

Burnt Offerings

by sunny33

Severus Snape receives an unusual gift for Valentine's Day.

-

Chapter 1 of 1

Severus Snape receives an unusual gift for Valentine's Day.

Disclaimer: No, they are still not mine.

The first one arrives as he is busy in the shower. He stalks, naked, unsatisfied, and dripping, from the bathroom to investigate the unholy racket at the window. Intelligent, despite its appalling sense of timing, the owl drops its delivery on the carpet and withdraws posthaste. Snape's frustrated scowl dissolves into reluctant curiosity as he retrieves the item from the floor. A perfectly burned-black rose, just the way he prefers them. The puzzled Potions master has no idea who sent it, but the idea that someone actually *understands* stays his hand as he moves to toss it into the fire.

Sneering at the nauseatingly romantic activities of the students in the Great Hall becomes a little difficult when another rose arrives, dropped right in the middle of his eggs. He and his companions at the head table can see the delicious midnight charring of the petals, but the giggling dunderheads only see the foul-tempered Professor receiving a rose. On Valentine's Day. Whatever next? Chocolates for Argus Filch?

Tempted to crush the gift into carbonised dust, Snape again restrains his temper. He studies each of the faces around him. He recognises a school owl when he sees one. Someone there knows.

The seventh-year Potions lesson is well underway when a sudden, intense darkness envelops the room. Before Pansy Parkinson has time to scream hysterically, the lights reappear to reveal a third blackened rose positioned just so upon his desktop. Whirling around to glare at the students one by one, Snape sees no evidence of guilt or fear upon any of the smirking faces. The realisation the disturbance occurred at a time when the potion being brewed was at its most stable does not escape his notice. He carefully examines the rose, looking for any evidence of its source. Not a thing.

The rest of the lesson passes uneventfully. Potions are brewed with varying degrees of success and turned in by watchful students who eye the rose with interest as they pass his desk. When the last sample is handed over, Snape takes them to his office for grading later that day. He is only out of the classroom for thirty seconds, but on his return, yet another rose has appeared. A fleeting glimpse of black robe and a tinkling laugh from the corridor send him rushing to the door, but once again, nothing. The enigma is beginning to piss him off.

By lunchtime, another two roses have appeared, one by owl during his third-year class and another found on his office desk when he repaired there for a brief respite from the curious eyes of the children. His temper has reached incendiary level after a lesson disrupted by flying cupids and ridiculous notes passing between students. Owls delivering blackened roses from an anonymous source have not helped assuage his mood. Still, he places each rose into the vase on his sitting room table, uncertain why

he keeps them. Beautiful red roses would be *Incendio*'ed on the spot. But these are black.

Severus Snape arrives late for lunch, aware of all eyes upon his back as he strides and billows up to the head table. Of course, there is another rose lying at his place in its charcoal-dusted glory, and titters from his colleagues – even Headmistress McGonagall snorts at his look of resignation – fail to quell the glimmer of warmth deep in his chest. He casts his eye around the Hall, increasingly sure a student is behind the gifts, but finds only the Granger girl is brave enough to meet his gaze. Cool, unflinching, and disturbingly perceptive. Gryffindor, indeed. He looks away.

The afternoon is punctuated by burnt offerings arriving by owl, appearing on his desk between classes, and one by a house-elf who bashes his head against the table rather than reveal who has given him the task. Three more black roses. Three more times the sourest wizard in Hogwarts almost smiles. Not that anyone notices.

After his last class, Snape places the roses into his vase. There is a certain degree of aesthetic appeal in the ten blackened roses arranged in crystal. He suspects his would-be Valentine shares his cynicism towards Valentine's Day, and he finally allows a tiny smile.

Snape expected the rose which appears, seemingly out of nowhere, beside his plate as he seats himself at dinner. He didn't expect her, assuming it *is* a woman, to have Transfigured the rose into a wine glass and left a time release spell in place to re-Transfigure it upon his arrival. He looks up, shaking his head in awe of her skill, to again meet the steady gaze of Hermione Granger. Hermione Granger, the undeniably intelligent, powerful know-it-all, who is well known for her disdain of the fripperies of Valentine's Day. He lifts his glass in silent acknowledgment and nods.

He is unaccountably nervous. Pacing before his fireplace, Snape knows the game started this morning by the bushy-haired Gryffindor is yet to play out. Her goal is unclear, but he is aware she has one. And he is afraid both that she is too Gryffindor and not Gryffindor enough. For suddenly, he yearns for someone to understand, someone to listen, to comfort. He finds he is needy. No longer concerned about her status as a student – she started it, after all – he yearns for release from his self-imposed isolation.

A knock on the door, and one more rose has arrived.

Midnight approaches. Valentine's Day is almost over. He stares at the roses in the vase and waits.

Another knock. This time, she is there, standing straight and proud and bearing a thirteenth rose. Without speaking, she offers him the tribute and enters his private domain.

"Why, Miss... Hermione?"

"They seemed fitting, *Severus*."

"How did you know?"

"That you hated all Valentine's Day stood for, or that you hated roses?"

"Both. Neither. I don't know."

"But I do." Closing the gap between them, she reaches up touch his face. "I know *you*."

Severus smiles as he gathers her into his arms.

A/N: Saturday Night Drabble prompt from lulabelle72: Someone is thrilled to receive thirteen burned-black roses.

Ten 100 word drabbles. It was hard work! Thanks to rosewood, who helped with the title, the other girls in chat for ideas, and blue_paris for the beta.