Snape's Christmas Angel

by debjunk

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I do not own the Harry Potter Series, nor *It's a Wonderful Life.*

A/N: This is a response to the Yule 2008 Challenge Prompt #4: Movie Madness: Turn your favorite Christmas movie into a one shot featuring HP characters.

Big thanks to Lilith Kayden and Pathseekerme for their beta work on this.

My favorite Christmas movie is *It's a Wonderful Life,* simply because I love how George Bailey discovers how his mundane existence has changed the world for the better. I think we all do the same thing in our ordinary, every-day lives.

As many of you know, I love to mess with time and all of its many possibilities. What's great about this plot is that anything goes, because it will all be back to normal by the end... hopefully.

Snape's Christmas Angel

Severus Snape made his way slowly to the edge of the Astronomy tower and looked below. He had had enough. Well, to be honest, he had had enough years ago. He had simply existed for so long that he had forgotten what it meant to live. He had been constantly pulled in two directions by two incredibly manipulative men. His life had not been his own since he had received the Dark Mark. All he had done for years was implement plans and react to situations. He had never had the opportunity to do what he wished. By the end of the war, he had felt tired and used. He was ready for a change. Then as he lay decimated on the floor of the Shrieking Shack with death so near he could taste it, that fool phoenix of Dumbledore's had swept in and taken him from his well-anticipated peace. So, here he was, five years later, contemplating doing what should have been done years ago.

He stepped up onto the stone rail of the tower and peered down into the darkness. The ground beckoned him. It whispered to him, luring him to take that first step off the rail. It opened its arms to him. *Come to me. I will welcome you with open arms. It's time to sleep now. Just drop off. I will surround and cradle you. It only takes one step...*

Severus blinked as the words came into his head. He hesitated, even though the only thing that he wanted right this instant was to plummet to his death. If the world had been truly fair, he would have died the night the giant snake had mauled him so viciously. He absentmindedly touched his neck where the scars from that encounter plagued him to this day. They had faded, but to him they burned violently red, a reminder of his wasted life and lost opportunity at death. Curse Dumbledore and his

overzealous phoenix. If not for them, he would be lying cold in a grave now. How he wished for that... how he longed for that.

Looking down, he placed a foot over the ledge. Then an odd thing happened. He heard a tinkling sound behind him. He chose to ignore it.

"Severus! You need to come down from there, or you'll fall!" a nagging voice cried.

Severus was so startled that he lost his balance and fell forward. His arms swung out in front of him, and he waved them around, trying to regain his balance. Thankfully the nagging voice had a body... one with incredibly fast reflexes. A hand shot out and grabbed Severus' arm and pulled him back over the ledge. He fell to the floor of the tower roof. Looking up at his 'Savior,' he was shocked to see Hermione Granger bending over him. She was dressed in a silky, white dress that fell below her knees. It seemed to move around her wispily, even though there was no breeze up on the tower. Purple flowers formed a halo on the top of her head, and her hair flowed around her in a mass of curls. He blinked at her, shocked at her lovely appearance and by the fact that she had pulled him from certain death and was now stooped over him, glaring at him with a reproving look.

"See, I told you so," she said tartly. She reached out and grasped his hand, pulling him up to a standing position.

"Professor Granger, what is the meaning of this?" Severus bellowed.

She gave him a lovely smile. "I'm not really Hermione Granger. I'm an angel. I've simply taken the form of someone you would recognize."

Severus scowled. "Professor, I believe you must be sleepwalking because you are making no sense whatsoever."

Hermione began to pout. "They told me you would take some work."

"Work?" Severus was becoming angry. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"You see, Severus, as I said, I'm an angel. I've been sent here to help you so I can pass my N.E.W.T.S."

"Professor Granger, as you have been teaching here for four years, I would imagine that you passed your N.E.W.T.s several years ago."

"Oh, no, not those N.E.W.T.s. Angel N.E.W.T.S. That stands for Noteworthy Examples of Wanting To Serve. They measure the goodness and angelic abilities of angels. Once I pass my N.E.W.T.S. I can get my wings!"

"Professor Granger... Hermione... you seem a bit... out of sorts."

"I told you, Severus, I'm not really Hermione!" She spun around with her hands in the air and looked up at the sky. "I'm an angel. I'm here to help you! I need to help you to prove that I'm a capable angel."

Severus decided that Hermione's ranting and raving was not worth dwelling upon for one minute longer. He once again stepped onto the stone rail.

"You don't have to do that, you know," Hermione said quietly.

Severus turned and gave her a caustic look. "And just what am I doing, Hermione?"

"You're going to jump. That's obvious, but you don't need to."

"What do you suppose I should do then?"

"You should see your worth, Severus Snape, not wallow in the disappointments of life."

Severus sighed and looked down. "Hermione, I don't have time for this. If you'll excuse me, I have a date with the ground."

"Severus, you need to realize just how important you are."

Severus rolled his eyes. "Yes, without me there would be so many more people alive. The world would be a happy place and hundreds of students would not cower in fear when I walk down the halls."

"Severus, you're a good man."

"I'm an abomination."

"You should recognize all of the good you have done!" the angel Hermione cried.

"It would have been better if I had never been born!" Severus shouted at her. "Don't you understand? My life has brought nothing but pain and misery to everyone and everything I touch. It's time I ended it and gave everyone the chance to live a decent life without my influence in it."

Hermione clapped her hands together in joy. She grabbed Severus' shoulders and pulled him back off the rail. She began to dance and hop around with him. "That's it!" she exclaimed. "That's how I can get through to you!" She kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you, Severus. That's a wonderful idea. From this moment on, you were never born. You don't exist!"

Severus' eyesight became blurry for a split second and then returned to normal. He barely even noticed it. "Hermione, you need to get some rest. Now, I have something to take care of. You go back to your room and sleep off whatever you drank before coming up here. Do you understand?"

Hermione looked up, distracted. "Look! A shooting star! That means an angel just got his wings! Oh, isn't it wonderful?" She clasped her hands together and brought them close to her heart. "Just you wait, Severus. Soon there will be a shooting star for me!"

Severus rolled his eyes. "I thought an angel got its wings whenever a bell rang."

Hermione gave him an odd look. "How did you know about that? No one knows about that."

Severus cocked an eyebrow at her. "Surely, Professor, you have seen the Muggle movie *It's a Wonderful Life?* That's what this whole charade is about, isn't it?"

Hermione looked at him quizzically. "Severus, I have no idea what you're talking about!"

Severus held his hand to Hermione's head. No fever. She must certainly be drunk. He turned her and pushed her back toward the door. "Go back to bed, Hermione."

She stumbled forward a bit, steadied herself, then stopped and turned. She was just in time to see Severus mount the wall and throw himself off the tower's ledge. She smiled and shook her head. Snapping her fingers, she appeared at the base of the tower just in time to see Severus hit the ground and crumple in a heap in front of her. Shaking her head again, she extended her hand to help Severus up. He turned on his back and blinked at her offered hand.

"What just happened?" he asked furiously.

"You don't exist, silly. You can't kill yourself."

Hermione gave him a merry smile. Severus had the urge to slap the smile from her face, but he refrained. Instead he grasped her hand and let her pull him up. For the second time that evening, he marveled at her strength.

"How did you get down here so fast?" he asked suspiciously.

"I'm an angel. I can cover great distances in a matter of seconds," she explained. Her smile never faltered. She seemed almost giddy.

"Alright... good... I'm just going to head back to my room. You should do the same."

Severus turned and left her smiling after him. Her smile dissolved as she moved to follow him. Down to the dungeons he went. Appearing in front of his door, he waved his wand to lower the wards and grasped the handle. It shocked him. He pulled his hand away quickly and glared at the door. He repeated his charm but received the same shocking welcome from the door handle.

Speaking very slowly so he would understand, the angel explained it to him again. "Severus, these aren't your rooms anymore. You don't exist," Hermione told him in a sing-song voice. Severus glared at her.

"You mean to tell me that I'm not a professor here anymore?" Severus barked.

"You're not anything anymore, Severus. You... don't... exist." Each word was punctuated by a tap from Hermione's finger atop Severus' nose.

Severus looked at her with rage, but that rage disappeared when the two of them heard footsteps rushing up to them. In a blink of an eye, Hermione had disappeared.

"Who's there!" an older voice cried.

Around the corner shot Albus Dumbledore with his wand extended. Severus turned ashen at the site of the man he had murdered years ago.

"Albus!" he managed to mutter in shock.

Dumbledore pointed his wand at Severus' chest. "Who are you? How do you know my name?" he demanded.

"Albus, it's me... Severus!"

"I don't know any Severus. Did the Dark Lord send you?" Albus cried.

"The Dark Lord? But he's dead!" Severus retorted.

Albus pushed his wand into Severus' chest. "Shh! Never speak like that! The portraits report to him. If he heard you talking like that, he would have you killed within minutes!"

"Albus... what's going on?"

"How do you know who I am?" Albus asked in frustration.

Severus was silent for a moment. Evidently this apparition didn't know who he was. He would just play along.

"I am an old acquaintance, but you probably don't remember me. We met a long time ago," he explained.

"What are you doing here?" Albus asked.

Thinking quickly, Severus made up an excuse. "I came to speak with the Potions professor. I was wondering if he needed any assistance. I am looking for a job."

"Professor Slughorn is away on holiday, as is most of the school. How did you get in here? The wards keep everyone but faculty and students out."

Severus shifted his eyes from the door and back to Albus.

"Professor Slughorn had the wards recognize me. He was expecting my visit. I wasn't aware he would be away."

Albus looked at Severus warily. Finally, he lowered his wand. "Very well, but I will see you to the gates. You must not linger here."

With that, Dumbledore turned and began leading Severus out of the school. He said nothing more as they made their way to the gates. He lowered the wards and held the gate open for Severus to exit.

"Professor Slughorn will return in a week's time," he advised Severus. He got closer to Severus and whispered to him. "Don't mention You-Know-Who's name. He can find you that way. The people he finds disrespecting him in the way that you did earlier are never seen again."

Dumbledore backed away, and Severus could see the fear in his eyes. It was a look he had never seen upon the older wizard's face. It worried him to no end.

Albus quickly nodded to Severus, slammed the gate in his face, and, turning without another word, headed back up to the castle. Severus could only stare in disbelief. Suddenly, Hermione appeared again by his side.

"He's alive," he muttered to her. "What happened? How is this possible?"

"You never existed. You didn't kill him," Hermione explained.

Severus looked at her, relief flooding his eyes. "You see? There's one good thing already! You have proven my statement. I should have never been born. My non-existence has already saved one life!" He crossed his arms in front of himself smugly.

"One good turn of events does not diminish all of the bad that has happened because of your absence, Severus."

Severus narrowed his eyes at her. "Explain," he demanded.

"Draco was killed when he attempted to take Dumbledore's life. Dumbledore killed him."

Severus fell to the ground. His chest constricted within itself. He clawed at it, trying to pull the pain out of his body, but it was a useless task. Suddenly he found himself groaning loudly.

Draco was dead. The young, vibrant man would never grow to adulthood. Severus' mind was filled with thoughts of the Draco he knew and loved. He had just had tea with him last week! The young man Severus knew was married and expecting a baby. Now none of that would come to pass. Draco had been destroyed in his youth. A single tear fell down Severus' cheek. Would every good thing be tinged with bitterness, no matter what he did?

The angel placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "It's okay. There's nothing you could have done. You don't exist, after all."

"Stop saying that!" Severus screamed. He stood and began to pace. He stopped suddenly and grabbed Hermione by the shoulders.

"Tell me everything! I need to know. Why isn't You-Know-Who dead? What happened to Potter? Why is Albus running around like a scared child? What happened?!"

Hermione smiled a rueful smile. "Why, life just went on without you, Severus."

Severus got a faraway look in his eye. "Lily... what happened to Lily?"

Hermione frowned. "Do you really want to know?" she asked.

Severus frowned at her. "Of course I want to know!" he snapped. "Tell me... is she alive?"

Hermione looked down to the ground. It seemed her bubbly personality had disappeared. "No, I'm sorry, Severus, she's not."

Severus began to pace. "What's the point of not existing if my biggest regret is not rectified?"

"But it's not your fault, Severus. It never was, even when you heard the prophecy in your world. The blame lies solely on the Dark Lord's shoulders."

Severus glanced at Hermione as he continued his pacing. "What... happened... to her?" He was struggling to speak because he was so upset.

"Bellatrix Lestrange, who had Disillusioned herself, was following Dumbledore and heard Trelawney's prophecy. Dumbledore had no idea that anyone else had heard the prophecy. Lestrange urged Voldemort to act quickly so that Trelawney's prediction would never have a chance to be fulfilled. He surmised that the Potters and the Longbottoms were the likely parents of the child. He killed the Longbottoms first. He then sought out the Potters. Neither couple had even had their children yet. Neville Longbottom and Harry Potter never had the chance to be born."

Severus placed his head in his hands. He had stopped pacing and was just standing there, muttering to himself. Hermione heard the word 'no' escape his hands every now and then among the muttered whispers.

She went over and placed a hand on his arm, trying to comfort him. He shrugged her off. Finally he looked up at her. "Tell me the rest," he demanded.

"Dumbledore lost confidence in himself from that moment on. He continued to lead the Order, but he feared to be aggressive. The final battle came as Voldemort and the Death Eaters stormed the Ministry with the Order racing behind in an attempt to help. The battle was hard fought, but the Order and the Ministry both fell. The Minister, the entire Wizengamot, and every Order member save Dumbledore, were put to death. Dumbledore was left as an example of what happens to those who are not obedient. He was tortured mercilessly by Voldemort and almost died. Then he was placed as a figurehead at Hogwarts, where he remains, under the careful scrutiny of Voldemort and his henchmen."

Severus looked up at Hermione with pleading eyes. "Please, tell me there's something worthwhile in this tale. What happened to the Weasleys? What happened to you?"

"What happened to me? You mean what happened to Hermione Granger? Let's just say that Voldemort enacted a law stating that all Muggle-born children were to be 'cleansed' within a week of their births. Cleansing, of course, meant that they were to be murdered. The rate of SIDS among Muggle births has risen slightly with that decree, but the Muggles are clueless to the real reason for the deaths. Hermione was one of those infants to be struck down. There are now no Muggle-born wizards in your society."

Severus let out a low, miserable groan. "How could this have happened?" he muttered.

Hermione continued as if he had said nothing.

"As for the Weasleys, blood traitors like them are treated the same as non-purebloods. The purebloods, as you can imagine, run this society. They look down their noses at anyone beneath them. Those who are in disagreement with them, or of lesser blood status, are turned into slaves. They live in squalor and are treated like house-elves. Their children are not allowed to attend Hogwarts. That school is only for purebloods now. The rest of society has no rights and only subsist on what the purebloods choose to give them. They live in misery and beg for death to take them quickly, but it never does."

Severus sunk to his knees. "No," he muttered. "It can't be so horrible. There must be something I can do!"

Hermione knelt down next to him. "There's nothing you can do, Severus. You don't exist, remember?"

Severus looked at her with a murderous look. He grabbed her and shook her. "Why? Why have you done this? You have destroyed my world!"

The angel brightened and smiled at him. "I haven't done anything but make you disappear. You are the only difference from the world you remember and the world you see before you now."

"How can that be?"

Hermione looked with pity upon her charge. "Severus, you don't realize just how much you have done for the world. This world we are in now is a direct result of your absence from it. You were never here to hear the prophecy. You never realized how evil Voldemort was. You never offered your services to Dumbledore, so he never had a spy in Voldemort's ranks. Because you weren't found out while overhearing the prophecy, no one knew of the danger that the Potters and Longbottoms were in. Because you weren't here, Harry Potter never even had a chance to take a breath, let alone defeat the Dark Lord. Without your spy work, the Order was unprepared for Voldemort's attack. You never did any of the things that were important, and because you didn't, the world has suffered immensely."

Severus laughed bitterly. "You make it sound as if I single-handedly saved the world."

Hermione put her hand on Severus' shoulder once again. He did not shrug it off this time. He searched her eyes instead.

"You did, Severus. Even you can admit that after seeing the results of your absence. One missing action has a snowball effect, making everything else different and changing what you remember into something nightmarish."

Severus sat back onto the ground. "You're wrong. Nothing I have done has saved anyone. I have been a puppet for most of my life."

"Do you need more proof, Severus?"

She pulled him up, and suddenly, they were in front of Malfoy manor. She snapped her fingers, and they were both Disillusioned. They entered the manor and heard Lucius bellowing.

"Ginevra! Get your bony bum down here when I call you!"

They saw Ginny Weasley running through the halls with a look of sheer terror on her face. She slipped into the study and disappeared. Severus marveled at her state. She wore torn robes, her hair was messy, and she was thin as a rail. Obviously, slave life was not agreeing with her.

Hermione took his hand and pulled him into the room where Ginny had disappeared. He saw Lucius looking at Ginny with loathing. Lucius' voice was low but malicious.

"When I call you, I expect you here before I finish saying your name, is that understood?" he growled.

She nodded vigorously, obviously hoping to avoid whatever punishment Lucius had in store for her. She wasn't lucky in that regard. Lucius slapped her across the face so hard that she fell to the floor. Blood trickled from the corner of her mouth. He then took his boot and kicked her in the ribs. She groaned in pain and doubled in on herself.

He pulled her back up to a standing position by her hair. She stifled a cry, but it still came out as a whimper. Fear filled her eyes as she tried to not make eye contact with her master. He pulled her even closer to him, bringing his mouth right up next to her ear.

"Next time I call you, I will expect to not have to teach this little lesson to you. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Master!" Ginny cried, barely able to get the words out, she was in so much pain.

Lucius flung her aside. "Clean yourself up!" he ordered.

Without a look back, Ginny staggered from the room. Hermione locked her arm with Severus', and they appeared in a park. They had materialized in front of an empty bench, and she motioned for him to sit down. He sunk down into it and buried his head in his hands.

"Scenes like that are repeated throughout your world, Severus. That is the life of a slave, and Ginny actually has it easy. Lucius only beats her once or twice a week, and he never forces himself on her like some of the Dark Lord's followers do to their prettier slaves. Yes, Ginny's got it easy compared to some."

"Merlin, stop... please stop! Make this nightmare end. I cannot take it anymore."

Hermione straightened and grinned. "Really?" she asked enthusiastically.

Severus turned his head and looked at her curiously. "Why are you so chipper? How could anyone be happy after watching that?"

"Because I've convinced you not to kill yourself!" she exclaimed. She stood up and clapped her hands. "Oh, this is the best news I've had in years!"

Severus arched an eyebrow at her. "Just how long have you been an angel, anyway?"

"Ten years. It takes ten years to learn everything that you need to get your wings. I've studied ever so hard, but when they gave me your case, I didn't think it would ever be possible to pass my N.E.W.T.S. and get my wings." She turned back to Severus and bent over him. "But you have been very accommodating!"

"I am not your lab rat," Severus sneered.

Hermione straightened. "Of course you're not!" she cried haughtily. "You're a man who deserves to live. I'm so happy you decided not to kill yourself." She had grasped her hands to her chest again and was looking at him with devotion.

"I never said I wasn't going to kill myself."

Hermione's face fell. "But... but you see what life is like without you."

"So, I have. But that doesn't mean that life will not be better off without me gone in the future." Severus' shoulders sagged. "To be honest, I have nothing to live for."

Hermione smiled again. "Ah, but that's where you're wrong," she advised him as she pointed her finger for emphasis.

Severus straightened and sat back against the bench, his arms folded in front of him. "What exactly do I, Severus Snape, ex-spy and most hated wizard in England, have to live for?"

Hermione looked at him as if he were daft. "Why, love, of course."

Severus looked at her as if she'd lost her mind. "Love... that's it? That's what I have to live for? I have no better chance of someone falling in love with me than the Cannons have a chance to win the Quidditch cup!"

Hermione's laugh was high-pitched and quite wild. "Severus, don't be silly. Someone is already in love with you, you just never noticed."

Severus huffed. "Angel, this is ridiculous. No one is in love with me. No one will ever be in love with me. I know you want to get your wings, but come now, be reasonable. Who could ever fall for someone like me?"

"Hermione Granger could."

Severus stared at the angel as if she had lost her head. "That's quite impossible."

Hermione huffed. "Why do you think I'm here, Severus? Angels just don't appear out of nowhere. They have to be summoned."

"Are you trying to tell me that Hermione Granger called you to help me?"

The angel Hermione rolled her eyes. "Not in so many words, Severus. She prayed. She's been praying for you for at least a month now. She's worried about you."

"Hermione prayed for me?" Severus asked with his eyebrows raised.

The angel snapped her fingers, and a cloud appeared in front of them. On the cloud, a picture was projected that showed Hermione kneeling at her bedside with her arms folded in front of her.

Dear Father in Heaven,

Please help Severus. I'm worried about him. He's always kept to himself, but, lately, he seems more aloof and morose than usual. I fear he might try to hurt himself. Help him, Father, to see his worth. Help him to know that he is loved. Help him to like himself. It would be the greatest Christmas gift I could receive to see him in better spirits. And if it's possible, Father, help him to see how I feel about him. I care for him a great deal and just want him to be happy. Christmas is a time for miracles. Please, grant me these Christmas wishes, they're all I need to be happy this holiday season. Thank you for listening to my prayer.

Amen

The cloud disappeared, and the angel Hermione shrugged. "She's been saying prayers similar to that for over a month now. Who could resist such a heartfelt plea?"

Severus stared where the cloud had dissipated. "She cares about me? She wants me to be happy?"

"She loves you."

"How can that be? I hardly speak to her."

"You speak to her enough for her to know that she loves the person you are."

"The woman is daft!"

Hermione giggled. "Stranger things have been known to happen, Severus. So, you see, if you off yourself, you'll be missing out on the opportunity to have Hermione Granger love you."

Severus scowled. "It would never work out, we're too different. I'm too old and jaded."

Hermione laughed. "You are like two peas in a pod. Who else can you get excited with over the latest article in *Potions Today*? Who else can keep you conversing for hours over a simple observation about the finer points of transfiguring cups into cardinals? You say you don't speak with the woman... You spend hours debating with her on a daily basis."

Severus thought about what the angel was saying to him. It was true. They did spend an inordinate amount of time at the dinner table discussing 'shop.' Oftentimes, the conversation continued in one or the other's rooms over a steaming mug of hot chocolate...Hermione's personal favorite. He always found her opinions fascinating, but he had never given anything else even a thought. How could she love him?

"Severus, don't you want to be happy?" the angel asked him while crossing her arms in front of her.

Severus looked back up to Hermione. "Of course I do."

"Then live your life!" she cried in exasperation. "Stop being afraid of what people will think of you. Who cares about those who look down their noses at you?"

The angel gave him a sympathetic look and unfolded her arms. She placed one of her hands on his. "You have friends. Spend your time with them. Spend your time with Hermione. Wonderful things will come of your relationship with her."

"How can you be certain of that?" he asked caustically.

She squeezed his hand. "I'm an angel, remember? Inside track? I know what your future holds if you stay the course." She shook the hand that lay under hers. "To stay the course, you must return to your present and not take your life. You also have to take some chances. You must stop being afraid of rejection and be adventuresome once in a while. You might be surprised at the outcome. If you don't do that, you will never know the happiness you seek. So, stay alive, and go for it, alright?"

Severus pulled his hand from hers and folded his arms. "You just want to pass your N.E.W.T.S. and get your wings."

Hermione folded her arms as well and looked to Severus petulantly. "Don't you realize that getting my wings symbolizes my caring for others and ability to help them? Of course that's what I want. That proves that I can save a life when sent to do so!"

Severus quietly regarded the angel for a while. He tossed around everything she had said. Part of him still wanted to fling himself from the Astronomy tower, but most of him wanted to live. He was curious about Hermione. He was hoping to find happiness. Could she truly love him? Would she want to be with him? Could she make him happy? She was quite lovely. He did enjoy his time with her. Could he see her as more? Oh, yes, he could. The sudden realization of that sent a shock through his body. Just looking at her as the angel in front of him made him feel a desire he hadn't felt since he was a youth, chasing after Lily.

Throwing caution to the wind, he closed the distance between the angel and him and pulled her to him. He kissed her, shocking the daylights out of her. The angel pulled back but gave him a sly smile. Soon her laughter was tittering out of her mouth.

"Silly boy, I'm not really Hermione. When you kiss her... you will see..." She tilted her head and looked at him carefully. "Besides, I'm much too old for you."

"You said you've only been an angel for ten years," Severus remarked with a raised eyebrow.

"But I'm over one thousand years old! Not every spirit is an angel, you know. It takes a special person to do this job. I just found the desire to become an angel ten years ago and have been training ever since."

Severus smirked. "You look really good for being so ancient. Even better than Dumbledore did before his untimely demise."

Hermione giggled again. "Eternal beings don't age, silly boy."

Severus looked his angel up and down. "Alright, you've convinced me. I will not take my life. But you'd better be right about Hermione, or I will kill myself and hunt you down!"

The angel's face at that instant became so bright that Severus had to turn his head. She pulled away from him, stood, and raised her hands out to her sides. She spun in circles and laughed heartily while the light shone brilliantly from her radiant face. Severus thought it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

"I did it!" she squealed. "I saved you!" She put her arms down as the light disappeared from her face. She grabbed at Severus, pulling him from the bench and hugged him furiously. Not realizing her own strength, she about crushed him. Only his gasping alerted her to the fact that she was being over-exuberant with a frail human body. She released her hug and looked at him sheepishly.

"Sorry," she apologized. "Sometimes I get a bit enthusiastic."

Severus bent over and tried to catch his breath. He panted for a while until his breathing became regular and the crushing feeling in his chest had disappeared. When he straightened up, he noticed Hermione was still looking at him worriedly.

"It would do no good for you to kill the very being you just saved, Angel," he snapped.

Hermione's face fell. Severus repented of his caustic remark. Already he didn't like seeing her so sad, and she wasn't even the real Hermione Granger.

"I was just kidding," he explained.

Her face brightened again. "Are you ready to go back?" she asked him.

"Yes, I suppose I am," Severus agreed.

Hermione snapped her fingers, and everything went black.

oooOOOooo

Severus opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling. He was lying in his bed with the covers over him. He had been snuggled in the bed fast asleep. He even had his pajamas on. The black satin slid against the sheets as he turned onto his side.

He struggled to make sense of what had just happened. He was tucked in his bed, but moments before he was in a park. The whole adventure must have been a dream. But what a dream it had been! He had fully intended to take his life tonight before he had fallen asleep. He had planned out everything, including the note that still sat on his bedside table. Pushing himself up onto his elbow, he reached over and picked up the note and tore it to pieces. He tossed the remnants into his wastebasket next to the bed.

Mulling over what must have happened, he realized he had probably drifted off to sleep before he had had a chance to implement his well-thought-out plan. The realization that instead of being warm in his bed, his body could have been broken at the base of the Astronomy tower filled him with dread. He had narrowly escaped death all because of a little dream.

Lightness filled his heart. Although the whole episode hadn't been real, it had proven something to him. No matter what he had done, it hadn't been as awful as he had thought. Most of what he had done had had merit. Of course, he had made mistakes, but they weren't worth ending his life over. He finally saw himself for what he was. He

wasn't the worthless man he had thought he had been for so long. In however long it had taken to have that dream, his life had been restored to him. His need to wallow in his past and punish himself had fallen away. He didn't know why he had had that dream, but it had literally changed his life. Maybe he could be happy now. He certainly hoped so.

He chuckled at the part about Hermione. That was a nice fantasy, but he was awake now. The reality of it was that she would never feel such things for him. They got along well enough, but they didn't feel that way about each other. No, they definitely didn't. He didn't. *Did he?*

Severus shook his head. *She had looked quite lovely as an angel.* Another shake of the head banished that stray thought. It really didn't matter how he felt, as he was sure she could never reciprocate such feelings. The thought of that made him sad. He pushed that feeling away also. His spirits were too high to let such thoughts spoil his mood.

Severus sat up and checked the clock. It was seven in the morning. He glanced at the calendar and realized it was Christmas day. He chuckled again. He had dreamed about committing suicide on Christmas Eve. Wasn't that just typical? Could he be any more depressing? What a killjoy he was! No wonder he had no friends.

He could just see Minerva reacting to his death, had the dream been real.

"Yes," she would say. "He threw himself off the Astronomy tower... the overly dramatic bat. And he had to pick Christmas Eve to do it on, too. Now we're all depressed. That man could throw a pall over a king's coronation if given the opportunity."

He chuckled at the image. His gaze fell to the small table that sat at the edge of his bed. On it there were four presents awaiting him. He furrowed his brow. That was more than usual. He moved to the edge of the bed and looked at the presents. The usual ones from Minerva, Lucius, and Hermione were all there, but there was another added to the pile this morning. It was a small box that had no name on it. Severus shrugged and placed it back on the table. He would save the surprise gift for last.

He reached for Minerva's gift. It started singing *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* as soon as he touched it. He unwrapped it quickly and crumpled up the bright red paper to shut the voices up before they started another chorus. He peered into the box at his present. It was a scarf in Slytherin colors. Every present he received from her had been an article of clothing in Slytherin colors. He had been especially embarrassed a couple of years ago, when he had received some silk boxers with silver and green checks on them. Of course, he would never admit it, but they had become his favorite pair of underwear... ever.

Lucius' gift was not unexpected. They had been trading new quills for Christmas for years. This year's choice, however, was quite remarkable. It was a hippogriff feather tipped in gold. Severus admired it for a minute before replacing it in the box and reaching for Hermione's present.

He wondered what she had chosen this year. Her gifts were always beautiful and well thought out. He tore into the paper and lifted the box lid. Inside he found a silver pocket watch. It had an engraving of two snakes wrapped around a pole with wings on top of it. It was a caduceus, an American Muggle symbol for the medical field. He was sure Hermione was aware of that. The symbol seemed to fit nicely with his work as a Potions master. He smiled and pulled the watch out of the box. He opened it to find an elegant pearl face with dark green numbers on it. Green snakes served as watch hands. He glanced at the cover. She had inscribed it!

Severus,

Merry Christmas! I hope this gift always helps you to take the time to see how wonderful you are.

With love,

Hermione

Severus caught his breath as his dream came flooding back to him. He couldn't believe that she had taken the time to inscribe such a personal message to him. Maybe his subconscious was trying to tell him something?

He read the inscription over again. She thought he was wonderful? He hadn't noticed her wearing any rose-colored glasses lately. Maybe someone had cast a spell upon her? Severus Snape and the word wonderful had never been synonymous to anyone. The woman was daft. That was the only explanation. Wonderful! Really! He looked back at the inscription. *Wonderful?* He shook his head. He would have to accept it. She had inscribed it into his gift, after all, she must have believed it.

He placed the watch back in its box, intending to nestle it in his pocket when he was dressed. Reaching for the last box, he picked it up and examined it. He grabbed his wand and performed spells on it to assure it was safe to open. Being an ex-spy, one could never be too careful. He had received dangerous packages before from people who had thought he needed to be taught a lesson. Some in the Wizarding world had thought he had gotten away with murder. He had agreed with them, but that had given them no right to take the law into their own hands.

This package, however, seemed perfectly safe. He set his wand back down on the bed stand and tore into it. A golden box lay underneath the bright green paper. He lifted the lid and gasped. Inside was a golden Christmas bell attached to a green ribbon. He lifted it out of the box and noticed a note lying underneath it. He lifted the note with a shaking hand, unfolded it, and read its contents while still holding the bell's ribbon in his other hand.

Dearest Severus,

Thank you for helping me out. I wanted you to have this so you could remember our encounter always. It was real, Severus, not a dream. Thank you for helping me pass my N.E.W.T.S. I will always be grateful to you for that.

Best of luck in the future,

Your Angel

As he finished the note, the bell began to shake. It rang loudly, and Severus dropped it out of sheer amazement. It continued to ring even though it was now lying on the thick bedspread that covered Severus' bed. After a few more seconds it stopped. He continued to stare at it, nonetheless. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. It had only been a dream, hadn't it?

Picking up the bell, he caressed it with his fingers. It certainly felt real enough. And the letter, how could that be explained away? It hadn't dissolved after he'd read it. It now sat on the bed, almost smug in its existence, although now it was a bit more crumpled than when he had first lifted it up from the box. He picked it back up and reread it. He looked to the bell in disbelief. Could it possibly have all been true? Had all of that really happened last night?

oooOOOooo

Severus was dressed and moving through the halls. After much deliberation, he had come to the conclusion that the evidence was too much for him to deny. The experience had been real. Having come to that realization, he had come to another one rather quickly. He didn't want to spend another minute away from Hermione Granger. He was eager to begin a relationship that had been promised to him to become a great joy in his life.

He had dressed in a flash and was now headed to her room. He knew she would be there, as she had planned to spend the holidays at the school. Breakfast was going to be a late, leisurely affair and wouldn't start for a couple of hours. He hurried down the hall and approached her room. He knocked lightly on the door and waited impatiently. It took a few moments for it to open. There she was, standing before him in lovely red robes. It seemed that she had risen early also.

"I hope I didn't wake you," Severus apologized.

Hermione wiped the surprised look off her face and smiled at Severus. "Severus! Merry Christmas! You didn't wake me, come in!" She stepped aside and opened the door wide for him. "I just got back, actually," she explained. "My parents always have a really early Christmas. I Floo'd over there to open presents with them."

By now, Severus had entered the room and turned to gaze at her. She motioned for him to take a seat on the couch that faced the fireplace. He did so and looked up at her.

"Why aren't you still there?" he asked curiously.

She shrugged as she made her way to an armchair next to the couch. "Ever since I altered their memories, it's like they're newlyweds again. There's only so much snogging one can bear from one's parents."

Severus laughed, which caused Hermione to raise an eyebrow at him and give him a shocked look.

After Severus had gotten over his laugh attack, he sobered and looked over at Hermione. "I wanted to thank you for your present, Hermione." He pulled it out of his pocket and showed it to her. "It's beautiful."

She beamed at him. "I'm glad you like it."

He opened the watch and gazed at the inscription. "I especially like what you wrote in it."

He looked up to see Hermione blushing.

"You really meant what you wrote?" he asked cautiously.

Hermione turned a brighter shade of red and looked down. "I think you fail to see your good points, Severus. You're always too busy beating yourself over the head about the things you did wrong."

Severus watched her in silence for a little while. She squirmed under his gaze.

"You're right, of course. I have buried myself in my past for too long. I hear you've been praying for me," he continued.

Hermione gaped at him. "How... how would you know something like that?"

"An angel told me."

Hermione huffed. "Fine, don't tell me. Yes, I've been praying about you. You haven't seemed yourself lately, Severus. I've been worried."

Severus nodded his head absently. They sat in silence for a little while, but neither of them seemed to be bothered by it. Finally, Severus looked up at Hermione again.

"I brought you your Christmas present," he told her.

Hermione's face lit up. "What is it?" she asked curiously.

"You'll have to sit here for me to give it to you." He motioned to the place next to him.

Hermione gave him a puzzled look but complied with his request. She looked to him expectantly as she settled in next to him.

"Okay," he instructed. "Close your eyes."

She looked as if she was about to argue so he quickly continued. "It's not wrapped," he explained.

With a look of exasperation, she pursed her lips and muttered to him, "Okay... I guess." She obediently closed her eyes and waited.

Severus looked at her. She truly looked lovely this morning. Her hair was flowing around her face prettily. Her face itself was a picture of beauty. Well, it seemed quite beautiful to him. He had never noticed before just what a beautiful combination her hair and face made. He wondered why it had taken an angel kicking him in the butt to make him realize what had been before him for years now. He slowly moved closer to her and placed his hand on her neck. She gasped as he did so, and he was filled with anticipation. His lips gently touched hers, and she gasped again. He felt her stiffen beneath him and hoped that he was doing the right thing. He could just see this all going downhill fast with her pulling back and slapping him across the face. He braced himself for such a possibility, but it didn't happen.

Emboldened now, he pulled her a little closer and intensified the kiss. Hermione relaxed, and he felt her return his affections. The angel had been right. This kiss was entirely different than the one he had placed on the eternal being. This was filled with desire from the both of them. How had he not realized how much he desired her?

The kiss intensified, and Hermione parted her lips, leaving him entrance. Hungrily now, he explored her. He felt her arms surround his neck, and he lowered his hand to her back, pulling her to him. Their bodies pressed against one another as their kiss exploded with passion. He had never felt so wonderful in his entire life.

Finally, the kiss ended, and Severus pulled back a little to gauge her reaction. She was staring at him lustfully. Now that was a look he had never received from the opposite sex before. The woman was truly daft, but who was he to complain?

"*That* was my Christmas present?" Hermione asked finally.

He nodded at her.

"Can it be Christmas every day?" she asked shyly.

"It doesn't have to be a one time deal," Severus explained to her.

Hermione grinned brightly at him. "How did you know what I wanted for Christmas?"

"I told you, an angel told me."

She gave him a caustic look. "You used Legilimency on me, didn't you?"

"No, an angel told me. She looked like you, and she made me see that I'm not such a lousy person after all."

Hermione's eyes widened in joy and surprise because she misunderstood completely what he had just said. "How did I convince you of that?"

"You're an angel, aren't you? Angels can convince the most stubborn person that they're mistaken about themselves."

Tears began to fall down Hermione's cheeks. Severus took her head in his hands and wiped them away.

"Now, don't cry. It's not a sad thing."

Hermione chuckled, despite her tears. "I didn't think anyone could get through to you. You've been so despondent."

"I just couldn't see what was right in front of me. If I had, I would have never let myself get to such a state."

"What was in front of you?"

"You were," he whispered as he caressed her face.

He pulled her to him again and kissed her. The spark flew between the two of them again, and Hermione groaned. That only proved to make Severus groan as well. They fell back against the couch and continued with their display of affection for quite some time.

"Merry Christmas," Severus finally whispered to her.

"Merry Christmas, Severus."

The End