

Not so Merry Christmas

by imhilien

Hermione is Snape's apprentice and angry at having to work on Christmas Eve. Snape does not care... but will some ghostly visitors change his mind? For the Dicken's 'A Christmas Carol' challenge at grangersnape100

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Only Professor Snape would have made her chop up beetles on Christmas Eve, Hermione grumbled to herself as she carried out her chore. Everyone else was enjoying themselves.

To think she had become Snape's apprentice out of admiration... and something more. But admiration had swiftly dulled, and the something more... well, wasn't that all lost now. Snape was brilliant, but cold and exacting with little words of approval from him. He always seemed to try and find fault with her nowadays.

Snape's scathing voice broke into her thoughts.

"Dawdling, Miss Granger?"

"No, sir," Hermione said stiffly, quickly resuming her work.

Snape glowered to himself as he went to the Potions storeroom. Surely Miss Granger should be grateful that she was his apprentice at all, though she had begun to occupy his thoughts in a way he determinedly repressed.

He went into the storeroom, only to suddenly find himself surrounded by white mist. Snape whipped out his wand even as he turned around, but the door was gone.

His wand felt useless... his magic too.

"If this is a trick of some student," he said dangerously, "then..."

"This is no trick, Severus," a familiar voice said gently from behind him.

Feeling like a damned yo-yo, Severus turned around again to see the translucent form of the late Albus Dumbledore.

"Albus? What is this nonsense, and what do you want?"

Albus smiled sadly. "Alas, I am the Ghost of Christmas Past, not this 'Albus'. I have taken the form of someone you would find familiar in this role."

"And?" Severus spat, hardly impressed by his blatherings.

"You are a soul with much potential, and you have been given a second chance to amend your ways."

"Amend MY ways?" Severus said, coldly furious. "I assume you will be visiting several Gryffindors next."

The ghost smiled sadly. "Gryffindors have often played a significant part in your life, haven't they? But I am here to show you where perhaps things started to go wrong for you."

Before Snape could say he wasn't interested, he went very still when they were suddenly standing in a cramped kitchen, the occupants eating at a small table unaware of their visitors. It was his home at Spinner's End. There he was as a very young boy, his lank, black hair partly covering his thin face. He was reaching for a salt shaker, but it was too far away. Suddenly, the salt shaker lurched and flew into his hand. Shock, consternation and then delight appeared on his face.

His father, though, swore and leapt to his feet, amazement then loathing on his sallow face.

"You... this is your fault!" he spat at the cowering woman opposite him, her eyes darting between her confused son and her husband.

The ghosts gaze rested gently on Snape. "That should have been a good day, shouldn't have it."

Bitterness rose up within him. "It was my first magical display... and I was sent to my room as if I had done something wrong."

"Your mother was a witch, though," the ghost said thoughtfully.

Snape's mouth twisted. "Yes, for much good it did her. She was in constant fear of my father, and so her magic rarely worked when she wanted it to. She secretly ensured, though, I knew my hexes and curses."

"So your first magical education was that of aggression and defense," the ghost mused.

"It is an unfair world," Snape said curtly. "I merely learnt that early. I am certainly not asking for your pity or sentiment!"

"And now you do not ask for pity or sentiment from anyone, do you."

Snape's eyes glittered. "If you are so omnipotent, then you will know of the... sentiment I once felt for another, only to lose her."

Lily, he thought.

"Perhaps she was not the right Gryffindor for you," the ghost said sympathetically.

"Just what are you implying?" Snape growled.

"Despite your dislike of most things Gryffindor, you nevertheless took on a Gryffindor by the name of Hermione Granger as an apprentice..."

Snape felt an odd pang in his heart at the sound of her name, but he said curtly, "I am merely training her. Apart from that, she means nothing to me."

For the first time, the ghost looked defeated. "Perhaps you are right. My time is done here... it is up to my colleagues now if anything is to be done. Farewell."

Snape frowned. "What-" he began, only to see the ghost vanish, to be replaced by what appeared to be a translucent Madam Pomfrey.

"Who are you supposed to be?" he asked warily.

The new ghost studied him thoughtfully. "The Ghost of Christmas Present," she said briskly. "Right now, I can show you something that will probably please you."

The scene changed to show a grim Hermione leaving the dungeons.

Snape stared at Hermione. "She... left?" he said, his voice sounding queer to him.

"It's Christmas Eve, and she's taken the opportunity to go. Even the most studious get sick of work today," the ghost said.

Hermione now walked along a quiet corridor. "I've had enough!" she said furiously to herself. "I've worked hard all year with little thanks, and I need a break. It's Christmas Eve. I don't even care if Professor Snape thinks this is a breach of contract. Maybe that Ministry job offer isn't so bad..."

"She cannot leave!" Snape said, agitated.

"Would you really miss her?"

"She is my apprentice!" Snape snapped, but a hint of desperation was present.

The ghost sniffed. "Well, did you make her feel genuinely welcome when you made her your apprentice?"

Snape paused, remembering how he had informed Hermione in a clipped voice, coldly observing the light in her brown eyes that indicated eagerness... and something more?

"Not... entirely," he said stiffly.

"Did you always show approval when she made progress?"

Snape felt something shrivel inside him. "No," he said quietly.

The ghost remorselessly continued.

"Was this your way of punishing Hermione for daring to try and be close to you?"

"No!" Snape protested.

He realised though with a sickening certainty that the ghost was right. He had taken a woman who had shown such bright enthusiasm in her early days as his apprentice... and turned her into someone who had started to tense whenever he opened his mouth.

No wonder Hermione was furious now. No wonder she had left him.

"Release me!" he demanded. "I must go and find her." He had to make amends, somehow...

The ghost shook her head regretfully. "Not yet. What's done is done, and you must see the consequences of your actions, despite your regret."

Snape tensed as the ghost vanished... flinching as a black hooded figure appeared, drifting from side to side by its own wind. It was a Dementor.

No, it wasn't, he thought swiftly.

"Are you the Ghost of... Christmas Future?" he asked abruptly.

The figure nodded, and the scene vanished only to show himself failing to convince a cold faced Hermione that things would be different from now on.

Another scene... Hermione starting a Ministry career. Appreciated. Promoted.

More scenes... himself in his office, alone. No one close, or loving him. Dying as he had lived, alone.

"No..." Snape said, appalled.

Anger rose within Snape and he clenched his fists. He refused to believe that things would turn out that way.

"There must be something I can do to change things!" he demanded of the ghost.

The ghost merely looked at him implacably.

"There has to be," Snape insisted. The thought of being unable to convince Hermione of his sincerity suddenly felt unbearable.

The ghost did nothing.

"Please... I want to make things right with Hermione," Snape pleaded, prepared to get down to his knees if necessary.

The ghost and everything vanished, leaving Snape alone in the storeroom.

He had failed.

Feeling empty inside, Snape left the storeroom, frowning when he noticed that the Christmas decorations in the corridor had gone. What was wrong?

His instincts told him to go to his office, and he did so warily. He opened his office door only to stop, stunned, on seeing Hermione waiting there.

"Hermione?" Snape whispered.

She blinked at him. "Sir, I thought you had forgotten... it's my first day as your apprentice," she said readily.

"First day?" Snape repeated numbly.

A startled glance at his wall calendar confirmed her words. He had been sent back in time... to make things right.

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Hermione was glad she wasn't working on Christmas Eve.

Not that Professor Snape would have made her, she conceded. Becoming his apprentice had been the right thing to do. He was a brilliant yet sardonic teacher, giving gruff approval when she had done something well.

Hermione had always felt something more for him, and to her delight she had realised he returned her feelings.

She accidentally stood on Snape's foot.

"Sorry," she apologised, their dance at a Christmas Eve ball briefly pausing.

"I shall have to be a better teacher," he purred, thankful that this Christmas Eve was far better.

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