I Wish it Could Be Christmas Every Day

by silvernatasha, smutty_claus

Summary

An encounter with a cursed object pulls three people into a never-ending Christmas Eve.

Notes

Written by silvernatasha for the 2010 smutty_claus exchange.

See the end of the work for more notes.

To:

From: Your Secret Santa

Title: I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day
Author: silvernatasha
Pairing: Neville/Lavender, George/Pansy, Zacharias/Luna
Summary: An encounter with a cursed object pulls three people into a never-ending Christmas Eve.
Rating: R
Length: ~17,500 words
Author's notes: Thank you to my beta for valuable feedback. You had so many juicy prompts that I couldn't pick between them. I hope you enjoy this. Merry Christmas!

December 24th. Zacharias' House, Kensington.

Zacharias stirred slowly, drawn gently from sleep by coaxing fingers that slipped over his body in precise, teasing touches. He smiled to himself, eyes closed as the covers shifted, warm lips pressing to his chest in a tantalising trail that worked down his body. He lifted his hand, a little uncoordinated in his sleepy state, fingers meeting long, silky hair and earning him a soft laugh before those lips closed around the length of his morning erection.

He sighed, head pressing back into the pillow as he simply enjoyed the exquisite torment of a talented tongue.

Those warm fingers didn't stay idle, and, as they began to join in, Zacharias pushed the covers back. Lips still wrapped around his length, Luna looked up at him with wide luminous eyes, her blonde hair tousled in what Zacharias thought was an irresistibly sexy way. She drew back, tongue lapping at him like a lollipop.

"Morning," he groaned, shuddering at the sight of her.

"Good morning," she said blithely, her hand replacing her mouth. Luna sat up, hair tumbling around her bare shoulder. Sitting there deliciously nude, she started to crawl forward over him, so much pale skin simply begging to be touched.

Luna wasted no time in guiding him to her entrance, sinking down on him with a pleased sigh and an equally happy smile on her lips.

Zacharias bit his lip against the curse that was on the tip of his tongue, hands quickly coming to rest on her waist and guide her with every rise and fall of her body. Luna leant forward, kissing him firmly and moaning contentedly into his mouth. Her thighs gripped his sides, her movements unabashedly wanton as she worked herself to completion.

She knew him well enough to know that he wouldn't last long at this time of the morning, the sounds of her pleasure only increasing as her slim fingers dipped between their joined bodies to stroke her clit in slow circles. She mewled in pleasure, hips rocking harder against him. Zacharias' fingers pressed harder into her as he tried to hold back his desire and let her finish first.

Luna came with a long, low groan, quivering from head to toe as she reached her release. She sighed contentedly, still moving in gentle rolls of her hips as she coaxed him to join her. Zacharias' hand slid up her back, fingers tangling in her hair and drawing her down for another kiss. The tension in him in exploded in just a soft sigh, fingers tightening and holding Luna closer.

She purred, lying on his chest and slowly stroking his side. "Happy Christmas Eve."

He shifted beneath her, trying to get comfortable but failing when he realised that he would need the loo in a minute. "I don't really celebrate Christmas Eve. It's just another day." Encouraging her off him, Zacharias pressed a kiss to her cheek and rose from the bed with a yawn.

Apparently not bothered, Luna simply stretched out, filling the space that he had just vacated. Her fingers toyed with one of her nipples as she watched him; it would have been tempting to simply
rejoin her, but Zacharias' bladder protested too much. He raked his hand through his dark blond hair. "I'll be back in a minute."

"Alright," she said with a smile. "I'll be here."

Though he hadn't doubted it in the slightest, Luna was true to her word and was still sprawled across the bed when Zacharias returned from the bathroom. Her body was flushed pink with arousal, legs spread. Her fingers had drifted down from her breast to between her thighs, moving expertly over the slick skin. Her head was tipped back, mouth open in an O of pleasure.

Zacharias knew he ought not to stare. Well, that was not strictly true. With Luna, he could stare all he wanted and he knew she wouldn't mind. In fact, she would probably find an audience arousing. Still, his sensibilities told him that he ought to avert his eyes.

He couldn't. The image of her lying there touching herself was mesmerising.

He cleared his throat gently and Luna opened her eyes, looking up at him with a self-satisfied smirk. "Everything all right?" she asked casually, fingers not stilling for even a second.

Zacharias swallowed thickly. "Yeah, fine." He paused for a long moment. "Do you have to do that?"

"Yes," she said airily. "I really would like another orgasm before breakfast." She licked her lips. "Do you want to help?"

"I'll... pass this time. Thanks." Zacharias could barely take his eyes away from the sight her touching herself intimately. Luna wasn't going to stop, but he was not going to watch. Not this morning, not if he actually wanted to do anything today. If he stayed staring at her, there was every chance that he would simply get back into bed and not leave until absolutely necessary. Christmas Eve or not, there were errands that needed to be run.

"Sometimes I don't know what you see in me," he said, shaking his head. Tugging his underwear drawer open, he rummaged in it and found a clean pair of boxers. Tugging them on, he cast a glance at her over his shoulder. Luna's chest heaved, a familiar expression on her face as she grew closer to climax.

"At first it was because we had similar needs for intercourse. But I've grown very fond of you, Zacharias."

Picking up his jar of moisturiser, Zacharias paused. A square wooden box sat at top of the chest of drawers, intricate carvings covering its surface. It looked old, older than he could identify. It looked familiar, but at the same time he knew he had never seen it before. He couldn't even place it in a century, let alone a country.

He turned to Luna, a questioning look on his face, just in time to see her reach that second orgasm. She lay there, basking in the afterglow, almost seemed to glow herself, an ethereal beauty stretched out on his bed. That was a sight even more mesmerising than what he had seen her doing before.

"Luna, what is this?"

She sat up, popping herself on her elbows. "That? Just something I found."

Zacharias picked it up, curiously turning it over. "Looks old."

"Yes, very. I'm not quite sure how old, though."
He tried to open it, certain there was a hidden latch somewhere.

"I have a theory it might be cursed," Luna added.

Zacharias nearly dropped it. Turning to face her fully, he stared in open-mouthed disbelief. "You couldn't have told me that before I started touching it?"

Luna sucked her lower lip into her mouth, thinking about it. "Yes," she agreed, "I probably should have." She rose from the bed, surprisingly elegant despite often looking like a newborn lamb teetering around. "I don't think it will hurt you, though. It hasn't harmed me so far."

"It's a potentially cursed box that we don't know the origin of," Zacharias pointed out to stubbornly. "I don't really think we should have it in the bedroom."

"Why? I don't think it has anything to do with sex. Or sleeping. Which are obviously the two activities that happen in here the most."

"No," he said, trying to remain patient. "You might be right. But I don't know where it came from and personally I'd rather not have cursed objects around me while I'm sleeping."

He eyed the box warily. "I should take it to Gringotts. My friend Megan can have a look at it. She's a curse breaker." Zacharias put the box down carefully, watching it to make sure it didn't explode.

Luna shook her head. "I was going to look at it myself."

"What if it's cursed? You could get hurt if you don't know what it was." Luna was a lot of things, but she was not a professional at this sort of thing.

She fixed her cool grey gaze on him, unblinking as she stood there naked in front of him. "If you insist. But it could wait until after Christmas."

"It won't take long."

"At least have breakfast before you go. I think I'm going to do a fry-up. But we haven't got any mushrooms because I had them for lunch yesterday."

As she started towards the bedroom door, Zacharias cleared his throat. "Luna? You might want to put some clothes on. You remember what happened the last time you fried bacon naked."

She pursed her lips. "Yes. That was most unpleasant."

**December 24th. Tillie's Tea Shop, Diagon Alley.**

With a chunky striped scarp tied artfully around her neck and her hair loose around her shoulders, the only hint of Lavender's scars were those that just managed to creep up past her jaw. Her breath curled up in a white puff and she rubbed her gloved hands together, expression solemn despite the cheery Christmas music that spilled from the tea shop behind her. Finally, a smile broke across her face. "Neville!"

Beaming, she hugged him tightly. "So glad you're here." His cheek was cold as she kissed it; she laughed softly, wiping off the smudge of her coppery cinnamon-scented lipgloss, "Let's go inside. I have news, but I can't stay for breakfast like I promised. I only have time to get a drink to take away. They called me into work today because someone's sick."

She gripped his sleeve, nearly dragging him inside. A blast of heat surrounded them once the door
swung closed with a tinkle of Christmas bells and Neville immediately began to pull off his thick cloak and sturdy gloves. He stuffed the gloves into a concealed inner pocket of the cloak, sure that he would lose them otherwise. "But it's Christmas Eve, Lavender."

Lavender sighed. "The goblins don't really care. I'm sorry. I was really looking forward to this, too. Maybe we could get together for dinner later?"

With her eyes so wide and hopeful like that, Neville couldn't say no. "Of course. I'll book us a table somewhere. So, what sort of news?"

"Hang on," she teased, despite her brimming excitement. "Let me order first. I have been dreaming about the special hot chocolate since I dragged myself out of bed."

"The one with marshmallows on?" Neville shook his head. "Lavender, it's not even nine o'clock."

"It's Christmas, so the marshmallows are green and shaped like Christmas trees," she agreed, eyes lit up.

As she unfastened her cloak to account for the warmth of the cafe, Neville couldn't help but smirk. He didn't know anyone else who could wear a knitted pink jumper with a snowman on the front like that and still be able to make it look sexy. The highly impractical miniskirt she had paired it with probably helped, but he still held the opinion that anyone else would look ridiculous.

Neville peered at the chalkboard above the counter where the drinks were listed. Fairy lights twinkled all around, shimmering in time with the music.

"You're going to order a pot of tea and you know it," Lavender said gently, her foot gently nudging his.

"I... might have wanted something different. For a change." Neville cleared his throat. "I might have the same as you." When Lavender raised her eyebrows, he sighed. "All right. So I'm going to have tea. But I'm going to have toast and jam, too."

"Nice choice." Lavender tugged down what little there was of her skirt, nails painted the same pink as her festive jumper. "Breakfast is important."

"Says the woman who'd consume her weight in marshmallows if she could. All that sugar's not good for you."

She pursed her lips. "I'm a big girl. I'll cope."

When a young waitress with tinsel started to fix their order, Lavender grinned and tugged him over a nearby table to sit down while they waited. She leant forward, eager to share her news with Neville.

"So remember I applied for a job ages ago? The international thing with the Ministry?"

"Er, vaguely?"

"Well, they didn't have any positions then, but I got an owl on Monday and I went in for a meeting yesterday afternoon."

She bit her lip, barely constraining herself. So many emotions bubbled inside her that she couldn't keep her news to herself any longer.

"They offered me a position. It's not the same job that I interviewed for, but when the opportunity came up, they said I was the first person they thought of." Lavender clasped her hands together,
grinning broadly. "I'd be part of a group going around to wizarding schools all over the world. The team is going to be from all over the world, too. We'll be setting up pen pal exchanges and teaching custom from different countries. I'm trying to decide whether to accept or not."

Neville slumped back against his wooden chair. "Right."

"Yeah." Lavender bit her lip. "Thing is, I've got to leave on Monday. We're starting in the New Year and there's all sorts of things that need to be prepared before then."

"But... Merlin. That's so soon."

Pursing her lips, Lavender nodded. "I know. But this whole year could be an amazing adventure, you know? Lots of new experiences."

"A year?"

She nodded; Neville looked down at his lap, trying to formulate a response to that.

A silence fell between them, filled with cheery Christmas music about hippogryffs gambolling in the snow. Lavender nibbled at her thumbnail, gaze trained on Neville. Eventually, she sighed, hands dropping to her lap. "This is the part where you're meant to congratulate me or tell me you're happy for me."

"Or tell me to stay."

If he asked, she would stay in a heartbeat. No one else would have that influence over her, only Neville. Whatever their friendship was at the moment, she'd been feeling for a while that perhaps it was just about to tip into something else. Neville didn't wear his heart on his sleeve, though, and she still couldn't quite tell what he was thinking or feeling.

"Sounds like this is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

Lavender licked her lips. "Yeah. I guess it is."

"Congratulations."

She sighed, sitting back into her seat. "Thank you." She searched for the right words to say, digging even deeper to try and find the bravery that she knew she had in her. The best she could come up with, though, was, "I'm going to miss you."

"No," Neville said dismissively, shaking his head. "You'll probably forget all about me. You know, all those adventures you're going to have."

Lavender had never imagined that Neville would ever be capable of breaking her heart. She had been so sure that it would be the other way around, if it were to ever happen. But right at that second it happened, as sharp and clean as snapping the head off a gingerbread man.

"I'm sure I won't," she said softly, the smile on her lips not even close to reaching her eyes.

December 24th. Pansy's Residence, Knockturn Alley.

"And take you on my sleigh to the North Pole..."

Pansy cringed as her alarm broke into festive music. She had been awake for a good five minutes, just waiting for it to go off so that she could have every minute beneath her warm covers that was possible before she had to get up and get ready for work.

She sighed and rolled over, fingers fumbling with the switch and cursing her alarm clock before she
finally managed to get it to shut up.

Now that she was up, she easily slipped into her morning routine. A quiet cup of tea and a slice of wholemeal toast spread thinly with her favourite apricot jam. Next came brushing her teeth, then the ritual of cleansing, toning and moisturising, something which she found especially important in the stinging December cold.

At work, there was no guarantee of what might happen to her skin, either. Things tended to blow up or get thrown across the shop floor at the slightest provocation, the products as temperamental as some of the customers. The worst was what happened when people tried to shoplift. Depending on the item they were attempting to filch, it could get messy very, very quickly.

Pansy brushed her dark hair up into a neat chignon at the back of her head, then pulled on the lurid magenta robes that had become both the bane of her life and her salvation. Of all people, of all the job applications she had sent out, he was the only person who had deigned to employ her. It was humiliating - not even the Ministry of Magic would hire her and it often seemed as though they would take on anyone. It just wasn't fair and her pride could barely stand it.

If there was one thing she was good at, however, it was keeping her chin up and carrying on. It was something she'd had to pick up quickly after the war, finding hostility from many of her peers after her failed attempt to get Harry Potter handed over to the authorities. She'd always been the type to the biggest power and, at that moment, she'd felt that had been You-Know-Who. If he wanted Harry, he was going to get him. Right? Apparently not.

So, if she were going to hold her head high today, it was going to be held up with a sprig of faux holly artfully arranged in her ponytail and with Seraphina's Silver Sparkle eyeshadow highlighting the shape of her eyes. She walked tall in equally shiny silver shoes, having long since decided that if she were going to wear these gaudy robes she would embrace the gaudiness with everything she had.

George didn't look so impressed when she put his customary morning cup of tea down on the workbench beside him.

"Pansy," he said, quill pausing as he sketched out ideas for a new label design. "I said you didn't have to come in today. It's Christmas Eve."

She smiled serenely, though inwardly her stomach was tying itself in knots. "It's fine. I don't mind at all."

"It's Christmas Eve," he stressed.

George put the lid back on his bottle of red ink, standing up; Pansy took a step backwards, looking up at him. She swallowed. It wasn't fair for a man who annoyed her just by existing to have such blue eyes. "I'll go and open up. I think I need to do some dusting."

He kept his cool gaze fixed on her, silent for a long moment. George's shoulders shifted and she thought that he was going to fold his arms over his broad chest, but his arms stayed hanging by his sides. "All right. Don't forget to do behind the counter."

"Of course, Mr Weasley." As chirpy as she made it sound, those words still made her skin crawl.

Pansy had barely picked up her luridly chartreuse feather duster when the same Christmas music that she had been hearing solidly for the last month started piping into the shop. It wasn't your standard Christmas fare, but rather variations on familiar tunes that were jam packed with more double
entendres than one could shake a stick at. She sighed, glad that it was Christmas Eve because that meant all this incessant Christmas cheer would soon be over for another year.

She flipped the shop's sign from closed to open with a flick of her wand then turned to the display behind the counter. Pansy pursed her lips. Slap bang in the middle of the display was a photograph enclosed in the most ostentatious and tawdry frame that Pansy had ever seen in her life. There was no denying what an eyesore the frame was, but it wasn't the decoration that made Pansy's stomach churn - though it certainly offended her sensibilities. Instead, it was the photograph it held.

It had been taken during the war, or maybe just before it had really started. George and his now-dead twin had their arms around Harry Potter himself, the three of them grinning at the camera in the middle of the busy shop. Pansy could just about make out the fuzzy shape of Hermione Granger's head in the background, but right at the edge of the picture was Ron Weasley, gawping at the camera as though he had never seen one before in his life.

If there was one person she didn't think she'd ever be able to look in the eyes, it was Harry Potter. Even though his photographic self was smiling and laughing, she had long since convinced herself that he was glaring at her every single time she looked at it.

As could be expected, the shop was quiet. Pansy only had herself for company, serving only one customer, a harried-looking last-minute shopper, before George emerged from his workroom. Blue ink streaked across his freckled cheek and he wiped his hands on the apron that was slung low on his hips before putting his hands on her shoulders and turning her to face him.

"I've decided it's pointless staying open. I'm closing early."

Pansy's heart started to race. "If you want to go, I can keep the shop open."

"Pansy," he said firmly, "it's Christmas." He tossed his hair back, moving it out of his eyes. "Go home, relax, enjoy yourself. I'm sure you can't wait to get out of those robes. I've heard you complain about how much you hate them."

There was something about hearing George Weasley tell her to get out of her robes that made her stomach knot up again. She sighed, pained. "Do I have to?" How thick did he have to be to not understand that she didn't want to be at home today? Or any day, really. She was always here early and stayed as late as she could and there was no way that it was because she liked the decor. Or the company. Definitely not the company.

He chuckled dryly. "Yes. Tell you what, I've got some money that needs to be taken to Gringotts. Could you drop it over? You don't have to come back afterwards."

Her shoulders drooped and she looked around. Maybe, just maybe, she did like the eccentricity of the decor a bit. Summoning her self-composure, she put on her best neutral expression as she looked up at her boss. "If you insist, Mr Weasley."

**December 24th. Gringotts Bank, Diagon Alley.**

Goblins, it has to be said, had never been known for being the most friendly of creatures. The human employees at Gringotts were generally happy to be left alone by the goblins when it came to their appearance - and in some cases personal hygiene - but when it stopped customers from actually getting access to the services that they required at the bank, it left them less than impressed.

For the last six months, a trial had been in place at the bank based on the St Mungo's Welcome Witch. Lavender was one of the Gringotts Welcome Witches, tasked with standing in the lobby and
direction wizards to the appropriate part of the bank.

It was not her job, she thought ruefully, to be ogled by wizards old enough to be her grandfather; Lavender didn't need eyes in the back of her head to know that the last wizard she had assisted was looking at her derrière as he walked past. Not that there was anything in particular to look at when she was wearing deep red robes that went all the way down to her ankles, but she didn't put anything past men with false eyes or other optical devices like the wizard's shiny silver monocle.

Despite being called in to work at the last minute, Lavender couldn't be too upset when it meant she'd had a few extra galleons for the trouble, nor when there was every chance that she would soon be leaving this job. Putting on her biggest and brightest smile to greet the few weary wizards and witches who ventured out to the bank on Christmas Eve simply made it all the more easier for her to squash down the disappointment of Neville's non-reaction to the news of her job offer.

She hoped he'd just been too shocked to say anything. Or maybe she'd simply been reading everything wrong.

Lavender sighed, immediately pulling herself together when the familiar scowling face of Pansy Parkinson came through the door. As much as Lavender had a general dislike of the witch after years of unpleasant behaviour at school, she couldn't help by admire the shoes she was wearing. Merlin, her feet would be aching like nobody's business if she wore them to work.

"Good morning," she said pleasantly, smiling. "How can I help you this morning?"

Pansy's scowl darkened. Did Brown have to smile at her like that? The last thing she felt like doing right now was smiling. Being sent home from work early mean that she had to go home and, frankly, that was far from ideal. Her charmed fireplace was nowhere near efficient enough to warm her draughty little bedsit and she couldn't even afford paper chains, left alone a tree. Festive cheer was the last thing on her mind.

"I need to deposit -"

"Which way to the curse breakers' offices?"

Cheeks flushed red from the cold, a yellow and black scarf tied haphazardly at his neck, Zacharias looked expectantly at Lavender. He had a potentially cursed object in his bag and whatever the other witch wanted could obviously wait until he had dealt with this. He recognised her from school. Parkhouse or Parkinson or something like that. Slytherin and not really work his time or the effort required to remember her these days.

"Well, excuse you," Pansy snapped, dark eyes narrowing dangerously. She was many things, but she was not invisible. Having attention taken away from her made the hairs on the back of her neck prickle and she held her chin up.

Zacharias blinked at her. "Yes, excuse you." He turned back to Lavender. "Well?"

"Sir," Lavender said, mustering her most patient tone. "I was just helping this woman, so if you'll wait just a moment and -"

"No." He carefully held the bag he was carrying up to eye level so that neither witch could miss it. "This is a potentially dangerous item and I insist you help me first."

Lavender pursed her lips, all too tempted to point out that she probably could have helped Pansy and him in the time it had taken for him to complain, but that wasn't going to help matters. Any good Hogwarts student knew not to tickle a sleeping dragon and she wasn't about to aggravate Zacharias
Pansy, however, was not the patient sort. "No! I was here first." She swatted the bag away from her face, palm slapping the back firmly. "Wait your turn."

Making a strangled noise, Zacharias tried to steady it from swaying dangerously, only succeeding in making it swing further and catch Lavender on the temple.

"Ow!"

For a moment, bright yellow light encompassed the world.

Spots swimming in front of her eyes, Lavender rubbed the side of her head. "Sir," she said quietly, the knock to the head upsetting her already unsteady emotions, "please stand to the side for a moment. If you interrupt again, I'll have you escorted from the bank." Lavender blinked back tears, wondering why she had assumed that today would be easy.

Pansy blinked, too. She wasn't sure what to make of the odd flash of light, even going so far as to wonder whether she was seeing things after being part of one too many minor explosions at the joke shop. "Um. I need to deposit some money."

"If you'd like to see one of the goblins over there," Lavender said, managing to keep her tone even and not sob from her sudden headache, "they'll be able to help you."

"Thanks," Pansy said slowly, looking from Lavender to Zacharias and then simply deciding that she didn't want to know what had just happened.

Lavender gritted her teeth for a moment and couldn't bring herself to smile. "Now, sir, how can I help you?"

All colour drained from his face, Zacharias had the horrible feeling that the mystery box had been responsible for the explosion of light that was still making his vision swim. Nothing seemed to have happened, though. No one had dropped dead or sprouted tentacles or anything of that type, so maybe things were fine. For now.

His stomach churned with more nerves than before. "Curse breakers?" he asked weakly.

"Through that door over there. Turn left at the hat stand." When he simply stared at her, Lavender held in a sigh with great difficulty. "Anything else, sir?"

Zacharias licked his lips. "No. Thanks. That's everything."

"Merry Christmas, sir."


Coaxing fingers slipped over Zacharias' body in precise, teasing touches, drawing him gently from sleep. He stirred slowly, smiling to himself. The covers shifted, soft lips pressing warm kisses to his chest in a tantalising trail that worked down the length of his body.

A little uncoordinated in his sleepy state, he lifted his hand until his fingers met long hair, the strands silky to the touch. His fingers moved over Luna's head gently, earning him a soft laugh.

Her warm lips closed around the length of his morning erection and he let out a long, pleased sigh. The pillow embraced his head as her enjoyed the exquisite torment of of her talented tongue and
fingers, no desire to stop her from doing whatever she wanted.

Zacharias pushed the covers back, Luna looking up at him with her lips still wrapped around his length. Her blonde hair fell around her shoulders in a tousled mess, irresistibly sexy. As she drew back, her tongue lapped at him like a lollipop.

He groaned, shuddering at the sight of her looking both so innocent and so debauched. "I could get used to this."

She pressed a strangely chaste kiss to the end of his erection, sitting up deliciously nude. "I shall have to remember that," she said, starting to crawl forward over him. "Good morning," she said blithely, her hand replacing her mouth. "Happy Christmas Eve."

Zacharias groaned, her words not sinking in immediately. Often, things that Luna said went straight over his head and he had developed a habit of half-listening, paying attention only when he was sure he needed to. "What?" he asked, gasping. Wasn't it a little early for her to be putting her finger there?

Luna looked at him curiously with wide luminous eyes. "Pardon?" She straddled his thigh, arousal rubbing against him as she shifted back and forth.

Though there was so much pale skin in front of him simply begging to be touched, Zacharias was too confused to take advantage. "It's Christmas Day."

"No," she said, apparently unconcerned by his confusion, "that's tomorrow."

"But it was Christmas Eve yesterday."

"Yesterday was the twenty third," Luna corrected.

Disorientated, Zacharias sat up. Yesterday had definitely been Christmas Eve. Luna had woken him just like this. They'd had breakfast. They'd made it as far as the stairs before they'd given into desire again. He'd gone to Gringotts with...

His gaze landed on his dresser. A square wooden box sat atop the chest of drawers, intricate carvings covering its surface.

All arousal seemed to leave his body in a rush, despite the encouraging strokes of Luna's hand. "What's that?" he asked tightly, throat constricting.

Luna turned to look, tilting her head to the side. "Oh," she said, her free hand lifting to play with her breast as she sat there. "I found it. I think it's cursed."

Zacharias looked at her with wide eyes. "Yeah," he said finally, "I think you might be right."

**December 24th. Again. Pansy's Residence, Knockturn Alley.**

"And take you on my sleigh to the North Pole..."


While Pansy quietly accepted that funds were tight, she now knew better than to drink half a bottle of cheap wine before bed. Her head didn't hurt, but apparently it had made her dream in excruciating detail, exhausting her at the same time. She hated mornings when she woke up feeling more tired than she had when she'd retired for the night, but that troubled her less than the dream she'd had.
If she were going to dream about anything, did she have to dream about work? It was equal measures boring and depressing. That sort of vivid dream ought to be reserved for dreams filled with exotic locales and shirtless men adoring her, not dusting and checking stock.

Setting down her duster, she stowed it beneath the counter. The place seemed clean enough for now, in her opinion. Pansy found a suitably shiny surface and adjusted the holly that she'd tucked into her ponytail. It wasn't real holly, but it was still a little prickly, one of the leaves scratching her head every time she turned her head.

The scant few customers that came in seemed to be impressed with the swift service that she provided them. Even Pansy was surprised with herself; though she considered herself quite good at her job, being nice to people and helping them didn't come as naturally to her as it did to other people. Deja vu prodded at her as she popped a box of Ton-Tongue Toffees into a bag. Had she really dreamt about this? Merlin, maybe she did need a couple of days off, even though all that she had to look forward to tomorrow was the seasonal marathon of *Days In Diagon* on the Wizarding Wireless Network and a tin of tomato soup for lunch.

She sighed. Time for a cup of tea to clear her head, she decided. There were very few things at Weasley's Wizard Wheezes that Pansy would eat voluntarily, but the tea supply was almost sacred and there was no way that George would tamper with it.

Pansy glanced around to make sure that the shop was empty before ducking out to the workroom.

She paused in the doorway, cringing as a bottle of blue ink squirted at George as he made to dip his quill into it. He frowned and gave the bottle a disapproving flick with his finger.

"Mr Weasley?" she started tentatively. As George turned to look at her, Pansy's fingers gripped when doorframe when she spotted the streak of ink across his freckled cheek. "The shop's quiet so I was just going to make a cup of tea. Would you like some?"

"I was just about to come and see you," George admitted, rising from his chair. He quickly wiped his hands on his low-clung apron, giving Pansy a smile. "I've decided it's pointless staying open. I'm closing early."

Sure that wasn't the first time she had heard him say those words, Pansy's heart started to race. She licked her lips quickly, mouth suddenly feeling dry. "If you want to go, I can keep the shop open," she insisted.

"Don't be silly, Pansy," he said firmly. "It's Christmas." George pushed his his hair back from his eyes, succeeding in smudging bright red ink across his other cheek. "Go home, relax, enjoy yourself. I'm sure you can't wait to get out of those robes. I always hear you complaining about how much you hate them."

That was true, Pansy couldn't deny that.

Brilliant. Now even her boring, true-to-life dreams were telling her that George Weasley didn't want to have her around, just like in real life. At some point, something must have gone very wrong.

She sighed. "Do I have to? Really, if you want to be with your family, I'll lock up. I've done it before plenty of times."

The smile dropped from his face for just a moment before it twisted into something more wry. He gave a soft, mirthless chuckle. "It's fine Pansy. I'm the boss, I should do the boring stuff."

Pansy's shoulders drooped. "If you insist, Mr Weasley."
"I do." He paused. "Tell you what, I've got some money that needs to be taken to Gringotts. Could you do me a favour and drop it over? You don't have to come back afterwards."

The money bag that he presented her with seemed to weigh twice as much as she remembered. Although, obviously, she didn't remember it at all because to suggest that she had lived this before was utterly ridiculous. She'd simply had a dream about work last night and now she was just a bit stressed about Christmas and was attributing things to her dream that she hadn't even dreamt about.

Obviously.

It seemed to get heavier and heavier as she made her way down Diagon Alley. Pansy barely heard the carol singers that she passed or noticed any of the festive display. All she noticed was how the arches of her feet were starting to ache and that she really ought to buy a pair of gloves in the January sales if she had the money.

Just inside the entrance of Gringotts, a headache started to brew at the base of her skull. Lavender Brown stood just a short way away on the polished marble floor, complete with a perky smile and neatly curled hair. Pansy had never hated the sight of her more than she had in that moment.

Pansy's somewhat shaky steps over to her were interrupted when a hurrying wizard nearly knocked her over. As it was, he grabbed her and the bag he was went flying, skidding over the floor to rest a couple of feet from a horrified-looking Lavender Brown. Scowling, Pansy tried to right herself without his assistance, though several insults died in her throat when she found herself looking up at the annoyed face of Zacharias Smith.

He gave a strangled gasp, releasing her immediately; Pansy nearly lost her balance. "Careful," she hissed.

"Hey," called Lavender. "What is this?"

They both turned to stare. She had picked up the canvas bag and was peering into it with a deep curiosity written on her face. Zacharias legged it across the lobby so fast that Pansy had to hurry to keep up.

"That's mine," he insisted, grabbing it back from Lavender.

Surprised, Lavender put up no resistance. She frowned, gingerly touching her temple as she felt the ghost of a headache spread through her. "Sorry," she murmured, then straightened herself up, looking every inch the professional Welcome Witch that she could. "I had the strangest feeling I've done this before." Maybe it was a sign that she needed to pay attention to her tea leaves, she thought, or simply being yelled at by a goblin via the Floo for doubting that it was indeed the twenty-fourth of December had set her off-kilter for the whole day. She shrugged. "Must have dreamt it."

"You dream about work?" Pansy sneered. Although she felt very much the same way, mocking someone usually made her feel better.

Today, it didn't seem as effective.

Zacharias tugged the bag off the wooden box, laying the box flat on the palm of his hand. It was surprisingly light and looked as though it ought to have been heavier. "I think we have been here before.""}

"Well, that's just ridiculous." Pansy was vaguely happy believing that her deja vu was simply the result of a bad bottle of wine.
"No, I think this box did something."

Pansy rolled her eyes. "The only thing it's done is hit Brown in the head. Probably knock some sense into her."

"Hey!" Lavender protested. She pursed her lips together quickly, not wanting to draw attention from the goblins; she was already in their bad books today, it seemed. "But, wait. It didn't hit me in the head." Though it was certainly starting to feel like it had.

"No, she's right," Zacharias said carefully, eyes narrowed thoughtfully at Pansy. "It did. Yesterday. The first time we were all here."

"This is the first time I've been to Gringotts for weeks," Pansy told him curtly. There was no point in depressing herself with the emptiness of her vault any more often than she absolutely needed to.

Lavender tucked her hair behind her ear, frowning. "I don't understand. What's happening?" She didn't mean to whine but, well, this was confusing. Everything felt like it had gone wrong from the moment she had got out of bed, as though she'd done everything better before somehow.

"It's this box," Zacharias said, angry tone directed at the wooden cube. "It's... made us relive today or something."

An uneasiness bubbled slowly in the pit of Pansy's stomach. A horrible, dawning feeling of agreement spread through her before her head took over and told her not to listen to something so stupid. "I think someone's been at the mulled wine a little early," she announced. "Now," Pansy continued, looking squareley at Lavender, "I have some money to pay in. It's over this way, isn't it?"

Gaze following Pansy's pointing finger, all Lavender could do was nod. More confused than ever before, she didn't have the presence of mind to argue. Nor could she: Pansy was correct.

Lavender sighed softly and gave Zacharias a watery smile as Pansy left them standing there with a sharp tap tap tap of her silver heels on the marble. "Um... The curse breakers are through that door over there. Turn left at the hat stand."

"I didn't ask you where they were yet."

Her eyes widened. "But you were going to."

"Yes. I was." He stared at the box. As empty as it felt, it was clear to him that it was holding a big secret.

"Oh, dear," Lavender said quietly.

"Mmm." Zacharias nodded, distracted by the intricate carvings on the box. "My thoughts exactly."

**December 24th. Again. Lavender's Flat, London.**

A steaming mug of hot cocoa sat on the coffee table, sadly devoid of any marshmallows, novelty or otherwise.

Lavender sighed. She'd lost her appetite for the cocoa almost as soon as she'd finished making it. Today had been beyond bizarre and somehow that had quenched even her desire for chocolate. If there was one thing that Lavender was sure to always want, it was chocolate. To feel slightly sick at just the thought of it was unthinkable.
A Christmas edition of *Days In Diagon* was playing on the wireless, Lavender listening as she curled up on the sofa. Though the clock had yet to even reach seven o'clock, Lavender was already in her favourite pyjamas, thick socks snug on her feet to keep her warm.

"Damon," proclaimed the breathy ingénue of the drama, "you should sit down. There's something I need to tell you."

Lavender leant closer to the wireless, watching it intently as she waited with baited breath to hear the big announcement. They had been teasing this for weeks, a dark secret that Miranda was keeping close to her chest and away from her beloved Damon. The characters were childhood sweethearts; Lavender had been listening to their trials and tribulations since she had been a teenager.

"Miranda, you're scaring me."

She closed her eyes. In her mind, Damon was incredibly handsome. Her first crush, albeit one on a fictional character that didn't even have a face she could swoon over.

A long pause passed between them, time enough for someone to knock on her door. Lavender gasped, the sudden interruption to her quiet time making her heart race. She glanced at the door, pained. The drama was just getting good and the volume was down low enough that maybe she could pretend she wasn't home...

"Lavender?"

Neville's voice made her heart race again, though for a different reason this time. She scrambled up from the sofa, shuffling across the carpet to pull open the door. "Neville. Hi." She blushed, her smile fading when she saw the worried cleft between his brows. "What's wrong?"

"You're all right?" he asked.

"Yes. Of course I am," Lavender said, gasping again as Neville pulled her into a tight, yet brief, hug. "You had me so worried."

Lavender frowned. "Why?"

"Because you didn't show up for breakfast today. And then I couldn't get in touch with you all day - I even checked St Mungo's."

"You checked the hospital before you checked my flat?" Horrified that she'd forgotten about him in all the madness of the day, Lavender still laughed in response. "Oh, I'm so sorry. Come in." Lavender grabbed the front of his cloak and pulled him inside. "Let's shut the door. It's cold out there."

She shivered, gesturing for Neville to take a seat on the sofa. Lavender flipped the switch on the wireless, turning it off so that Neville didn't have to be subject to her shameful *Days In Diagon* habit. It seemed she'd missed the big revelation and now she was going to have to wait until late tomorrow to hear it in the omnibus.

"Today has been a complete disaster," she announced, flopping down onto the sofa and tugging the blanket from the back of it to arrange it over their knees. "I got confused over what day it was and then I got called into work to cover for someone who was off sick..." She sighed, leaning towards him. Neville's shoulder was cold, but she knew from experience that it didn't take long for him to warm up. "I'm so sorry. I was really looking forward to breakfast, too."
"Me, too." Neville smiled sheepishly, lifting a hand. It hovered over her covered knee for a moment, then he put it back down.

Lavender pursed her lips. Little things like that gave her hope that she wasn't simply reading too much into their relationship, but he never followed through and there was every chance that he would get scared away if she actually tried anything.

"How about we try again another day? You could come around here. Boxing Day breakfast? Brunch?" She tucked a loose curl behind her ear. "I like to sleep in." Tomorrow when she woke up it was actually going to be Christmas Day and this ridiculous incident would all be forgotten, she was sure of it.

Neville ran a hand through his shaggy hair. "Yeah, alright."

Lavender smiled, trying to encourage him to make eye contact.

"We can... compare our bad Christmas presents."

"Exactly," Lavender said brightly. Her throat started to constrict, though, when she realised that she hadn't told him about her big job opportunity. The first time she'd tried, it had never happened. Just gone. Erased from history.

"I was going to tell you," she started, but the words seemed to stop when Neville looked at her expectantly. Merlin, but she loved it when he looked at her so intently. "I... Um..."

Leaning forwards, Lavender grabbed the mug of cocoa. It was cooler now and she still wasn't thirsty, but it gave her something to do with her hands and lips.

"What is it?" Frowning, Neville really did put his hand on her knee this time. "Is something wrong?"

She shook her head. "No. I got offered a job. With the Ministry." Lavender sipped her cocoa, already regretting picking up the drink. She shifted it into one hand, covering Neville's hand with her own. "It's going to involve a lot of travelling for move of next year." She felt Neville's fingers twitch and cringed inwardly. "I haven't accepted yet," she added quickly.

"Sounds like this is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

Lavender licked her lips, a familiar sense of disappointment dawning in her. "Yeah. I guess it is." She cuddled into his side more. If even a repeat of the day couldn't make this conversation go any differently, she didn't know what she could do.

"Congratulations."

Once again, she ventured, "I'm going to miss you," heart nearly in her throat as she inwardly begged for him to say something substantial.

"You'll probably forget all about me. You know, all those adventures you're going to have."

Lavender bit her tongue, attempting not to grimace as she did so. "Of course I won't. Don't be silly." She wiggled away from him, pushing off the blanket. "I'm going to open my new tin of biscuits. Want any?"

Neville sank back into the cushions and gave her a one-shouldered shrug. "Yeah. Go on, then. It's Christmas, after all."
December 24th. Again. Gringotts, Diagon Alley.

"Oh, not you two again."

Lavender rolled her eyes and even Zacharias sighed.

"Parkinson," he said, "this is the fifth time that we've lived through Christmas Eve. You don't need to say that every single time."

Pansy pursed her lips. Putting her hands on her hips, the money bag she was carrying jingled with clinking coins. "This is getting ridiculous. I refuse to do this again."

Lavender gave a hollow laugh which she quickly turned into a cough. "And how do you propose we do that?"

"Well..." Pansy's mouth hung open as she searched for an answer. "I haven't figured that out yet."

"Well, I'm taking this to see what the curse breakers think of it." Zacharias pulled the wooden box from its canvas bag, raising his eyebrows when he saw Lavender wince. She did that every single time, though it had only hit her once.

It was Pansy's turn to sigh. "Again?"

"Yes, again," he said, losing patience with her surliness. Even by his standards she was getting to be too much. "As soon as the day starts over, everyone forgets everything."

"Yeah," Lavender agreed quietly. Her shoulders slumped for a moment before she straightened up and put on her best false smile. "Well, you both know where you need to go," she said, waving her hand.

"Thanks," Pansy muttered and didn't mean it, scurrying off towards the goblins as fast as her pointed silver heels would take her.

Zacharias dropped the box back into the bag without a single word of acknowledgement. Lavender reached for him, stopping him before he made it even two steps. "I hope you find a way to stop this."

He sniffed. "Of course I will."


A scream nestled in Pansy's throat, ready to explode. Her fingers tightened around the handle of her feather duster, the feathers trembling and her knuckles turning white.

She couldn't do this. She couldn't keep doing this.

It was the same thing every day over and over. Nothing changed, from the song on the wireless that woke her up to the wizard who came into the shop looking for a present for his wife, of all people. Pansy had gone from suggesting beauty products and Patented Daydream Charms to sweets that would promote flatulence and the growth of warts.

Needless to day, the wizard had been less than impressed with the suggestions that she had given him.

Now, as she stared up at a photograph the most ostentatious and tawdry frame that she had ever seen in her life, all Pansy wanted to do was scream.
Christmas Eve after Christmas Eve after Christmas Eve, the grinning trio of George, Fred and Harry mocked her with their happy smiles and cheerful waves. This was, by her estimation, the seventeenth Christmas Eve that she had lived through. Every day, they seemed to just grin wider as she felt more and more like punching each of them in the photographic face. Even the gawping Ron Weasley at the edge of the image seemed to be looking at her with a knowing smirk.

Smug bastard, she thought bitterly. She narrowed her eyes at the photograph, not for the first time wishing that she could hex the whole thing out of existence. A headache seemed to focus behind her eyes, growing more and more intense.

"Hey, Pansy," George emerged from the workroom, wiping his hands on his apron. He stopped in his tracks, surprised to see such a glare on her face. "Er, are you alright?"

She gave a growl under her breath, only to gasp when smoke started to curl from the edges of the frame. The frame caught alight with a soft whoof of air, starting to crackle immediately, filling the shop with acrid green smoke.

"Whoa, there." George gave her a gentle push out of the way, raising his wand to quickly extinguish the flames. Face pale, he reached to pull it down from the shelf, hissing at the temperature and dropping it on the counter where several pieces fell off.

"I... haven't seen anyone do accidental magic for a while." Expression caught between shock and disappointment, he looked at Pansy.

For her part, she was trembling, her headache suddenly gone but not the emotions that had prompted the accidental magic. Now that the stopper on them had been released, they swelled dangerously within her. Her jaw twitched as she stared, horrified, at the mess that the frame had become. Fire damage did not improve it one iota.

"Sorry," she choked. Her eyes stung, she told herself, from the smoke.

Without stopping to collect her cloak, Pansy ran from the shop, magenta robes and all, and out into the street.

She couldn't keep doing this.

December 24th. Again. Gringotts, Diagon Alley.

Brown needed more concealer under her eyes, Pansy thought. Then again, maybe nothing would help her with those awful scars on display, too. What were a few dark circles when put up against that?

Pansy simply couldn't see the point. She tried her best to bury everything she could about the damned war, covering up the way she'd behaved and the more questionable things that she'd done.

No matter how she tried to cover them, though, people always seemed to know.

Perhaps it was the same with Brown's scars. She could wear a scarf or slather on make-up, but it wouldn't make the scars or what happened to her go away.

"Where's Smith?" she demanded.

Lavender regarded Pansy tiredly. "He got here over an hour ago."

"And?"
The Welcome Witch sighed. "And what, Parkinson?"

"Is there any news? To say that I'm getting tired of all this is the understatement of the century."

Pursing her lips, Lavender composed herself before saying, "If I knew, I'd say something. So would he."

Pansy scoffed. "He would not. He doesn't care about us, you know."

"He's not completely heartless."

"Looks like he is. He's leaving now." Pansy nodded towards him as Zacharias strode across the lobby, barely casting them a glance on his way to the exit.

Lavender frowned and called after him. "Zacharias." He turned, looking at her expectantly. "Have you found out anything?"

He sighed heavily enough for them to hear. "Guess." He rolled his eyes and continued on his way.


"Don't know what you're looking so smug about," Lavender said, turning on her. "Him being a selfish bastard isn't a good thing."

Pansy set a glare on her. "Maybe things are all Christmas carols and candy canes for you, Brown, but did it occur to you that getting emotional doesn't help everyone?"

Lavender pinched the bridge of her nose. "Just go."

"Gladly."

**December 24th. Again. Zacharias' House, Kensington.**

Zacharias Smith never wanted to have oral sex again.

At least, he was in no great hurry to receive it, when once it would have been one of the highlights of any sexual encounter. Merlin knows how much Luna seemed to enjoy using her mouth to bring him to his peak, always so wet and ready for him when she had been having her way.

Now, though, Zacharias' body and mind were in conflict. While his body was only too happy to receive the attention of her talented tongue when he awoke, just the tickle of her long blonde hair against his thighs was enough for Zacharias to start losing his erection. One of her many talents, though, was knowing just how to get and keep him hard, her slim fingers finding the exact place that always had him rock hard again almost immediately when she stroked there.

Waking up to that every morning, the same morning over and over again, had lost its novelty sooner than Zacharias would have liked to admit. It was always with a resentful groan that he pushed her away and a variation of, "I'm not in the mood."

"I think your cock would disagree," she said smoothly, eyeing him in a way that made him shiver.

"Yeah, well," he told her gruffly, pulling the covers back over himself, "that's just a perfectly normal reaction to have in the morning. Doesn't mean I want you going down on me."

Luna pressed her lips together thoughtfully. "I suppose. You don't normally say no, though."
Yes, I bloody well do, he thought, scowling. Zacharias held the covers down, willing his erection away. When it subsided enough not to be awkward, he clambered out of bed away from her. Yanking his dressing gown from the hook on the back of the door, he shivered against the cold and quickly tied the belt around the waist.

"I'm taking this to Gringotts to get a curse breaker to look at it," he announced, picking up the wooden box. Even simply sitting there it taunted him by its very existence.

Turning to look at Luna, who still sat nude on the bed, it wasn't confusion he saw on her face. The expression was one that he noticed more and more every time they repeated this morning. From something that he hadn't picked up on at first, the hurt in her eyes had grown to something that was impossible to miss.

"You don't even know what it is." Luna shifted onto her side, stretching out her pale legs and watching him closely.

He cleared his throat, looking down at the carpet. Beyond making sure that she was happy in his company and that the sex was good, her emotional well-being simply wasn't something that he normally concerned himself with. He'd never proclaimed to love Luna, after all, and he only dimly recollected her admission that she was fond of him from the first time he had seen this box.

Zacharias stared at the ornate carvings that covered it, the swirling patterns as nonsensical to him as some of the things that came from Luna's mouth. Every time he took it to Gringotts, he had the same fruitless conversation. Not even Megan Jones and her broad Welsh vowels could convince him that she really had no idea what the box was or how it was supposed to be doing what Zacharias told her it was doing. No matter how matter-of-fact she was in her tone, Zacharias refused to believe that there was nothing to be done and that there absolutely had to be some way of ending this curse that had dragged him into a never-ending Christmas Eve.

Along with Brown and Parkinson.

He had given them little thought over the last couple of cycles, turning up at Gringotts far earlier than the original meeting time in the hope that more time with Megan in the curse breakers' offices would help shed light on the matter.

Every time, Megan's eyes widened as Zacharias showed that he knew his way around the office perfectly. Just like the hurt in Luna's eyes, he'd come to recognise the slight purse in Megan's lips that told him she was holding back a comment. That just caused him further annoyance - he didn't want to know what people were thinking because if he started noticing then he was going to have to start actually caring about them more and being... considerate. He was fine just as he was, thank you very much. Compassion for people seemed to end up with someone getting hurt; he had taught himself that much during the war when he'd lost good friends.

As for Brown and Parkinson, they weren't friends. He wouldn't even talk to them if they hadn't been thrown together like this. Even now he barely spoke to them more than he needed to.

His eyes started to lose focus the longer he stared at the box. He blinked, snapping his attention back and realising that he didn't really know what went on for them in this repeating day. Sometimes they were at the bank, sometimes they weren't. But they were looking tireder, he was sure. He felt that tiredness, too, like an ache that seeped through his bones faster and faster every day.

It would be so easy to simply rejoin Luna in bed and sleep for the rest of Christmas Eve. He had no plans for the day, or at least none that he could remember after so many repetitions.
Zacharias only noticed Luna at his side when she gently laid her hand on her arm. He looked down at her. Luna raised her eyebrows inquisitively. "Are you poorly? You should come back to bed."

"Yeah," he muttered. Would a sane man really turn down an offer like that from his very naked partner, especially one as attractive as Luna? But was he even sane anymore? Maybe he'd simply gone mad a few days ago and not noticed.

Looking down at the wooden box in his hand, a spark of anger flared in the pit of his stomach. Now this box had him questioning his own sanity. That was ridiculous. He wasn't going to be sent to the Janus Thickey ward by some cursed trinket.

Annoyed, he tossed it away.

The box barely touched the wall, just the lightest of taps, but it shattered into pieces. Splinters of wood bounced on the carpet, some disappearing under the bed.

Luna gasped at the destruction, covering her mouth. Zacharias, though, felt as though his stomach had been jerked from his body. He dropped to his knees. It was empty. Completely empty.

"Reparo."

Zacharias barely heard Luna's spell, but it didn't matter. The shards of wood didn't even twitch.

Crouching beside him, Luna gently stroked his cheek. "You're crying," she stated simply.

He touched his face, feeling the wetness there. "Nonsense," he protested, shaking his head and ignoring the way his hands were trembling. "Must have got something in my eye."

**December 24th. Again. Lavender's Flat, London.**

"Damon, you should sit down. There's something I need to tell you."

Lavender quickly flipped the switch on the wireless and it fell silent, its dial dimming. She gave a shaky sigh, curling back onto the sofa. However many times this day repeated, she had yet to actually hear the shocking announcement that had been promised for weeks by *Days In Diagon*.

If she didn't see him in the morning, Lavender could set her watch by Neville's arrival at her flat in the evening. Forever the same interruption, forever the same non-response. Tonight she didn't feel she had the strength to actually see him face to face. Whatever she said to him, it seemed to make no difference.

*I've been offered a job and I don't know if I should take it.*

*I've been offered a job and I leave next week.*

*I'm leaving next week. The Ministry offered me a job and I can't say no.*

*What do you think about this job?*

Her heart ached at the thought of another fruitless conversation. With a tired flick of her wand, she turned out the lamps, pitching the room into darkness. Closing her eyes, Lavender tugged the blanket from the back of the sofa over herself. She cuddled back into the sofa, a cushion clutched to her chest as she awaited the inevitable knock on the door.

Though she was expecting it, it still caught her by surprise, heart fluttering. She bit her lip, the urge to cast aside her resolve to stay quiet and hidden strong. But no. If she saw Neville, she thought she
might cry.

"Lavender?"

She gripped the cushion tighter, face screwed up in concentration.

He knocked again. "Lavender?" he asked again, a little louder. "Are you home?"

Lavender shook her head. No, I'm not. Go away.

She should have gone out, she realised, and left the flat truly empty. There was nothing keeping her here, nothing stopping her from going out and finding someone who would listen to her or give her encouragement one way or another.

Neville, though, would have come here anyway. Just the chance to hear his voice left a warm feeling in her chest. Hope, maybe. Hope that he actually cared.

"Lavender?"

Neville shuffled his feet, looking down at the ground. Not a peep of light filtered out from the crack under the door. When he had looked up at the flat from the street, he had been sure that he had seen a light. Maybe he had been mistaken and spotted a neighbour's window instead.

His knocking roused no answer; Neville wrung hands anxiously. Where was she? He hadn't seen her all day and when she hadn't turned up for their designated breakfast, he'd hoped - albeit sadly - that she had merely forgotten. The excitement of Christmas and all that. But when he hadn't been able to find her anywhere, concern had set in.

He tried knocking once more, hoping that perhaps she was in the bathroom or her bedroom, somewhere she couldn't hear him. Still, there was no response.

His last knock was not a knock, but him banging his head fruitlessly against the door. He groaned, immediately wishing he hadn't done that. Neville couldn't think where else she would be. He had tried everywhere he could think of, even the hospital. If she were with his family, he couldn't interrupt that, but he knew she wasn't close to her family these days.

Pained, Neville realised that he didn't even know her plans for Christmas. Had she tried to tell him? If she had, he wouldn't be surprised if he had forgotten. His memory hadn't improved great deal over the years, but how a detail like that could have escaped him, he didn't know.

When they had been owling earlier in the week, Lavender had seemed excited and confirmed the details of their breakfast meeting with multiple exclamation marks. Date. Meeting. He wasn't quite sure what it was, what it was supposed to have been. Whatever he might call it, he knew he'd been looking forward to it.

He raised his hand to knock again, but simply let it fall at his side. This was pointless. He ought to go home, spend time with his gran.

Neville stared at the door. Maybe she was asleep. It was still early, though, far too early to sleep on Christmas Eve. He had known Lavender since she was eleven and if there was one thing he knew, it was that she got excited about Christmas. He remembered fourth year all those years ago. The whole castle had been brimming with excitement about the Yule Ball, the foreign guests, the excitement of everything. Lavender had been no exception. She'd stayed up until gone midnight, eating chocolate and eyeing the pile of presents awaiting them all. Neville had stayed up, too, teenage bravado stopping him from admitting that he was tired. They'd played board games into the small hours until
finally creeping up their staircases to bed.

Even now, Seamus still complained that snakes and ladders would be a far more interesting game if there were magic involved.

The memory brought a smile to Neville's face, but only briefly. If he could better vocalise his concerns, maybe he would have found Lavender by now. Even when he wasn't with her, though, she had the uncanny ability to make him utterly tongue tied.

His hand slipped into the inner pocket of his cloak and he pulled out an envelope. It was slightly crumpled around the edges, but otherwise fine. Neville slipped it under the door and straightened up. He would just have to try and talk to her over the Floo tomorrow, he supposed.

Lavender peered through the darkness, just enough light seeping in from the corridor to allow her to see something flat pushed beneath the door. A moment later, she heard Neville's heavy footsteps leaving. Lavender bit her lip hard, hugging the cushion tighter to her chest as she tried to hold back exhausted tears.

December 24th. Again. Gringotts, Diagon Alley.

"You look like you're about to cry, Brown." Zacharias' lip curled as he looked over the witch in front of him. Did he look that bad? Merlin, he hoped not. But while he didn't feel close to tears, there was something reassuring about seeing the stress of this repeating day shown outwardly on someone. Not to mention comforting that he was holding it together in public better than she was.

Lavender let out a shaky breath. "I'm just so tired of all this." She glanced around the lobby of the bank, the large space nearly empty. Unsurprisingly, considering the day. Blinking quickly to hold back her tears, Lavender clenched her teeth. "Actually, you know what? I can't be bothered with this today."

Unfastening her formal robes, she shrugged them off to reveal a knitted pink jumper with a snowman on the front and a miniskirt that Zacharias thought looked far too short for the late December weather. She shoved them into Zacharias' arms with an annoyed growl.

"You know where you're going. Just drop those somewhere. I'm going home."

"But you're meant to be working."

She ran her hand back through her hair and shook her head. "Not today. Like I said, I can't be bothered. Have fun with your curse breaker. I'm going to the pub."

December 24th. Weasley's Wizard Wheezes, Diagon Alley.

Emerging from his workroom, George rubbed at his cheek, feeling the slightly wet streak of ink that covered it. He pulled a far and wiped his hands on the apron.

"I've decided it's pointless staying open," he announced, tugging up his apron so that it didn't slip any lower on his hips and end up around his ankles. "I'm closing early."

Standing in front of the counter, he stopped. "Pansy?" he called cautiously, looking around for the familiar flash of magenta robes and not seeing even a scrap of them behind a display. "Pansy?"

George raised his voice, hoping she hadn't got swallowed up by one of the displays.

A soft sob from behind the counter caught his attention. "Pansy?" Confused, he leant over the
counter, but from that angle all he could see was the tips of her pointy silver shoes. She sobbed
louder and, with a grunt, George jumped over the counter, crouching down beside her.

Pansy sniffled, mascara puddling under eyes. "I really, really fucking hate Christmas," she swore
fiercely, her hands curled into tight fists. "I just need it to be over."

George regarded her in open-mouthed astonishment. "I..."

"And if I have to listen to Hippogryff Sleigh Ride more time, I'm going to find the composer and
punch them in the face." Her jaw set in vicious determination, Pansy aimed her glare at George.

He sighed and twisted, sitting down beside her with his back resting against the same shelf as hers. "I
completely agree."

"It's not even a good song," Pansy grumbled, her fists loosening just a little at the discovery of an ally
in her crusade against all things Christmassy.

"Yeah." He gave her a gentle nudge with his elbow. "I can't wait for Christmas to be over, either."

Pansy dabbed at her eyes with her fingertips. Seeing her mascara on her fingers, she gave up and
simply wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. There was no way that she could look any worse
than she did right now, she decided. She swallowed thickly, shaking her head. "At least you have
family to go home to. You know, my skanky little flat doesn't even have a sofa because I can't afford
one."

"Um..." George hesitated for a long moment, then awkwardly put his arm around her slim shoulders.
He let out a breath, slumping as the energy drained out of him with his confession. "I don't want to
have a family Christmas. Everyone's just... they're so careful around me. Have been for the last few
years. And that gets so bloody tiring."

He smiled wryly. "Almost wish I had a sofa-less Christmas. Better than everyone pretending that
everything fine." George paused. "They don't even say Fred's name. Like he never existed."

Sniffing, Pansy's tears were now stemmed. "I'm sorry. All I want is for today to end and you..."

"Yeah. Well, he's not coming back. I just wish that the family would acknowledge him more.
Families are complicated." Pushing his hair back out of his eyes, George studied Pansy closely. "Is
this why you work so much? You'd rather be here than at home?"

Pansy stared intently at her shoes, avoiding his gaze as she scoffed dismissively. "You really think I'd
be here in this multi-coloured nightmare than in the comfort of my own home?"

"Doesn't sounds very comfortable without a sofa," he remarked.

She pursed her lips. "Fine," she said grudgingly. "Being here is better. But don't tell anyone I said
that. I have a reputation to maintain."

"Yeah, the witch who hates working for me but is here almost every waking hour. That's some
reputation."

Her cheeks turned pink and Pansy turned her attention from her shoes to George. It took her a couple
of faltering attempts to speak. "I suppose I don't exactly hate you."

"Yeah?" He chuckled, raising his eyebrows. "Good to know." George rummaged in the pocket of
his apron, producing a handkerchief that wasn't spotless, but as good as any handkerchief in
George's possession would ever get. He offered it to her, Pansy wrinkling her nose but taking it, anyway. She wiped her eyes, sighing as she surveyed the black smudges of make-up on the material.

"Thanks," she said softly, dropping it onto his lap. "Sorry. Didn't mean to break down here in the shop."

George gave her a careful squeeze. "S'alright. Wouldn't be Christmas without a few tears."

Cupping her cheek with his free hand, George turned her face to look at him. "Cheer up. Another thirty-six hours or so and Christmas Day will be over."

"I wish," she said softly. Tomorrow would be today. The day after would be today. It was always going to be Christmas Eve.

George produced his wand and flicked it over his head. A familiar clacking sound signalled the sign in the window turning from open to closed. "Tell you what, you can stay upstairs tonight, if you want. We could go open a bottle of something, get pissed and complain about everyone else's Christmas cheer?"

Pansy smiled, heart racing. She leant forward and kissed him firmly, George left speechless when she pulled back. "That sounds perfect," she breathed, still smiling. Anything to make a little difference to this eternally repetitive day.

"You just kissed me," George said, blue eyes fixed intently on her.

"Yes," Pansy said, clambering to her feet and leaving George scrambling after her. "But don't worry. You won't remember tomorrow." She didn't know why that hadn't occurred to her before. If everything was simply going to default to Christmas Eve morning, she could do anything she wanted. No consequences.

Next time she woke up, she was going to find the composer of *Hippogryff Sleigh Ride* and carry out her threat. Pansy had never actually punched anyone before, but she was already looking forward to it.

"I dunno," George said dubiously. "That was pretty memorable."

His hand reached for her hip, Pansy's breath catching at the sudden memory of a distant Christmas Eve. Maybe it had been the first one, she couldn't be sure. It didn't nothing to slow the racing of her heart, Pansy licking her lips, conscious of just how close he was standing and how intense his eyes were. Now, that really wasn't fair, in Pansy's opinion. He somehow managed to look perfectly natural and charming with blue ink smudged all over his face, yet she was sure that she looked a complete state with mascara and foundation all streaky.

Pansy would deny that she ever launched herself at him, but George's arms around her and his lips pressing insistently against hers were a warm bliss that she hadn't experienced for quite some time, even when it wasn't Christmas Eve. The warmth spread through her and her fingers curled into fists again, though this time as she grasped at his robes.

She purred contentedly, body flush to his, as she drew away a little. "We could get drunk and do that more," she suggested lightly, a dizzying smile on her lips.

George pursed his lips in hesitation. "I'm your boss."

"But you kissed me back."
"It's, y'know, inappropriate."

"Oh, because you never do anything inappropriate," Pansy countered, brimming with a sort of confidence she hadn't known repeating the day ad nauseum could bring her. Her fingers deftly unfastened the tie of his apron and it fell to the floor around her feet. "Mr George Weasley, king of propriety."

"Proper my arse," George grumbled, lifting her up onto the counter just quickly, standing himself between her legs. Pansy simply grinned and kissed him again.


Zacharias stirred slowly, woken once more by Luna's coaxing fingers slipping over his body.

He sighed, pressing his head back into the pillow and closing his eyes tight. Trying to take calm, slow breaths, he let Luna's precise, teasing touches work their magic on him for once instead of trying to fight it.

Growing increasingly weary of the hurt look that he drew from her every time he pushed her away, he'd forgotten how much he enjoyed the warm lips pressing to his chest and the provocative trail that she traced down his body. The way the silky strands of her long hair slipped through his fingers as he reach out was a revelation, bringing an unfamiliar smile to his face. Smiling was something he'd forgotten, too, a determined frown settled on his features for the most part.

Luna gave a soft laugh, lips closing swiftly around the length of his erection. Zacharias pushed the covers back, lifting his head just enough to simply watch her. At first, she seemed not to notice him, but then she looked up. As she pulled back, tongue stroking the underside of his cock in a slow sweep, her lips twisted into an impish smile.

"Good morning," she said cheerfully. Her fingers stroked his length expertly as she sat up, smiling happily. Zacharias swept his gaze over her, from her pert breasts to the birthmark almost hidden at the top of her thigh.

As she started to crawl over him, the ends of her long hair teasing his stomach, Zacharias put a hand on her shoulder. "No?" she asked.

Zacharias swallowed, her luminous grey gaze fixed so curiously on him that he couldn't look anywhere else. It had been a long time since he had spent so much time looking at him and a memory came to him in a flash of their first night together, the way he'd been drawn to someone so very different to himself. Somehow she'd made him do things in the bedroom that he had never even considered and words failed him as he thought of all those repeated mornings when he'd wanted to curse at the very idea of oral sex. He didn't hate it, not really.

If this had been just sex as he had assured himself, why would he have made plans for Christmas with her?

Luna stretched out beside him, feet nudging against his. "What are you thinking about?"

He smiled wryly. "Sometimes I don't know what you see in me," he admitted.

She licked her lips. "At first it was because we had similar needs for intercourse. But I've grown very fond of you, Zacharias."

Putting his hand on her hip, Zacharias drew careful circles on her skin. With her so deliciously warm to the touch, a slew of things he wanted to do ran through his head. The first he acted upon, inclining
his head to kiss her.

"I've grown very fond of you, too."

Zacharias glanced over at the dresser. As always, the carved wooden box sat there. It didn't glow, it didn't crackle with magical energy and today it wasn't going to go anywhere. He was going to take the time to remind himself of exactly what he'd been pushing away, the ethereal nymph he left in his bed every Christmas Eve morning. The world hadn't ended so far, so he was going to take a day off from trying to figure out this damn problem.

The box would still be there in the morning.


A short glass of firewhiskey sat on the coffee table. No ice, no embellishment, just firewhiskey.

Lavender sighed. The feeling that she had been here before was all too familiar to her now, just an idea in the back of her mind that she easily squashed down. It wasn't worth dwelling on it, not when it was once again Christmas Eve.

Almost as soon as she'd poured the glass of firewhiskey, Lavender found herself torn between wanting to drink it in one burning gulp or losing her appetite for it completely. Maybe she should have made cocoa this evening after all.

She shivered, the Christmas edition of Days In Diagon playing once again on the wireless. The clock on her wall ticked steadily towards seven o'clock as Lavender sat there, half-listening to the same fragment of conversation that she'd heard countless times. Only habit stopped her from not turning the wireless on at all.

"Damon, you should sit down. There's something I need to tell you."

"Miranda, you're scaring me."

She closed her eyes, drawing in a deep breath. Letting it out slowly, Lavender picked up the glass of firewhiskey and drank the shot down in one. A burn of courage ran through her from sternum to stomach, bracing her for what she knew was coming next. Neville would arrive shortly, just as he always did. She, however, was going to do something different. Dangerous, even. Knowing that the day would very likely repeat again still didn't dispel the butterflies in her.

Every experimentation and variation on this evening she'd tried since this had all began had ended with the same result - her waking up on Christmas Eve morning with the same crick in her neck, the same nearly-off bottle of milk in the cooler and the same... everything.

The first chance she got, she was redecorating.

Even going out and spending more than a month's wages on expensive shoes and dresses hadn't done anything to end this cycle, though Merlin only knew how much looking at receipts usually brought her down to Earth with a heavy bang.

At the first knock on the door, Lavender was on her feet and across the room. Her whole body warm from the firewhiskey, she pulled open the door with a wide smile.

His hand still up to knock again, Neville blinked. "Lavender?"

The rehearsals she'd had of this moment, the things she was going to say to him, all flew out of her
head at once. His bemused expression, that slight furrow of his brow as he regarded her, left her speechless. The only thing left for her to do was pull him bodily through the door and kiss him firmly.

Lavender's arms wound around his neck. She pressed herself close to him, his cloak cold against the festive red dress she was wearing. Neville's gloved hands came to rest firmly on her slim waist and Lavender smiled inwardly as she felt him respond and not just stand there like a block of ice.

She drew back reluctantly, lips red. As she searched his face for some sort of positive response, Neville glanced upwards. "Is there mistletoe?"

Her arms slackened, expression falling. Lavender swallowed nervously. "Do you need mistletoe to kiss me?"

"I..." Neville's cheeks turned pink and he spluttered through the beginning of several sentences before finding one he could get his lips around. "No," he said stoutly and kissed her again. Lavender gave a squeak of surprise, one foot popping off the ground as she surrendered to his embrace. The chill of his body against hers started to fade, Neville taking another step forward into the flat and removing his hand from her briefly to close the door. The loud bang it gave surprised them both, Lavender breaking away with a soft laugh.

"Oh," she breathed, raising a hand to caress his cheek. "I've been wanting to do that all day." If she hadn't known better, Lavender might have thought that she was under the effects of a jelly-legs jinx; Neville was the only thing keeping her on her feet.

"You weren't at breakfast," Neville pointed out darkly. "I was worried. Where have you been?"

"You wouldn't believe the day I've had." Lavender licked her lips, gaze dropping from his face for a moment to start unbuttoning his cloak. "And I will tell you all about it another time," she said, wishing she could, "but right now I don't want to talk."

Neville raised his eyebrows. "You don't want to talk? That's new."

"Shush," she chided, silencing him with another kiss. Neville shrugged off his cloak the best he could, Lavender helping them, then tugged off his gloves and dropped them on the floor. As he swung her up into his arms, Lavender gasped. A smile spread brightly across her face and she pressed gentle kisses to his exposed throat as he carried her towards the sofa. Hearing Neville groan softly sent a shiver through her.

Every kiss stoked the fire that the whiskey had started within her, every touch new and exciting.

From hours of manual labour in the garden and greenhouses, his touch was far from gentle, but that didn't make it any less surprising. She gave a squeak, sitting up a little as she felt a sudden change of pressure across her chest. "Did you just...?"

Neville smirked, albeit it sheepishly. "Yeah," he admitted. Somehow, he had unfastened her bra clasp through her dress.

Both surprised and impressed, Lavender grinned, not sure what to make of this new development but liking it all the same. "I think I like this side of you."

Neville's large hand stroked down the smooth expanse of her back, Lavender shivering under his touch, her breath catching. "I like this side of you, too." He kissed her jaw, her neck. "Have you only been thinking about doing this all day?"
"Longer," she whispered. "But I wasn't sure."

He kissed her softly. "Sure of what?"

"If you... You know. Felt like this."

Neville pulled back a little, looking down at her carefully. His fingers gently stroked her side, always moving, teasing her through the fabric. "You're kind of intimidating," he admitted.

"Intimidating?" Lavender's brow furrowed. "I'm not -"

"Yes, you kind of are. To men like me." He gave a one-shouldered shrug. "I didn't know how to ask you out."

"But..." Lavender licked her lips, thinking. "We have dinner together all the time." She nimbly unbuttoned Neville's shirt and he made no move to stop her.

"Thought you liked things just as they were," he admitted, struggling for a moment to kick off his shoes before he realised that it would easier if he removed his hand from where it was situated under the warm curve of her breast.

She laughed. "I must have been too subtle in trying to touch you and hold your hand."

"You're never normally subtle." Shoes off, Neville kissed her hard, pressing her back against the sofa. Lavender responded eagerly, discovering a battle for dominance as she did so. Hooking her leg around him, she gave a buck of her hips against his. Only intending to tease, the move surprised Neville. He tried to move back, but Lavender was so closely entwined with him that that ended up rolling onto the floor.

Though they narrowly missed the coffee table, the force knocked the breath out of Neville and he stared up in shock at her, trying to push her hair out of his face as he gasped.

Lavender gave a soft groan. If the magic hadn't been what it was, she would have worried about bruises on her knees in the morning. She broke into laughter, sitting up so she was straddling him. "Sorry. Didn't mean to do that." Lavender bit her lip, concerned about the dazed expression on Neville's gentle features until he smiled nervously and his hand found her breast.

She bit her lip, watching him with wide eyes. His fingers caressed the curve, exploring until they found her nipple, the peak stiffening under his touch. Even through her clothes, the touch made her squirm, breathing getting heavier.

Neville sat up, bringing him nose to nose with her as his fingers became bolder. His breath was hot against her face, Neville's eyes focused in concentration. A slight pinch of his finger and thumb made her whine in the back of her throat, the fire burning brighter and making her want more.

Fingers trembling with excitement Lavender smoothed the straps of her dress from her shoulder. She held her breath as she waited for Neville's reaction, feeling like she was smiling all over when he helped her tug the dress down. He chuckled over the tangle of her bra, Lavender laughing nervously.

As he put his free hand on her back, Neville looked at her curiously. "Are you all right?" he asked softly.

Lavender nodded, busying herself with removing Neville's shirt. "Yeah," she said, just a brief tremor in her voice. "Just... people don't normally see all my scars."
Neville frowned, only now looking closely at her pale skin. He'd always known about the ones that marred her neck and crept up onto her throat, but he'd never seen the rest. The purplish marks, still fresh-looking after all these years, had escaped his notice. "I didn't see them."

"Liar," she said, expression drawing pensive.

"Do you really think I'm looking at your scars right now?" he asked, hand gently squeezing her breast.

Lavender shrugged.

"Get up," Neville encouraged, helping her to her feet. As she did so, Lavender's dress pooled at her feet with a helpful shimmy of her feet. A moment later, she found herself up in his arms once more, putting aside her question of how Neville knew the way to her bedroom so well because his chest was deliciously warm and solid against her.

He dropped her gently on the bed, her breasts shaking from the momentum and Neville watching with a fascination that made her giggle. "Stop staring and get naked," she complained, laughing.

"And I thought you were a romantic." Neville swallowed thickly, though, when he saw her thumbs hook into the edge of her knickers.

"I'll be romantic another time," she promised, lifting her hips. Perhaps she wouldn't have been so bold if she hadn't thought that he would forget this soon enough. Arousal pooled low in her and she was determined to enjoy every moment of this that she could. Part of that was enjoying the view as she watched Neville remove the last of his clothes.

As he joined her on the bed, his hand slid up her side. Lavender shivered as she felt the length of his erection press against her hip. His kisses shy once more, Lavender wanted to coax out the bold Neville she'd had a glimpse of just now. Her leg curled around his, hand grasping his arse and making him groan against the hollow of her throat.

A fear of people seeing her scars and being scared away by them usually kept her quieter, hidden away with the lights off and covers hiding her body. Here, though, she was laid open to his every touch, his every kiss. Sighs and gasps tumbled from her lips, Neville's mouth exploring every sensitive spot she had and helping her discover a few more.

She exhaled deeply as he filled her, head tipping back onto the pillow. A sinfully good growl escaped from him and Lavender arched her back. The sound of his pleasure sent a thrill through her as strong as the sensations that rippled out from every thrust.

Neville kissed her gently with a smile, drawing her attention to him fully, Lavender's eyes half-closed. "All right?" he murmured, the long, deep strokes of his hips making her fingers dig into his back.

"Yes," she breathed, not able to formulate a response with more syllables than that. "Yes."

Beneath her hands, Lavender could feel every flex of his muscles and the gradual build of tension in his body that mirrored her own. The exquisite pressure between her thighs grew stronger and stronger, Lavender only able to manage gasps and moans beside his ear. Her teeth tugged at his earlobe; Neville hissed and gave a sharp buck of his hips. Her eyes widened, nails scraping his shoulder.

"Close," he grunted. Lavender's leg curled tighter around him, heel pressing into the small of his back. The slight change of angle put a little pressure on her clit and she trembled with the release that
felt almost tangible, yet just out of reach.

Less steady in his thrusts than before, Neville lost himself in her with a shudder as he reached his peak. He flushed deeply, burying his face in the crook of her neck.

Murmuring a word or two of encouragement, Lavender shifted her hips towards him. She clenched around him, breathing heavy and fingers shaking as she pulled his hand between their hot bodies. Neville's fingers slipped across the slickness of her arousal and it only took a flick of a digit across her clit to loosen every twisted inch of tension in her body.

Lavender held him close, breathless and her heart fluttering. As Neville plied her with soft kisses, she kept her eyes closed as she came back to herself. He teased her lips and she slowly looked up at him.

"Stay the night," she whispered, rendered all the more vulnerable with him still inside her. If she could fall asleep beside him and make this dream night last as long as possible, maybe it would make waking up in the morning with the same old crick in her neck all the more easier.

Neville rolled onto his side, pulling her with him. He stroked a curl from her face. "I don't think I could move if I wanted to."

She laughed, sighing tiredly. "Me neither."


While he wasn't normally one for mead, once Luna had started topping up his glass, Zacharias hadn't done anything to stop her. Today had been his day off, he'd decided. A day off from worrying about that damn box and the time loop and trying to solve it. A day to simply indulge in ever hedonistic pleasure that Luna presented to him.

A little uncoordinated from the alcohol, he fumbled with the door handle until Luna's cool fingers closed over his and opened the bedroom door. He smiled sheepishly, fingers on the clasp of her robes as soon as he could find them. As soon as the material slipped from her shoulders, she was naked, no need for constrictive underwear.

Beaming at the sight, Zacharias kissed her firmly, though broke off almost immediately when a bright yellow light flashed behind his eyes. He stuttered in surprise, turning to stare at the wooden box where it still sat in the same place as it had been this morning, unmoving atop the dresser, yet now glowing yellow. The intricate carvings were illuminated, seemingly more complex than every before.

"What's it doing?"

"Glowing."

Zacharias rolled his eyes. "I see that." He remembered the yellow light from before when it had all began and swallowed nervously. "It's cursed."

"Yes," Luna said, stepping away from him so that she could examine it closer, the yellow glow illuminating her naked body. "That's one theory, anyway."

He nearly choked on a breath. "One theory? You never mentioned there were other theories."

"You never asked me anything about it." She glanced at him. "You didn't even say you'd noticed it."

Technically, he supposed, that was true. He hadn't. Not this time around. This time, he'd ignored it as
much as he could. "What other theories?"

Luna carefully picked it up, the box lighting up her face. "Something I read about."

"In the Quibbler?" he challenged.

Her wide eyes fixed on him, unblinking. "It's very old," she continued, aware of his stance on the Quibbler. "And very powerful."

"Funny that."

Zacharias' dry tone went over her head. "It's never belonged to anyone. It shows up when it needs to and leaves when it's served its purpose." Luna turned the box over, eyes alight as she studied it carefully.

"Served its purpose?" he repeated. "Just..." At a loss for words, he couldn't fathom what sort of purpose this would serve for anyone. Repeating a day over and over surely didn't do anyone any good. Of all the days that he had woken up on December 24th, this was the only time when he hadn't dreaded going to bed.

"It's never glowed before," Luna said, putting the box in his hands before Zacharias could protest.

"No," he agreed. Staring at it wide-eyed, his heart pounded faster. Of all the times that he had spend studying it, staring at it, willing it to do something, he'd lost hope that it would actually happen.

Then, as suddenly as it had started glowing, the box was gone. His hands clapped together in surprise, shaking at the loss.

Luna turned her curious gaze on him. "Is there something you're not telling me?"

Stunned, he ran his hand through his hair, trying to account for what had just happened to the damn box. Finally, he looked at her, a familiar tiredness seeping through him. "Can we talk about it in the morning?"

The perfect way of avoiding the question, he thought, until she said, "It is morning."

"What?"

But it was there, the luminous hands on Luna's moon-shaped clock pointing to three minutes after twelve as clear as anything. Zacharias didn't remember the last time he had seen midnight.

Luna fixed him with a pleasant smile. "But you mean later after sleep, of course. And sex, I hope."

Trembling, Zacharias let out a long, slow breath. "Actually, can we just... You know." He couldn't bring himself to say the word.

"Cuddle?" she asked, her hand gently taking his. "Yes, we could do that." Luna kissed him softly, Zacharias too stunned to respond. "Merry Christmas."

**December 25th. Yes, really. Weasley's Wizard Wheezes, Diagon Alley.**

"Go directly to Azkaban. Do not pass Go, do not collect 20 galleons."

George gasped with exaggerated indignation and snatched the card from Pansy's fingers. He scowled. "Not fair."
"It's all just part of the game," Pansy said lightly, taking over and moving his little silver wizard's hat around the board with a few skips and jumps, placing it on the Azkaban square with a flourish.

He narrowed his eyes. "I don't know how you've got so many hotels."

"When I have money, I'm actually quite good with it." It was just a pity that this was all fake, otherwise it would have been rather nice. Pansy reached for the nearly-empty bottle of rum. "And you have no strategy."

"I was going to buy the Floo hubs," he complained, "but then you bought them all."

Pansy grinned as smugly as she could before breaking into a yawn. George followed with a louder yawn of his own, stretching his legs out across the floor. While the board game was settled on the rickety coffee table, they'd both slithered to the floor which was surprisingly comfortable with a couple of charms applied.

George gave his head a shake, trying to wake himself up. He ran a hand over his face, then pulled out his pocket watch. "Time for breakfast soon."

"Is food all Weasleys ever think about?" Pansy asked, adjusting the blanket over her knees.

"What? It's nearly four," he pointed out.

"What?" Pansy parroted. "How can it be four o'clock?" Peering up at the clock on the wall, she groaned and gave up on trying to decipher the time. Why anyone would own a clock that ran backwards was beyond her - with her head this foggy and tired it was easier to simply forget that one and snatched George's pocket watch from his hand. He scooted over closer to her to stop her from yanking it clean off its chain.

Pansy squinted at the robust watch face, the time much easier to read now. "It's Christmas Day," she said weakly.

"Yeah." George stifled another yawn. He pressed a kiss to the side of her head, Pansy leaning in instinctively. " Didn't plan on staying up all night playing games." He shrugged. "Might get a few hours kip. I'll take the sofa if you want the bed."

"L..." Still staring at the pocket watch, Pansy tried to lift it to her ear to make sure it was working, but ended up ducking her head. George chuckled and took it from her gentle, slipping it back into his pocket. "It's alright. I'll sleep on the sofa." Pansy wasn't a massive fan of seeing this hour of the morning as it was, but seeing this hour **today** was downright confusing.

"Nah. You're the guest." George struggled up onto his feet, grasping at the sofa for leverage. "I've got some manners. The sheets are clean. Ish." He frowned, smoothing his hair down over his missing ear.

Both hands over her mouth, Pansy took a couple of deep, calming breaths. As she clambered to her feet, George grabbed her elbow to steady her.

Seeing his expectant look, she sighed. "Do you snore?" she asked.

"Knew I should have cut you off on the booze hours ago."

Pansy gave his a light thwack arm. "Do you snore?" she repeated. "Because if you don't, we can... share." The word sounded as foreign coming from her mouth as it felt saying it.
George frowned. "Dunno. Been a while since anyone's been able to tell me."

She pursed her lips. "I suppose that'll do. But," she added, raising her finger to him, "if you steal the covers, I'll kick you out."

"Fine," George said, holding his hands up in surrender. "I can live by those terms."

December 25th. Lavender's Flat, London.

Lavender gasped, woken by a loud snore beside her.

She turned over, then over again as she tried to get her bearings and locate the source of the snoring at the same time.

The covers twisted around her, dragging them off the sleeping body beside her. Despite the sleepiness straining at her, Lavender stared wide eyed at Neville. He was taking up three quarters of the bed, she thought a little grumpily.

She gasped again. Her heart started to thud faster; Lavender picked up the edge of the bed covers to peek underneath and make absolutely sure she wasn't dreaming.

Wow. Maybe she was dreaming about that.

Before she could go as far as pinching herself, Neville stirred. He gave a sleepy groan, peering at her through half-closed eyes. "Are you staring at my... stuff?"

Lavender dropped the covers down, cheeks turning pink. "No," she said quickly. "Um. What day is it?"

Neville yawned, covering his mouth. He snaked his arm across her waist, rolling onto his side. "What? Christmas Day."

She gave a squeal and Neville cringed, turning his head in towards the pillow. "Not so loud," he complained. "'S early."

Curling close to him, Lavender didn't give a flying fig that it was early. It could be three minutes after midnight or half past five or even seven in the evening. She didn't care. It was Christmas Day and that was the only thing that counted right now.

"Sorry," she murmured, grinning. Lavender kissed his cheek and Neville pulled her flush against him.

"Shh. Sleep."

"Fine." She tried not to grumble, sure that excitement would keep her awake. "But if you go back to sleep you won't get your presents."

Neville kept his eyes stubbornly closed. "You gave me my present last week. 'S at home under the tree."

"Hmm. Just thought of something else I could give you."

He opened one eye and she smirked at him.

"Yeah, all right, then," he agreed, stretching out. "Merry Christmas to me."
Lavender pushed him onto his back. "And Merry Christmas to me."

End Notes

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