

Happy Christmas, Lord Voldemort

by starmom

The minions gather to decide on the Dark Lord's Christmas gift. Winner of Phoenix Rising's 2007 Mistletoe and Mayhem Challenge.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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They hated this time of year.

Last year, Grobius insisted on the fruitcake. They were lucky he was the only one blasted to smithereens. On the other hand, who knew Voldemort was allergic to nuts? Yes, they hated this time of year. The risks were greater to them than any mission they'd ever been assigned, and they grew riskier with each successive year.

Especially this year.

The war was going badly and Voldemort was in a bad mood. Every time he seemed to get close to getting at Harry Potter, something went wrong. And then his favorite familiar, Nagini, had been killed by what some said was an eagle. Others swore it was a phoenix. In any case, Voldemort was really put out.

So, once again the Death Eaters were gathered in Goyle's sitting room, sipping on Mrs. Goyle's spiked eggnog, to think up a really good gift to give to their Lord and Master for Christmas. And, of course, they tried to defer the matter at hand for as long as possible.

Yaxley and Mulciber were debating the pros and cons of various cleaning spells best suited to removing dried blood stains.

Bellatrix and Rodolphus Lestrange were discussing the relative merits of Alpine ski resorts with Dolohov.

A small but enthusiastic group were placing bets on the final rankings of Britain's Quidditch teams.

The tall, blonde Death Eater, whose name no one could remember, was wandering around the room, *Avada Kadavra*-ing unfortunate spiders and other insects that happened to pass by.

Severus Snape sat off by himself with a brandy in one hand and a large volume that he'd plucked off Goyle's bookshelf in the other, and contented himself with reading until the proceedings officially began.

Lucius Malfoy leant against the mantelpiece, noting, with some disdain, the tacky china figurines placed next to photos of Goyle's family. He thought, for the umpteenth time, that someone with his social standing should not be required to appear at these banal gatherings.

Just tell me how much to contribute and I'll send an owl.

Finally, as the host, Willem Goyle tapped on his glass to bring them all to attention. The room fell uncomfortably silent.

"Yes. Well," Goyle started with more than a little reluctance in his voice. "I know we are all excited to suggest ideas for this year's company gift to the Dark Lord. So, who'd like to go first?"

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"Ahem. Let's not speak at once."

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"Don't be shy, now! I know you all have wonderful suggestions...no one will make fun of your idea if you speak up."

Who's he kidding? Malfoy thought with a smirk.

Goyle put on his I'm-a-really-mean-Death-Eater-don't-fool-with-me expression. "Fine. We'll do it the hard way." He took out his wand and pointed it at Crabbe, who was closest to him. They all sighed with a collective eye-roll. This was going to take forever if they had to sit through everyone being Crucio'd one at a time.

Crabbe squirmed a bit. "Okay, Will. Don't get your knickers in a twist." Crabbe squirmed some more. "Um... how about an antique necklace? Heavy one. Maybe with a locket?"

Everyone groaned. Crabbe had this thing for ladies' jewelry.

"Necklace. Fine." Goyle shifted his wand to Rabastan who was sitting next to Crabbe. "Next?"

Rabastan looked curiously at Crabbe.

"Oooh, a necklace is a good idea, Connie!" Rabastan said with more enthusiasm about the idea than was seemly. "Or a ring? I've heard about one that used to belong to Salazar Slytherin!"

There was some murmuring about this idea, which they seemed to like better than the first...either because it was manlier or because of the Slytherin connection.

"Do you even know where to find that ring?" Malfoy asked derisively.

"Well, um, no. But we could always find one and say it was Slytherin's. He'll never know the difference!"

Bellatrix sidled up to Snape and sat on the arm of his chair, running her fingers through his lank locks. "What do you say, Severus?" She leaned over and licked his earlobe. It took all his skill to resist the urge to cringe. "I bet you have a ring we can use? One that has your initials on it would be perfect!"

"Ooo - ooo!" squeaked Wormtail. "Severus Snape! Salazar Slytherin! Their initials are the same!"

They all shot Death Eater-perfected withering glances at Peter Pettigrew, better known by his childhood moniker, Wormtail, for this absurd statement of the obvious. They all considered various ways of murdering him.

Snape pushed Bellatrix off the chair, wiped his ear and smoothed down his hair. "Don't be ridiculous, Bella. I hate ornamentation of any kind, not to mention that wearing metal is dangerous in brewing potions."

"Okay. Ring is a possibility," interrupted Goyle. It was only the thought of his upcoming holiday in Malta with the missus that was helping him get through this horrible evening. Beach. Mai Tais. Golf.

"Next?"

"Diary?"

"Set of new tea cups?"

"Subscription to the 'Fruit of the Month' Club?"

"Subscription to Quidditch Illustrated? I think he'd really like the swimsuit issue!" chirped Mulciber.

"Borgin and Burke's gift certificate?"

"I hear Abercrombie and Fitch's Wizarding Line has a new Muggle-Baiting Kit."

"Caracal?"

All heads turned to Wormtail. His silver hand was raised.

"A what?" asked Goyle.

"A caracal. It's a big cat. I know where to get one. I think our Lord might like a new pet!" said Wormtail, nervous with all those un-masked Death Eater eyes upon him.

"The caracal is native to African desert countries," added Snape in his most professorial voice. "It is characterized by its long, pointed ears, distinctive markings, and can grow up to three feet in length. They are nocturnal predators, but have known to be domesticated as familiars by African wizards."

At first there was silence in the sitting room as they considered this idea.

"A new pet," murmured Crabbe.

"Not a bad idea," concurred Goyle.

"Nothing will replace Nagini, of course, but it would be good for him to have a new creature to take care of," added Mulciber.

"He is good with animals!" said Bellatrix thoughtfully as she nibbled on her husband's fingers.

Snape and Malfoy looked at each other as they considered the...possibilities.

Peter flushed with pride as they all praised him and agreed that a caracal would be the perfect gift for Voldemort this Christmas.

This year's Death Eater Yule Ball was to be held at a secret, Unplottable, Disillusioned, Fidelius-Charmed location that was certain to foil the attempts by the Aurors and that infernal, meddling, green-eyed Harry Potter to find them.

Malfoy Manor.

They always held the company party at Malfoy Manor because no one else had a space that equaled it in size and amenities. But Wormtail, who was in charge of security this year, was certain that all the precautions taken would ensure their safety. He'd even hired some burly trolls to act as security guards at the entrances.

As the guests navigated their way past the red rope and had their names checked on the 'list' by the doorman, they entered into Malfoy Manor's Great Hall, which was bedecked and adorned in all its holiday finery.

Lucius Malfoy found Pettigrew and pulled him aside roughly by his robes. "Do you have it?" Malfoy whispered in his usual threatening manner.

"Of course, Malfoy," said Peter defensively. "It's all been taken care of and ready to present to our Lord as soon as he arrives. I have everything well in hand!"

"Make sure you do," said Malfoy who stalked off into the crowd.

Peter straightened his robes with a huff.

"Oh, don't mind him, Wormtail," said Narcissa Malfoy, who happened to be nearby. "You know how he gets at these things. He's been a bear all week trying to find a new way of 'introducing' Voldemort. I told him it will all go off like a charm. Well, it is a charm, actually!" she said, laughing at her clever joke.

At precisely nine fifty-nine, the assembled guests were ready, forming two lines, leaving an empty aisle between them. At the stroke of ten o'clock, the herald announced:

"Ladies and gentleman: your esteemed Host for tonight's Revel, Lord and Master of all wizardkind, Supporter of All Things Dark and Deadly, Heir of Slytherin, Duelist First Class and Undefeated Scrabble Champion of Great Britain... Lord Voldemort!"

Cheers went up throughout the crowd as Lord Voldemort entered the Great Hall and acknowledged his supporters. A brilliant light filled the room as fireworks formed serpents of various colors and shapes and flew about the Hall, merging in the center to form the words 'LORD VOLDEMORT', which remained suspended above the crowd, shimmering in red flames.

Voldemort smiled. and Malfoy, relieved, tossed back a glass filled with some old, expensive wine with high alcohol content.

Slowly, Voldemort made his way down the center of the room. As he passed, guests dropped to the floor and reached for the hem of his gown. The more sycophantic and obsequious, the better he liked it.

When he reached the end of the hall, Voldemort ascended to a riser and sat in an elegant, throne-like chair. Pettigrew appeared with a large object covered with a silk cloth. The object moved slightly. Pettigrew dropped to the floor like the others. The room was silent.

"Permission to present your Lord with a small token of our affection at this Holiday Season?"

"You may present, Wormtail," hissed Voldemort, his red eyes gleaming. If he'd had eyebrows, they would have lifted to convey his excitement and curiosity about the gift he was about to receive. For Tom Riddle loved receiving gifts. Especially on Christmas. He relished them in a way that he never was able to as a child in the orphanage, the depth of his early deprivation never sated.

Wormtail stood behind the object and with his wand, vanished the cloth, revealing a caged animal, beautiful in the sleekness of its pelt and perk of its ears.

Voldemort sucked in his breath and everyone in the room stopped breathing as well, ready to turn and Disapparate if needed.

"It's - it's a tamed caracal, your Lordship," said Wormtail who, with another flick of his wand, vanished the cage.

The animal looked at Voldemort and Voldemort looked at the animal. Voldemort gestured to it and the caracal ascended to the Dark Lord, placing its head under the long, skeletal fingers and pushed.

Voldemort laughed and everyone breathed in relief.

"It is a dear thing," said Voldemort, stroking its head and scratching its long ears. "What shall I call you?"

The animal looked at him, as if in reply.

"What's that you say? Horcrux? Hmm... interesting you should think of it! Yes, yes, all right. Horcrux, it is!"

At that moment, jets of red, gold and green light ricocheted around the Great Hall.

"Aurors!" someone yelled. Screams filled the air and Lucius Malfoy leapt to Voldemort's side.

"There was a spy among the security detail, my Lord," said Malfoy over the din.

Lord Voldemort, general of his Death Eaters, took charge.

"I'm off to another of my secret, Unplottable Locations. I'll send my Mark. The rest of you meet me there! Come, Horcrux!"

Voldemort took hold of the jeweled collar that adorned the neck of his Christmas gift and Disapparated out of the Great Hall.

Thirty minutes later, a group of bedraggled and wounded Death Eaters were assembled in a torch-lit cave.

Voldemort faced them, his previous joy replaced with fury.

"Who among you imbeciles is responsible for this? Who of you has ruined our holiday party with this spectacular example of incompetence and stupidity?"

Snape, who was leaning against the cave wall calmly amused, spoke.

"I believe that would be the clever Mr. Wormtail, my Lord."

Peter, who had tried to hide behind the crowd was hoisted forward and thrown at Voldemort's feet.

"Wormtail," Voldemort hissed. "Before we were so rudely interrupted, I was about thank you for this lovely gift," he said, caressing the caracal who was winding its sinuous body around its master's legs. "So clever, and so appropriate."

"You're...welcome, my Lord," said Peter, who was shaking uncontrollably and unable to face his master.

"Tell me, Wormtail," said Voldemort, almost casually, "what do these creatures eat?"

"Um... they like birds, sir, and small animals. They eat mostly at night."

"Ah, I see."

Voldemort was silent for a moment, and Peter looked up just as Voldemort raised his hand in some silent incantation.

Suddenly, it seemed that Voldemort had become a Giant, filling the space in front of Pettigrew. It wasn't until he felt himself upside down did he realize that Voldemort had turned him into his Animagus form as a rat and was holding him by his tail, upside down.

Peter squirmed and became dizzy as the room turned, and everyone's feet appeared where their faces should have been.

"You have given me two gifts tonight, Wormtail," said Voldemort with what passed for a smile on his snake-like face. "This beautiful new animal, and an opportunity to get rid of a pest whose usefulness has passed."

Peter saw the caracal rise, smelt its anticipation. He began to squeal and struggle as its large, feline teeth came closer.

"You are hungry, aren't you, my pet?" said Voldemort gently as he raised the rodent above the animal's head. "I understand you sometimes leap to capture birds in mid-flight? I'd like to see that very much."

Peter felt himself flung high into the air. *I never was very fond of flying,* he thought.

It was the last thought he ever had as teeth and darkness closed in on him.

The gathering drew to a close, and the Death Eaters began to leave, eager to rejoin their families on this festive night.

"I know where he hid the fruitcake," said Snape to Lucius, who'd joined him by the wall of the cave to watch the caracal feast on their former nemesis. "Care to have some?"

"I would, actually," Lucius said, nodding. "With tea, please."

"Happy Christmas, Lucius," said Snape with a grin.

"And to you, old man!" Lucius replied.

Both men left the cave laughing, enjoying their Christmas gift very much indeed.

END

A/N:

Banner courtesy of the talented ferporcel!

The "Scrabble Champion" reference is a nod to MartianHouseCat's great short story, Scrabble. Slytherins take this game very seriously.

Bill 'adopts' a caracal and gives it to Hermione in Anna's, Jewel of the Nile. It was such a cool pet idea I had to steal it. Thanks, Anna!