

Returning A Favour

by ConstantComment

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Warnings: Vaguely OOTP-compliant. Absolute schmoop. Hints of student-teacher romance and perhaps a ridiculous!Snape

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note(s): This [belated] birthday fic for beffeysue, one of my most faithful reviewers, was written in March 2010, but has remained unposted on TPP until now. I hope you all enjoy. I know I haven't been in the SS/HG world for some time, but I still love this ship immensely. Here is my proof.

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Severus Snape's birthday had never been a particularly fantastic day. Nestled in the dead of winter, January ninth was frigid and often blanketed in sloshy, wet snow. Not to mention that often the same date coincided with the prospect of nearly one thousand dunderheads returning to Hogwarts grounds. Indeed, Severus' birthday had never been even a good day. He hated remembering how much worse it had been in the past, when his father would be so incredibly drunk that his mum would forget Severus' wish for a new Potions kit. And later, when he had sat at Spinner's End, lounging in front of a dreary fire and lamenting his many mistakes in life.

So, his expectations for this birthday varied from low to nonexistent.

Of course, that expectation could never stop someone as mulish and unbearably Gryffindor as Hermione Granger, who had somehow weaselised the information from one of his colleagues that he would be turning 37 the day after the Hogwarts Express arrived from London.

He had been sitting in his office, minding his own damn business with a fifth of scotch in his spindly hands when she knocked on his door, requesting a moment or two.

"Why, Miss Granger," he had sneered (for only Severus Snape can sneer a greeting). "To what do I owe this... pleasure?" His lips curled ably around the word, transforming the two simple syllables into one hundred syllables worth of disdain.

"Did you have a relaxing holiday, Professor?" she asked, clearly dallying. He just let his eyebrows say it all and sipped at his scotch. "Right. I'll be brief, then."

"Delightful," he drawled, amazed that there was such a thing as brevity in the chit's surprisingly vast repertoire of talents.

"I heard that your birthday was today, Professor, so I took a little time over my holiday to make you a present. I hope you find it to your liking," she said, reaching into her satchel and pulling out a silvery parcel with simple twine around it. As she reached forward to place it on his desk, he panicked that this *thing* might be some hideous hand-

knitted doily or tea cosy, and set his glass down to prepare himself for the unsightliness. Maybe he wouldn't have to open it now?

Ah, that was it. Severus swivelled in his chair and pulled a random tome from his bookcase, turning to a page on Voodoo magics and quickly forgetting that he had any sort of celebration to worry about. However, his bookly utopia crumbled when someone cleared their throat.

Severus whirled around. "What the hell are you still hanging about for?"

Granger flushed red and clasped her hands together, and Severus refocused on the silver package that sat atop his grade-book. "If you please, sir, open your present now so I can take it with me if you dislike it."

Severus huffed, nearly flinging her out the door with a flick of his hand, but he had to admit, he was (morbidly) curious...

"It's nothing garish. I did have you in mind, anyway, when I..."

"Shut it, you idiot girl," he said distractedly, and pulled the parcel toward him, noting the squishy consistency before unwrapping it carefully.

It was several moments before Severus remembered to take another breath, his hands clutching at the gift. It was hand-knitted, all right, but...

Exquisite.

The soft wool caressed his fingers with a warmth he hadn't known he lacked, and the black knitting matched his robes.

He couldn't remember ever receiving a *thoughtful* present. Sure, there had been other students in the past who'd taken advantage of this occasion, but those presents had practically been bribes. And he liked not to dwell on Albus' many gaudy socks...

"Professor?"

Severus gulped, tracing a finger over the Celtic designs that danced in a deep green around the end of the length of wool. Finally he said neutrally, and maybe a bit dumbly, "You made this."

"Yes, sir. I've become rather talented with knitting needles since my house-elf welfare days. It's charmed to be impervious to wind and harsh weather. Also, I thought you'd like that it was, you know, black," she rattled off, getting a bit carried away with herself, as she was wont to do. He looked at her, eyes tracing the blush that still lingered on her cheeks.

He was...He didn't know what to say.

Well, that was new.

"This is..." he trailed off, his mind drifting away with the swipe of his thumb across the soft wool scarf.

She left quietly.

After The Event as he liked to call it in his head, Severus became rather determined to find out Miss Granger's date of birth as well. He satisfied his guilt with the lie that he wanted revenge for Granger's breach of privacy, but when he really thought about it, all he wanted to do was repay her in some way. Show her...oh, Merlin, he often drove himself to nausea over this...his deep gratitude.

He found, however, that her birthday would not fall during this school year.

And for the first time in Severus Snape's history, he mourned the looming graduation of a student.

He wore the scarf everywhere he could, basking in the warmth that it gave him. Once, although he'd never tell a soul, he'd even worn it to bedshh!...when the bitter cold of the dungeons crept too far into his chambers.

Of course, he didn't even know it, but he thought of her, too, when he wore his scarf.

Which was why, when spring came around, he stored the scarf with great reluctance and watched Hermione Granger leave school with a heavy heart.

Granger's presence in Severus Snape's thoughts didn't dwindle when his scarf was put away for the summer, and that was when he realized how utterly fucked he was.

When the first sign of fall blanketed Hogwarts with its mild bite, Severus gathered what little Gryffindorishness he had and wrote Hermione Granger a letter:

Miss Hermione Granger,

I am sure this letter finds you thriving in your new life after Hogwarts. I am also sure that you have nearly keeled over of some shock-induced trauma from seeing your former professor's scrawl again, but please do try to postpone the inevitable for at least the next few lines.

It has come to my notice that you are expecting your nineteenth birthday on 19 September, and I would like to return the favour you so courteously paid me. Perhaps dinner?

I never did thank you for your gift. I treasure it.

Awaiting your reply,

Severus Snape

Potions master

Dep. Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Order of Merlin, First Class

Order of the Phoenix

In truth, he never expected a reply.

Professor Severus Snape,

Thank you for your well wishes. I do admit it was rather strange, but not unwelcome, to hear from you. We were never close as teacher and student, but that never meant that I didn't treasure value your teachings. In any case, my person remains trauma-free.

I would love to have dinner with you. How does the 20th at Les Cinq Sens sound? You may owl with a specific time, if that is agreeable.

Yours,

Hermione Granger

In fact, he'd been so shocked to receive a reply that he'd done nothing memorable for two days, performing robotically throughout his workweek until he actually got around to contemplating her answer.

His second letter took much longer to quill. He only managed a meagre sentence or two in his spidery scrawl after he drank himself reckless.

Granger

Sorry for the delay. I do find your arrangements the agreeablest of agreeable. I shall escort you to Les Cinq Sens at precisely 7 PM on the 20th. Happy Birthday. Glad to hear your person is well.

Completely sloshed,

S. Snape, Potions master and all that rot.

It would have to do, since he'd never work up the courage again.

And of course, he agonized for the whole of a fortnight about her lack of response, but still Apparated to her doorstep at 7 PM on September 20th, hoping she wouldn't think him a complete fool.

Sweet Nimue, what the fuck was wrong with him? He slapped his forehead with a palm while his other hand tugged nervously at the warm, black and green scarf around his neck. He was dressed in a long charcoal grey pea coat, with black slacks and a white button down. He was sure to put her into shock, now.

"You're just nervous is all," came a voice from behind him, and Severus realized he'd been speaking out loud, just now. He turned, seeing her bushy curls and surprisingly curvy figure silhouetted by the yellow light in her entryway. "You certainly look different without the teaching robes."

"Is different a bad thing?" he found himself asking.

"Not at all," she said, and shut the door behind her, finally stepping down to his level on the front steps and looking up at him. "Hello," she said with a smile. "I quite liked your letter."

Severus couldn't stop looking at her. She wore a simple aubergine dress with black stockings and those nice, high-heeled shoes that Muggle women wore. "Good evening," he finally said, deliberately ignoring her jibe about his drunken response. "And Happy Birthday."

"Don't worry, I admit I needed a good glass of liquid courage before penning a response to you. I've never been on a date with a former professor before."

Severus cringed. "This is a date?" he asked.

She looked at him considering. "Only if you want it to be."

Severus took a big breath and extended his arm for her to take it. "I do want it to be."

And as Hermione smiled up at him, Severus thought of Les Cinq Sens and Disapparated.

The dinner was superb, with yellow beet salad with chevre and a simple sea bass entrée. However, conversation was better...which Severus had been dreading most of all. How was he to carry on a conversation with someone...a womanly someone...he barely knew outside of their talent in Potions and their participation in The Order? What, would they commiserate about wartime? Debate his bias in the classroom?

But, somehow, Hermione made it easy. Well, easier. She just... radiated a sense of calm, of comfort, almost like the damned scarf she'd given him last January. She paid him attention. She smiled at him. It was bizarre.

After a rare moment of awkward fumbling after he'd caught himself staring for the umpteenth time, Severus gulped at his wine, trying this time to NOT look.

"You know, I consider myself rather lucky," she began while he pushed his haricots verts around on his plate. "I had the biggest crush on you last year."

Severus' eyebrows shot up to his hairline. "Did you *really*."

She smiled, nodded. "And now look at this." She gestured between them.

Severus nodded minutely, swallowing the green beans before forcing himself to reply, "Odd."

"Indeed. How do you think we're doing?" she asked, and a hint of nervousness settled in the air between them.

"Personally, I'm contemplating taking that butter knife and ending it now," he muttered without thinking. Hermione sat back, looking a little stunned.

"Not sharp enough," she said flatly. "And anyway, we shan't have you ruining the tablecloth."

Severus realized, then. "Hermione, I didn't...oh, bugger. I meant that I'm floundering around while you're doing famously. You're lovely and I'm... doing this right now. It's utterly ridiculous. I've no idea why I asked you to dinner."

"You fancy me."

"I'm repaying you for your birthday gift."

"Oh, come off it!" she grumbled, exasperated. And in that moment, Severus was reminded frighteningly of Ronald Weasley. Severus rubbed his temple with his fingers and sat back in his chair, as well.

"All right, I fancy the living daylight out of you. And it's your fault!" Severus growled.

Hermione rolled her eyes but couldn't fight back a smile. "That's usually how things go."

Their waiter arrived with the bill in that moment, and Severus snatched it away before she could get to it.

"Don't worry," she snickered. "You're *repaying* me, remember?"

"Right."

"I'd no idea that the infamous Severus Snape turned into a nervous wreck around women."

"It's only women that I'm *attracted* to," he corrected distractedly, placing the proper amount of galleons on the table. "It's a very select few, I assure you."

"Ah, well good then. I'm glad to be in such a select group." Hermione finished her glass and rose out of her chair, readjusting the fall of her dress as she stood to her full height.

He stood shakily, trying not to smile because smiling was something Severus Snape had never been used to, and manoeuvred around the table to help her into her coat.

"I'm rather glad myself," he said finally, giving her his arm to escort her from the restaurant.

As they walked down the quiet street, Severus observed the lamplights shining on the wet pavement as Hermione curled into his arm and cast a wandless spell that prevented the rain, which was now heavy enough to be a bother, from dewing their coats. They paused at a street corner, silent as the stoplight clicked to red. In that moment, Severus looked down at the woman beside him, only to find her faintly smiling back. Her eyes were dark, but shining as she looked up at him, face open, waiting. Her nose turned up in an impish way and was smattered with delicate freckles, as were her wind-reddened cheeks. His gaze lingered most on her lips, however. And even as she spoke, he couldn't take his eyes of them.

"Severus?"

"Hmm?"

"I asked if you would like to kiss me," she said, and his gaze met hers as the stoplight changed to green and other pedestrians crossed the street and the world moved on around them as if time hadn't stopped.

"Would that be permissible?" he asked quietly.

"I mean, if my last words weren't permission enough, I did give you that scarf," she joked, worrying her lip, and her free hand joined the one wrapped around his arm.

"It is a damned good scarf," he murmured, and leant down to capture her lips with his.

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