job that allowed her to stay close to her beloved books.

"The Squib's book was easy to tame a few incantations, and it had gone to sleep. But I thought, whilst I'm here I could as well have a look at your house. I was curious, I must admit. I wanted to know where you grew up and so took a quick stroll through the wood." A second sandwich found its way into her mouth.

Snape could barely help a smile curving his lips at the sight of her, munching and telling a story like a child. Suddenly he realised that he felt quite comfortable being here with her was for sure better than marking essays, although he would have never admitted it, not even under torture.

Wiping her fingers off on a napkin, Hermione frowned at her former professor. "How could you do this?" she demanded, accusation in her voice. "How could you neglect this beautiful house, let it rot, abandon it?" There was deep consternation in her words.

"Bad memories," Snape just answered. His past was a subject he wouldn't talk about.

She snorted. "Sure," she said. "You are such a coward that you couldn't bear to come back here at least once for putting a 'For sale' sign in the garden." More wine, just another little sip.

She leaned forward. "I think you just couldn't be bothered. I think this house means nothing to you. I think you don't give a damn." Straightening up, she raised her chin. "I made it my hobby," she declared.

Gods, this woman drove him crazy with her sudden changing of subjects. "You made what, precisely, your hobby?" he saw himself forced to ask.

The canapés were delicious, he had just found out, and he had no intention to leave here with an empty stomach. Dinner at Hogwarts hadn't been an option tonight: too jolly for his taste.

She was too restless to sit still. Already she was up again, pacing the room. With one hand she touched the desk, his chair, the windowsill, and finally the bookshelf. "Your house; this house. I have been coming here since the summer, whenever I found the time during the week and every weekend. Renovating your house has become my hobby." Then she thought again. "Was my hobby. It's done, I'm finished."

Before the last words, there had been a certain warmth in her voice. It occurred to him that she loved this house *Very well indeed she can have it*, he thought. *And good riddance with it*. But she looked at him so expectantly that he found himself saying before he could hinder it, "What exactly have you done?"

And one of those smiles again. He could get used to them, actually.

"Everything," she answered. "You wouldn't recognise it anymore, I guess. Feel free to tell the Ministry that I have trespassed on your property. I don't care. It was so much fun, and I think you can sell it now for a much higher price than before. It would be perfect for a family of three or four, if you put it like that in the *Daily Prophet* you will be flooded with inquiries."

Time to change the subject.

"How did you manage to turn my book into a Portkey," he demanded, leaning forward and putting his glass on the floor. "Or to be more precise, who did you bribe to steal the book and to bring it back in time so I wouldn't notice its absence?"

She didn't even bother to lie. "Winky. She was so eager to help me when I told her that it would be for the best of you. She has a special liking for you, hadn't you noticed it?"

Snape just closed his eyes in despair. A house-elf why hadn't he ever thought of that possibility, not even once? They could move freely; it was their job to take care of food and clothing, they went in and out of his private rooms, and he had never wasted a thought at the fact that one might work for an enemy.

"She's fired," he stated matter-of-factly, which earned him another laugh.

"Sorry, Professor, too late for that she quit the moment she had taken the book back. Remember she's a free elf, she can leave whenever she wants."

With a sparkle in her eyes, Hermione got up and took the bottle from the table. With a questioning look, she came back to him, and he picked up his glass and held it out to her. When she poured in the wine, he saw that her hands were small and elegant with long red nails and not even as much as a scratch or callus. Involuntarily, his eyes fell on his own hands. They showed the signs of his work with potions whilst hers obviously hadn't seen a day of hard work. *Interesting*, he thought and got up to have a closer look at the bookshelf.

He felt her eyes in his back.

"There weren't that many books in this house for sure," he said. "And most of the good ones I took with me. Those books here are rare where do they come from?"

She leaned at the wall next to the shelf, rolling the glass between her delicate hands. "They were orphans, so to speak."

Pushing herself off the wall, she came over and stood close to him. She smelled appealing like a fresh winter breeze with a hint of orange flavour.

"I found them," she explained. "Here and there, and their owners didn't want them anymore or couldn't handle them properly."

Pulling one book out, she gently stroked its back, and it opened under her touch. It was an old volume and rare, and it needed a caring hand and a lot of knowledge to stay tame.

Snape took the book from her hands. The same book was in his own collection, but his was younger and not as beautifully coloured.

"Please take this and the others as a present from me, sir," Hermione said quietly. "I can't keep all those books in my flat. It's already crammed, and they need space and someone who treasures them. If you decide to sell the house, please take them to Hogwarts. I thought you would be the perfect person to take care of them."

His arms dropped, and he gave her his full attention now. "You intend to give me... a Christmas present?" He sounded as if the concept of receiving presents was completely unknown to him.

"Don't sound so surprised," she grumbled, clearly embarrassed at his stunned reaction.

She wanted to step away from him, but he put the book back into the shelf and caught her arm instead in one swift movement.

"Why am I here, Miss Granger?" he growled, and the sound of his voice made her shiver.

She freed her arm, turning away from him. He didn't need to see how uneasy she was.

But this was her night as the thought to spend it alone once again as in the past years had been impossible to bear. And she had promised herself to answer every question he might ask honestly. This one, though... but well. "You are here because I wanted you to be here," she said diplomatically, not lying, but not telling the full truth, either.

Snape snorted at her lame response. "Can't your overactive brain and your ever babbling mouth come up with a better explanation?" he mocked, a sardonic smile upon his pale lips.

"It's because of my ever babbling mouth, alright," she hissed, and the force of these words took him by surprise.

He had touched a sensitive spot as it seemed, worth a bit more poking. "You always talked too much, Miss Granger, from the first moment in my classroom. I clearly recall telling you that on several occasions. I know it earned you detention once or twice."

"But you were the only one!" she cried out and crossed her arms over her chest. "Maybe, if a few others had mentioned it severely enough, I might have learned in time to keep my mouth shut, at least occasionally, but no, that didn't happen. Which is precisely the problem."

In desperation she emptied her glass and went on. "I am incapable to shut up if someone talks nonsense, Professor. It is impossible for me to accept stupid compliments, knowing exactly that they weren't given honestly. I can't lie if some idiot asks me 'Was I good?' And I have no idea how to do proper small talk. I guess you get the point?" The look she gave him was hard and bitter.

He raised his eyebrow at that confession. "I see," he murmured more to himself than to her. "You are unmarried, and I take it that you scare the hell out of every man who might be only slightly interested in you. But that still doesn't explain why you chose me to be your victim tonight."

Strolling over to the windowsill, he took one of the tiny golden baubles off the fir twig. "As I am not interested in you in the first place, it was not only stupid to kidnap me of all people, but as well utterly useless to dress up for me." Holding up the bauble so the light of the candles made it sparkle, he continued, "But I thought you would at least know how much I dislike Christmas." He crunched the glass ball between his long fingers.

"Not as much as I, Professor," she replied dryly. "I was supposed to be at Harry's house tonight, like every year since we have been out of school, and since my parents now live in Egypt permanently."

Picking up a napkin, she came over, took his hand and cleaned off the tiny drop of blood on his forefinger. He should have hindered her, but for some reason he didn't.

"Can you imagine what it feels like to be there? With the children playing on the floor, and everyone having that half-mad happy smile on their faces, and Christmas carols all over the place and no one there interested in a decent discussion?" Letting go of his hand, she swiftly touched his cheek, and he was surprised that his instinctive reaction to jerk his head away from the contact failed to appear.

He pondered her words. Then he said, "Yes, Miss Granger, I think I know exactly how this feels."

"See? That's why you are here."

"I beg your pardon?"

Sighing, she answered in more detail, "You know how to listen, Professor. You can, if you like, keep up a conversation for more than a few minutes without drifting off into Quidditch subjects. And you don't fish for compliments you wouldn't need me to tell you how marvellous you are or how good at your job or how good a father you are or such nonsense in your presence, for once, I could be myself I figured and wouldn't have to guard my mouth as you are more than used to it. I didn't want to be alone tonight. I considered you would be, with a bit of luck, good company, and that's why I made the effort with the Cinderella Charm I thought at least I should look as good as possible for someone I had kidnapped."

She had said too much. Blushing, she realised that she wasn't that drunk anymore, and that she desperately needed another glass of wine. She stepped to the table where the nearly empty bottle was.

Her revelation had caught him off guard. The evening hadn't turned out as expected at all under usual circumstances he would be in bed by now. And when he had arrived, he had expected an enemy, a fight, someone who hated him enough to go through such great measures to get him out of Hogwarts. He hadn't expected a young woman not entirely sober, beautiful and sad, telling him that he of all people was the one she would like to spend such a special evening with. Suddenly, his heart ached for Hermione Granger who had such a brilliant mind and had the most devoted friends, but no one who loved her with all his might.

Wiping the last few splinters from the bauble off his hand, he followed her. She clung to her glass, but didn't drink from it. In an unusually gentle tone he asked, "And you haven't found anyone more suitable for company but me? None of your friends, no one..."

She just shook her head and refused to look at him. "They have family, Professor. They love me, but they have spouses and children. I didn't want to be the odd one out again."

"But... me?" He sounded lost for words.

Raising her head, she quietly said, "Do you deny that you are as lonely as I am?" Her beautiful eyes looked straight into his black soul and his ice-cold heart.

Whatever he might have answered was drowned out by the clock that struck twelve.

Turning pale, she stepped back, away from him and into the shadows near the door. She was about to vanish from the living room, but with two long strides he was next to her and grabbed her by the elbow once again, refusing to let her leave. With his merciless eyes he observed the changes in her appearance, forced upon her with every booming stroke.

The dress melted into a jumper and jeans.

The silver leaf in her hair turned into the quill it really was.

The glossy ringlets curled, becoming wild and untamed and falling into her face.

Her bosom, so outstanding only a moment ago, was barely visible anymore, and it wasn't only because of the lumpy jumper.

Her deep dark red lips paled. The colour of her skin wasn't silk-like anymore as if she had spent hours in front of a mirror, but showed clearly that she was troubled and unhappy. Her cheeks were red from the wine, and under her eyes were the hints of shadows; she obviously hadn't slept well lately. Taking her hands in his, he could clearly see now where the books had bitten her the hands of a working witch devoted to her job. Strange, really, that he found them a lot more attractive than the perfect, unmarked, red-nailed hands from only a moment ago. The skin was quite rough as well; he just raised an eyebrow at it.

"From renovating my house?" he asked.

She just nodded and still avoided to look at him. "The wards are lifted. You may go now, Professor."

Trying to get her arm free, she found that he still refused to let go of her.

"I apologise for abducting you, but there is no need to hurt me," she insisted, trying to step away only to find that he kept her close still.

"Why. Am. I. Here." Each word was precisely pronounced. He cupped her chin in his strong hand, touched her face and forced her to look at him. His expression made it clear that he demanded a satisfying answer.

"Because I like you! Because I decided that for once I wanted to spend Christmas the way I want to and that means in your company. Hex me, but I was foolish enough to think you could do with some company as well." A tear was slowly running down her face.

Regretfully, he shook his head. "So much effort for nothing, Miss Granger," he answered quietly. "Didn't you know that beauty and charm only cause me to run as fast as I can?"

"Thanks for telling me. I won't ever make the same mistake again!" She swallowed, apparently unaware of the fact that she was crying. "Go, then," she whispered and tried to push him away with her free hand.

Roughly, he pulled her up so she nearly lost contact to the floor. "Didn't you know that I am not interested in jolly young women? I, who cherishes a good book above nearly everything else? Why didn't your brilliant mind figure out that I would never fall for... this here?"

Letting go of her, he turned away and opened the door, stepped out into the hall, leaving the woman behind him.

For some reason his heart started to race. *Calm down*, he ordered, but his heart had always been the one thing in his life he had never been able to control, which had, since he had been a teenager, done what it liked.

Striding towards the front door, Snape reached out to open it when his heart demanded to be heard. *Go back!* it whispered. *Go back and dry her tears!*

"Humbug!" Snape grumbled. It was more than time to get out of here.

But his treacherous heart didn't give in and forced him to trace back his steps until he stood in the doorway to the living room again.

Of course she was still there. Her face, lit by the candles, was stern, and she was about to tidy up. A few flicks with her wand she had taken from the shelf, and the glasses, the bottle, the plate with sandwiches were gone. He could smell a faint peppery fragrance a sobering-up potion. Apparently, she had decided to end this evening.

Snape's heart sped up a beat. Silently, he approached her, and she jumped when she realised that he stood directly behind her. The look in her face was thunderous, but before she could come up with a snappy remark, he asked, "What is your wish for Christmas?"

Her mouth snapped close with clacking teeth. "What?" she finally managed. "I thought you..."

"You made a great effort for me tonight," he interrupted her, somewhat briskly, as he really wasn't used to friendliness. "You even were nice enough to find a present for me. So I consider it only fair to ask you what you would like to have in return."

"Don't bother," she replied shortly. "What I want you can't give me."

Another wave with the wand, and the fir twigs including baubles were gone. The sight of the once more empty windowsill caused a strange feeling of loss inside the Potions master.

"What ever you might ask for, Miss Granger, I will be happy to provide it if it is in my power to do so." Gallantry gods, this evening became stranger with every minute!

A humourless laugh was the answer. "Would you give me a kiss, Professor? A real one, one that would be worthy to remember, one that would sweep me off my feet, one that would make me wish for more? Would you do that *could* you do it? I doubt it!"

With a harsh move, she pushed past him about to leave his house and never to come back.

Blocking her way, he reached for her shoulders, and as she hadn't expected him to do so, she bumped right into him.

They stood directly under the mistletoe.

One year later.

Hermione called her husband upstairs. It was Christmas Eve again, and she simply couldn't wait to give him one present before Christmas morning, as it had been a tradition in her parents' house ever since she had been a child. One present beforehand, even if it was only a tiny little one.

"What do you think?" she asked eagerly, pulling him inside the smallest of the three rooms that occupied the first floor of their house.

"It's quite... yellow," Severus said, a little bit unsure. Pulling her into his arms, he said, "You really intend to give me an empty room, which you have painted yellow? That's... nice."

Kissing his wife seemed the only right thing to do under the circumstances.

She laughed and freed herself, although she could never get enough of his kisses. "It took me a while to find the right colour," she explained. "And when the sun is out, this room will be very bright and friendly. Perfect for its purpose."

Cupping her face in his hands, he stared deeply in her eyes. "Yellow is not really my favourite colour," he scolded. "As this room is supposed to become my study, I'm afraid you have chosen the wrong paint."

"It was supposed to become your study, but it won't now." A small smile curved her lips. "Believe me, love, our daughter will like the colour very much."

Standing on the tips of her toes, she brushed her lips across his cheek and whispered, "Merry Christmas, Severus."

A/N: The sequel is called "How to tell your friends..."