

Many Happy Returns

by Area52

Snape's birthday rolls around, with some unexpected rewards...

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Chapter 1 of 1

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While doing research for this story I noticed that J.K.Rowling has taken Latin words and changed them slightly to make up her own spells. In this vein I used the word "Tribuo" which means to share out, and made up my own spell, "Tribulos." "Seco" means to divide (as in slice) and I used that to create my own spell, "Secoro." And yes, the cake is that big.

All characters are owned by the one and only J.K.Rowling.

Dawn broke over the Hogwarts school grounds on the morning of January 9th. Shafts of sunlight streamed through the clouds, casting rays on the huge castle and burning away the dew that lay on the grass. Small wisps of vapour rose into the air and vanished, dissipating into the atmosphere. The clouds gradually parted, revealing a blue sky; the sunlight grew stronger, illuminating the windows in the Great Hall and shining into the dormitories. Students started to wake one by one as the sun's rays slowly shifted over their faces. They yawned and stretched; one by one they got out of bed and started preparing for the new day.

Down in the dungeons, it was a very different story.

Severus Snape had awoken early and was poring over a final pile of parchment on his desk. He didn't have to return them until the next day, but he wanted to get them out of the way so he could have some time to himself this evening. He hunched over his desk, scowling as he savagely crossed out an entire paragraph in red ink, and then proceeded to write sarcastic comments in the margin with his quill.

He worked by the light of his fireplace; no sunlight could ever penetrate this far down underground. Flames crackled as he tossed aside the unfortunate parchment and grabbed another. One more after this, and then he could go up to breakfast. He didn't really want to go up to breakfast, but Albus had paid him a little visit via Floo the night before in his quarters just as Severus was preparing for bed. The Headmaster had intimated he would prefer if Snape graced the Great Hall with his presence the following day; Snape knew it was really a demand and not a request, and had grumpily agreed to do so. He knew that Albus knew that he, Snape, would have preferred to spend the morning by himself, ordering food from the kitchens to eat in his quarters while he read a good book. Therefore, the bloody fool had decided to torture him on this day. Snape's birthday. It was bad enough he did the old fart's bidding the rest of the year; why couldn't he have his birthday off to do what he wanted for a change?

Scowling more fiercely than ever, Snape finished marking the last parchment and tossed it back onto the pile sitting to his left. Thank Merlin that was over! Now all he had to do was go up to breakfast, bolt his food and beat a hasty retreat to his first class. Unfortunately, this year his birthday was on a Monday; the previous year he hadn't had to face any dunderheads and had had relative peace and quiet all day long. Pinching the bridge of his nose in irritation, he got to his feet, put on his long, flowing robes, and left his quarters, locking and warding the door behind him. Then he made his grumpy way up to breakfast.

Dumbledore was already sitting in his chair at the head of the High Table as Snape made his entrance in the Great Hall. As the Potions master passed his employer, he heard Albus call, over the chattering voices of the students, "Happy Birthday, Severus."

Snape grunted in reply as he looked for an empty chair. Somewhat to his annoyance, he realized the only vacant seat was right next to Dumbledore himself. He looked at the other teachers with narrowed eyes; why was Minerva sitting in his chair? How come Poppy was there? She hardly ever showed up for breakfast! And what was Filius looking so cheerful about?

Reluctantly, Severus backed up and slowly lowered himself into the chair next to Dumbledore. The old wizard's eyes twinkled merrily as he took in Snape's vicious scowl at his fellow teachers. "Tut, tut, my boy. You should be in a pleasant mood today of all days," he said.

Severus turned to his employer. "If I had been allowed to partake of breakfast in my own quarters, *would* have been in a pleasant mood, Headmaster," he replied sarcastically.

He half-expected Dumbledore to be annoyed, but the older wizard merely laughed. "Nonsense! Birthdays are happy times and should be celebrated by everyone. They only come along once a year and thus are quite special," he said, raising his cup and taking a sip of tea.

Snape gave Dumbledore a snarl and turned away from him. He was about to reach for a plate of toast when he suddenly stopped dead; his insides seemed to freeze over. *Did he say that **everyone** should celebrate birthdays?* he thought with horror.

In a panic, he turned back towards Dumbledore. "If I might speak, Headmaster," he said, but Albus was now engaged in conversation with Professor Vector. Snape sat motionless, toast forgotten, wondering how the hell he could get out of here in a hurry. As his eyes darted from side to side, considering his options, he felt a hand rest on his right arm. Turning, he looked into the eyes of Professor McGonagall. "Happy Birthday, Severus," she said with a wicked smile. He didn't like the look of that smile at all.

"Thank you, Minerva," he said stiffly, removing his gaze from hers and once again surveying the Great Hall, plotting his escape.

The hand on his arm tightened. "You're not thinking of leaving, are you?" she asked. The wicked look spread from her mouth to her eyes.

"Whatever gave you that idea?" he sniped, jerking away from her touch.

"Attention, students!" Professor Dumbledore put his empty cup down and got to his feet. As the watching boys and girls quieted down, he straightened his hat and beamed at them. "We are into the second week of the New Year, and I thought it would be nice if we could start a new tradition at Hogwarts. Everyone has birthdays, and they should all be special. I have decided to start announcing our teacher's birthdays so everyone can wish them well. And today is our first such day of the year!"

He paused; students turned to one another and started whispering excitedly. Snape could hear them trying to guess whose birthday it was.

"Is it McGonagall's?"

"Is it Dumbledore's? It might be!"

"Don't be daft! Nobody knows what year he was born, far less his birthday!"

"What about Professor Flitwick? He seems really happy today! It could be his!"

Snape groaned and slumped forward, hiding his face in his curtains of greasy hair. He felt that annoying hand patting him on his arm and growled under his breath. Three seats to his left he could hear Flitwick's excited chuckles; his fingers itched to hex the tiny wizard into next week.

"I am very pleased to announce that today is Professor Snape's birthday," said Dumbledore, turning towards the Potions master, who still sat with his face hidden by his hair. "I'm sure I speak for dear Severus when I ask that you give him a trouble-free day."

This announcement was met with laughter, cheers and clapping; Snape thought he heard a few boos and raised his eyes. The Slytherins were all on their feet, whistling and hooting; Draco Malfoy seemed to be leading the others in his house. The Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws were definitely more subdued, but they were still applauding. As for the Gryffindors...

Hermione Granger was clapping vigorously, the little know-it-all. Maybe she wanted him to give her a higher grade in their next Potions class. His gaze shifted and he noticed that Ron Weasley wasn't applauding at all. Just then Potter gave his friend a vicious dig in the side with his elbow and jerked his head towards Snape; Weasley saw the Potions master staring daggers at him and hastily brought his hands together, clapping in the same manner that Snape clapped whenever Gryffindor won a Quidditch match. Snape's eyes narrowed. He saw Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil whisper to each other before bursting into giggles, and his eyes narrowed even more. The Weasley twins were making puking motions onto their plates, while Lee Jordan was laughing fit to split. Snape's lips thinned and he glanced at Minerva; naturally, she failed to notice anything.

"Thank you. Now let us finish our meal before we depart for the day," Dumbledore beamed, sitting down in his chair. Snape was grateful as the noise level in the Great Hall rose to its former volume; his cheeks cooled somewhat as he reached for a teapot. Soon the dunderheads would be back to talking about Quidditch or the latest gossip they'd read in the Daily Prophet. Sighing to himself, he raised his cup and took a sip of tea.

Just then the post arrived. Dozens of owls burst into the Great Hall and swooped through the air, darting and diving as they dropped parcels and letters into their owner's laps. Snape relaxed even more. He wasn't expecting any cards or presents from anyone, so there was no more risk of embarrassment.

At that precise moment, eight tawny owls appeared, carrying a large package that was suspended by four ropes. The students spotted the owls and pointed at them as the birds struggled to carry the parcel up to the Head Table. Snape stared at them as if he were transfixed, his gaze growing more and more disbelieving as the owls finally lowered the parcel on the table in front of him; it was so huge it took up nearly half the Head Table. Snape looked at the birds stupidly, and they looked back at him, fluffing their feathers and hooting indignantly.

"I do believe they are waiting for a reward, Severus," Dumbledore gently chided. Snape looked around the table and grabbed some cold toast, offering each bird a piece of the hard bread. They gobbled it up and flew off, leaving Snape with the huge package in front of him.

"Well, aren't you going to open it?" asked Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling.

Snape glared at him. "What is this supposed to be?"

Albus merely smiled; grumbling, the younger man snatched up his knife and carefully cut the cord that held the box together, uncomfortably aware of hundreds of eyes watching his every movement. Flitwick giggled again and Snape had a vision of hurling the little wizard into the lake and watching the giant squid chase him.

The cords snapped and the box fell open. There in the middle was a huge cake, covered in icing and bearing the words, "Happy Birthday, Severus!"

As the Potions master goggled at the behemoth in disbelief, Dumbledore's voice spoke up yet again. "There is a card, Severus," he said gently, as though instructing a child. Snape snapped the card up and looked at it. On the front, a wizard wore a fancy hat and was grinning widely. *Bloody idiot*, Snape thought as he opened the card. He started to read the message inside when the words floated out and hung suspended over his head, where they sung as loudly as a Howler:

Happy Birthday to you!

Happy Birthday to you!

Happy Birthday dear Se-ve-ruuuuus!

Happy Birthday to you!

The Great Hall exploded into laughter and more cheers. Snape's face went first red, then white with rage; he glared at Flitwick, who was holding his shaking sides as he laughed. "Oh, I thought I'd *never* get that charm right!" he squeaked.

"Cake for everyone!" Dumbledore called, clapping his hands. Everyone's dirty breakfast dishes, as well as the leftovers from breakfast, disappeared. Clean saucers and forks appeared in front of the surprised students. "Heads of House, please organize your students into lines. Severus, would you be so kind as to cut the cake and serve everyone?"

A knife and cake server appeared in front of the Potions master; Snape stared at them, then he looked at Dumbledore as though he'd grown another head. "I beg your pardon?" he demanded. "I believe I am the Potions master at Hogwarts, not a house-elf."

The Headmaster merely twinkled at him; Snape turned towards the students, who were all chattering excitedly as they lined up next to their tables. He noticed Ron Weasley making faces at Potter, and his lip curled. *I can't believe I have to serve all these dunderheads cake on my birthday* he stormed inwardly. A throbbing started in his left temple. *Someone* would pay for this by the end of the day, or his name wasn't Severus Snape.

Getting reluctantly to his feet, he ignored McGonagall's smirk and walked around the Head Table so that he was on the side nearest the students. He cast a gaze at the knife and server and his lip curled again; reaching into his robe, he drew out his wand. He hardly ever indulged himself in "foolish wand waving" in front of the others unless it was totally necessary, but today an exception could be made. It was his birthday, after all.

He silently counted the number of heads in the Great Hall, turned to the cake, waved his wand and said, "*Secoro*."

Instantly the cake divided itself into several hundred slices. There was a gasp and some appreciative applause from some of the students, most of it from Slytherin House. Snape smirked as he tucked his wand back into his robes; he caught McGonagall's eye and she gave him a slight nod of respect.

"Well then, what are you waiting for? Unless you fear being poisoned, of course," he said silkily, drawing more laughter from the students. "Slytherin first," he drawled.

He caught McGonagall's eye again and saw the faint look of disapproval on her lips. Smirking, he took up the server and started depositing slices of chocolate cake on the Slytherins' saucers, receiving "Thank you, Professor Snape!" and "Good show, Professor Snape!" in return. Snape gave them his cold smile in return, serving them all and then calling the Ravenclaws up next. *I'll serve Albus last, the blighter*, he thought as he dumped a portion of cake onto Luna Lovegood's plate.

Soon the Hall was once again full of chattering as the students went back to their seats. Snape did quick work of dishing out the cake, calling up the Hufflepuffs next and leaving the Gryffindors for last. Minerva was definitely wearing a frown now, and he mentally patted himself on the back. Today was shaping up to be a good day, yes bloody indeed.

He served the frightened Gryffindor first-years and dubious-looking second-years first before the third-years started coming up to the Head Table. He waited patiently as Neville Longbottom, knees knocking, went up to get his serving of cake. "Mind you, don't trip and fall on the way back to the table, Longbottom," he whispered into the boy's ear. "There's only enough for everyone to get one slice. If you drop yours, you won't get another."

Neville cringed and held his plate carefully with both hands, almost tip-toeing back to his seat. In the meantime, Snape beamed down at Hermione Granger, who was now standing in front of him. "I see that you've actually managed to tame that mane of yours today, Miss Granger," he said quietly to her. "Congratulations on not looking as though you've been dragged backwards through a hedge."

Hermione's cheeks turned red and she departed looking very out of sorts.

"Ah, Harry Potter! Do have some of my birthday cake. It might actually put some meat on your bones. You do tend to lose weight over the summer, don't you?" he whispered to the Boy Who Lived. Harry's face closed and he stormed off; Snape saw him slam his saucer down on the Gryffindor table and chuckled. But he wasn't done yet.

"Pity Johnson won't go out with you, Jordan," he whispered to the dark-skinned boy as he jogged up to Snape.

"T-thank you, sir," Lee stuttered, taken aback at this show of commiseration.

"Well, you can't blame the girl if she has high standards, can you?" the Potions master drawled, delicately putting a slice of cake onto Lee's plate. The boy's expression changed in an instant; fury overcame his dark features. He glared up at the smirking teacher before whirling back and stomping towards the Gryffindor table.

Snape glanced at McGonagall and saw her giving him a fishy look. She hadn't been able to hear what he was telling the students, but he didn't want to push his luck. He merely gave Lavender and Parvati horrible smiles as they came up to him. He had them in class later that afternoon; it would be easier to humiliate them in front of the class. He also ignored the Weasley twins when they shuffled in front of him. They were always breaking rules and it would be easy to catch them committing some infraction when he did his nightly rounds of the castle.

"Ronald Weasley," he purred as the tall redhead arrived in front of him. "It's always nice to get cake, isn't it?"

Ron considered this question and slowly answered, "I... suppose it is, sir."

"Yes, it is. Especially since it's from someone you despise, isn't it?" Snape purred, leaning forward so his hair blocked his lips from the other teachers' view.

Ron's face turned red. "I don't despise you, sir," he stammered as the teacher deposited a slice of cake on his saucer.

"Five points from Gryffindor for lying to a teacher, Mister Weasley," Snape said in his silkiest voice.

Ron, blushing fiercely, scurried back to his seat, tripping over Neville's robe as he did so and earning boisterous laughter from the Slytherins.

In short order, Snape served the rest of the Gryffindors and tossed the knife and server aside. *What the hell*, he thought, taking his wand out again. He waved it in the air and muttered, "*Tribulos*."

Several slices of cake rose in the air and deposited themselves on saucers in front of the other teachers, earning him more applause. Grinning at the discomfited McGonagall, he walked around the table and put the last slice on his own saucer. He picked up his fork and was about to cut into the cake when he realized everybody was staring at him.

"Dear me, where are my manners? Dig in, all of you," he said. The students burst into cheers as they started to eat; he noticed that several certain Gryffindors were muttering angrily to each other, and he smiled even more. Yes, today was shaping up to be a very good day indeed.

After leaving the Great Hall, Snape went to his first class of the day: Potions with the first-year Ravenclaws. This bunch of students was rather good, though of course he

would never admit it to them. He had a relatively stress-free morning, during which he recalled his comments to Harry, Ron and the others and chuckled to himself.

He went almost eagerly to the Great Hall for lunch. Once again, all the other teachers' seats were taken, so he sat down next to Dumbledore. Minerva was casting Snape angry glares; he calmly ignored her as he served himself roast potatoes and sliced beef. When he finally turned her way, her gaze penetrated him like a hot knife. "Professor Snape, I have had some... complaints... from several students about you," she said.

"Indeed?" he asked politely, helping himself to salad. Minerva's thin nostrils quivered with anger. "Yes, Severus. I heard that you told Longbottom if he dropped his cake, he wouldn't get any more."

Snape shrugged as he filled his goblet with wine. "I was merely cautioning the boy, Minerva. Everyone knows how dreadfully clumsy he is. You wouldn't have wanted him to fall flat on his face in front of everybody, would you? Or unable to have his cake and eat it too?" he asked, turning to her with a look of utmost innocence on his face.

McGonagall snorted. "Very well, then. But you told Potter he gets thin over the summer."

Snape chewed and swallowed. "He does, does he not? Perhaps if he were rooming with kinder folks than his aunt and uncle, he would return to school in September looking well, instead of underfed," he said, keeping his gaze on his plate. Out of the corner of his eye he saw McGonagall's lips thin with rage and smirked inwardly.

"Well, what about what you told Miss Granger about her hair?" Minerva demanded, stabbing at a pea and missing, making her fork screech against the bone china.

Snape sighed and took a sip of wine. "Merlin's beard, is it a crime to compliment someone when they have finally managed to make themselves look presentable? I know you love your Gryffindors, Minerva, but and I say this with all respect I pity you. At least my Slytherins are more... thick-skinned, shall we say?"

Whereupon Snape dropped his fork, gave McGonagall a bow and departed from the Great Hall in a flurry of black robes. He walked quickly so he could get to the privacy of the nearest washroom; once inside, he locked and warded the door. Then he leaned against the wall and burst into laughter, startling a student who was using one of the toilets.

The rest of the day went well for Snape. The Slytherins and Gryffindors trooped in for Potions in the afternoon; shortly before he took attendance, Draco Malfoy walked up to him and put a parcel on the desk.

"That's from all of us in Slytherin House, sir," he said loudly so everyone could hear. "Just something to show how much we appreciate your hard work as our head of house. Happy Birthday, Professor."

Snape looked at the Gryffindors, taking great pleasure in their looks of disgust. "Thank you, Malfoy," he said. "And thank you, all of you from Slytherin. It's my pleasure to be head of a house who know how to handle things themselves... without... crying and complaining... like people who belong to a certain *other* house..."

He smirked as the Gryffindors glowered and the Slytherins shouted with laughter. He put them to work on a Vanishing Potion and watched with satisfaction as halfway through the lesson, Neville mixed up some of his ingredients, adding them together in the wrong sequence.

"Ten points from Gryffindor for melting your cauldron and making a mess, Longbottom," Snape drawled, waving his wand to stop the flow of liquid from spreading farther across the floor.

Draco, Crabbe and Goyle laughed loudly. Ron made a face at Harry and mouthed something; Snape's lips curled upwards. "And five points from Gryffindor for your insolence, Mister Weasley. That makes it ten points you've lost for your house today."

Ron's ears turned beet red. Draco laughed louder than ever; Harry rounded on him. "Shut up, you!"

"Ah, ah, ah. Everyone knows you have a temper, Mister Potter, but you would do well to control it. Detention with Filch tonight," Snape said a very soft voice.

Harry glowered at Snape and the Potions master's black eyes glittered with malevolence. "For once in your life, hold your tongue," the teacher hissed. "Unless, of course, you wish to serve detention with me for the rest of the week."

Harry did as he was told, gritting his teeth as the Slytherins howled with laughter. Snape smiled thinly and looked at Hermione, wondering if she would do anything to get herself in trouble. She didn't; in fact, she was uncharacteristically silent for the whole class, not volunteering any answers to his questions. She merely did her work with a chagrined look on her face, both of which pleased Snape to no end. He'd silenced the chatterbox for once, and on his birthday too.

His glance fell on Lavender and Parvati; his lip curled as he saw them whispering frantically to each other. "If you have something to say, Miss Brown, surely you and your friend Miss Patil can say it for everyone to hear?" he taunted, leaning forward on his desk and projecting his voice towards the back of the classroom, where his two victims were standing.

Lavender's cheeks turned pink. Parvati cleared her throat. "Professor Snape, we're sorry. It won't happen again."

"I'm sure that it won't, Miss Patil. But let's take ten points from Gryffindor just to make sure it really does not happen again," Severus purred. Lavender glared at him as Pansy Parkinson gave a bray of laughter, holding on to her desk for support.

Dinner that night was even better. Harry bolted his food and left early, obviously bent on getting a start on his detention with Filch. Ron's face was black as thunder as he shoveled his steak and kidney pie into his mouth; Hermione was still uncharacteristically quiet. In fact, Snape noted that she was reading and eating, which made him smirk even more. *My remark about her hair upset her so much that she's still shutting everyone out* he thought.

As for Neville, he didn't even show up for dinner. Lee Jordan was casting doubtful looks at Angelina Johnson, who was ignoring him as she talked to another girl; Lavender and Parvati were giving Snape dirty looks every few seconds. The Potions master raised his goblet to them in a sarcastic gesture of recognition; the girls gave him one final glare and sullenly continued eating. McGonagall was livid, but Snape politely tuned out her ranting and calmly ate his dinner, pausing now and then to take a sip of wine. He was looking forward to getting to his quarters and opening the few presents he'd received for his birthday. Albus had given him something as well; judging from the size and shape it was probably a box of sweets. Well, if it was, he could always chuck it in the garbage bin. As far as he was concerned, he'd received the best presents when he'd insulted the Gryffindors.

Snape had dessert, said a polite good night to Minerva and Albus, and left the Great Hall. He made his way to the dungeons, stopping to chastise the Weasley twins for sneaking around one of the out-of-bounds corridors. "You have a habit of turning up in unexpected places," he purred as he took ten points off each unfortunate teenager.

Eventually he reached his quarters and took out his wand. He unlocked the door and removed the wards, stepped inside and waved his wand at the empty fireplace. "*Incendio*," he called, and a fire started crackling. Snape locked and warded the doors behind him and went to his desk.

On top of the desk rested the parcel from Albus and the package he'd received from Draco. He tucked his wand into his robes and paused, wondering which to open first. Then he picked up the smaller package and unwrapped it.

Inside was a brand new Potions reference book. Snape read the inside cover; it had been published earlier that year and was, he could tell by flipping through the pages, going to be quite valuable to his research. He smiled thinly. He'd give five points to each Slytherin who had contributed financially to purchasing the book. That should make Slytherin's lead over Gryffindor even more than it was at the present time.

He put the book down on the desk and took up Albus' present. It was a medium-sized box, gaily wrapped with birthday paper and festooned with a bright green bow. *At least he got the colour of the bow right*, Snape thought as he opened the package.

Inside was a box of Bertie Bott's Every-Flavour Beans; lying on top of it was a card. Sighing, Severus picked up the card and glared at it, hoping it was not musically charmed like the one he'd gotten that morning. He withdrew his wand and waved it over the card; then, satisfied that it was harmless, opened it, his wand still clutched in his fingers. Dumbledore had inscribed a message inside the card, written in his looping script:

Happy Birthday, dear boy! Forgive me for the announcement this morning, but birthdays are better when everyone shares them. You may be reclusive for the rest of the year, except perhaps at the Yule Ball.

Snape groaned aloud. *Bugger the Yule Ball!* he thought, tossing the card to the table. Oh well, at least it was eleven months away. And Dumbledore was right about birthdays being better when they were shared with everyone. Severus thought of what chores Filch might have Potter doing at that very moment, and smirked. *Vengeance is very sweet*, he thought.

He picked up his new Potions book, drew his chair close to the fire and sat down to read. He flipped through the first few pages until he got to the opening chapter. Almost as an afterthought he reached out one long arm and drew the box of Bertie's Beans towards him, settling it on his lap. He continued to read as he bit into a candy, nodding in absent-minded approval when he tasted caramel.