

Future Perfect

by Mint Stick

Severus Snape has a problem: unwanted fan mail. Hermione Granger to the rescue!

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Chapter 1 of 1

Severus Snape has a problem: unwanted fan mail. Hermione Granger to the rescue!

A/N: For Ayerf, who was the winning bidder for a ficlet from me in the TPP Every Flavour Auction. This is the result of combining two of her prompts: 'The courtship of Severus Snape. Post DH, Severus finds himself lauded a hero with an Order of Merlin First Class. He also finds himself beleaguered by fangirls everywhere he goes. Fangirls he'd rather not be getting marriage proposals and their underwear from. Hermione to the rescue!' and 'Snape realises that he's in wuv with the Head Girl (Hermione, of course). What does he do about it?'

Graciously beta-read by Ayerf herself.

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'But I don't *want* to be Head Girl!'

Severus Snape, who had retreated to a shadowed corner of the Headmistress's office upon the girl's entrance, half expected the words to be accompanied by a stomping of feet. The thought made him smirk.

He had to admit, though, that he was surprised. Hermione Granger, not wanting to be Head Girl?

'I'm afraid that it was the staff's unanimous decision. I'm very sorry, dear, but once this honour has been bestowed on a student, it cannot be denied by the student in question.' Minerva didn't sound apologetic in the least. 'You of all people should be aware of that, Miss Granger. It's in *Hogwarts, A History*, I'm sure.'

Granger's shoulders slumped. Severus wished he could see her face, but her back was turned towards him.

'I see, Professor McGonagall. Headmistress, I mean.'

'I don't need to tell you not to do anything... unwise, surely.' There was a hint of steel in Minerva's voice. 'We're placing a great deal of trust in you. The students will need to be able to rely on you.'

'I understand.' Granger shuffled her feet. 'It's just that I'd really hoped to spend this year in peace and quiet, focusing on my studies. And I'd rather not draw any extra attention to myself. It's not been easy, since the battle...'

'It's not been easy on any of us.' Minerva's eyes met Severus's, over Granger's shoulder. 'As I said, the staff all agreed on your appointment. I'm sure you understand how important it is for Hogwarts, especially after last year, to have a Muggle-born student in such a position. We all felt you were our best choice.'

Their only choice, in fact. Granger was the only seventh-year Muggle-born girl at Hogwarts. Severus was certain that this wouldn't escape Granger's notice.

'If there wasn't anything else...'

Granger obviously knew a dismissal when she heard one.

'No. Thank you for your time, Headmistress.' With that, she turned and left, not once glancing towards the corner where Severus was standing.

When the door closed behind her, Severus returned to his armchair across the desk from Minerva.

'I am surprised,' he said. 'You used to dote on the girl.'

Minerva picked up her quill and focused on the sheaf of parchment in front of her.

'She'll get over it,' she said curtly. 'I must admit I'm surprised she complained. I believed this was the goal she had always been working towards.'

Severus shrugged. He had believed that, too. Apparently they had both been wrong. 'People change. I suppose she has other priorities now.'

'Oh, Severus.' Minerva put the quill down and rubbed her brow. 'I didn't want to be so strict with the girl. But you know that we really didn't have a choice. And she'll do a good job.'

'I'm sure she will.'

Even if she now believes she was only appointed because of what she is, not who she is Severus thought. But that was really none of his business.

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Severus growled, and regretted it instantly, as the pain in his throat reminded him that he had been cautioned to avoid stressing his vocal cords. He had to make do with baring his teeth and glaring at the offending contents of yet another of the packages piled high on his desk. With a flick of his wand, careful not to let any part of the *thoughtful gift* as the accompanying letter had described it touch him, he sent it hurling through the air towards the fireplace.

There was a brisk knock on the door. He ignored it. If it was a student, they would go away; if it was a member of the staff, they would also go away.

The door opened, and a head of bushy hair peeked inside.

'Professor? Oh... Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realise you were busy.'

'Come in, Granger.' He sighed. 'And close the door after you.'

The Head Girl stepped inside, an average sized box in her hands. She glanced quickly at the fireplace before looking up at him. 'I'm sorry to trouble you, sir, but I was just outside by the greenhouses, and Professor Sprout saw me and asked me to bring you these.' She held out the box, which was, as he now saw, filled with a variety of freshly harvested plants.

He sighed again and took the box from her, leaving her hands free to close the door. Once she had done so, she looked somewhat confused. Perhaps she realised that she should have closed it from the other side, now that she had fulfilled the purpose of her visit.

'Professor?' she ventured, sending another glance towards the fireplace. 'I realise this is none of my business, but... Were you just burning underwear?'

Severus resisted the temptation to roll his eyes. Out of all the students Pomona could pick to deliver him the ingredients, she just had to find the one who wouldn't run off as soon as she could. No, she'd had to send Granger, the only student inquisitive enough and not afraid of him, apparently to ask a question with, really, an obvious answer.

'Yes, I was,' he said.

Granger stared at him. She had rather plain brown eyes, he noticed.

After a few moments of awkward silence, Granger must have realised he wasn't going to elaborate.

'But... why?'

There seemed to be no malice in her questions; no cunning plan to run away and tell everyone the lurid little secrets of Severus Snape's lonely evenings. Just genuine curiosity. As if she actually cared.

Now that was a novel thought.

Overcome with a sudden desire to explain, he swept his arm across the teetering pile of envelopes, packages and loose parchment on his desk.

'I'm sure you know what rubbish the *Daily Prophet* and other rags of its ilk published immediately after the battle.' Most of the adoration had of course been saved for Potter the Boy Hero, but and what had shocked him, once he had recovered enough to be able to read the papers, more than anything else there had also been articles praising the noble, tragic, misunderstood, romantic life and deeds and devotion of one Severus Snape.

He waited for Granger to nod and continued: 'This, here, is post from my... admirers. There are certain ladies and, occasionally, gentlemen, who have taken it upon themselves to shower me with letters of *affection*.'

He observed with satisfaction that the venom dripping from his words made Granger flinch.

'*Affection*, and... gifts. Of a personal nature.'

'Eww.'

His lips twitched. 'Succinctly put.'

Granger tilted her head. 'It's a rather high pile, sir. Is this just one day's post?'

'All this is from the last two days. I've gone through about a third already.' He grimaced. In addition to how unpleasant it was, wading through it all, it wasted much of his precious time time that could have been spent on something more pleasing, such as curling up in his comfortable armchair with a good book in his lap. Or even on marking essays or preparing for the next day's lessons.

He wondered again why he was even talking about it with Granger of all people instead of just ordering her to leave. The girl had been a thorn in his side for years, even if she hadn't been nearly as irritating this year, apparently preferring to focus on her work instead of showing off or insisting on breaking rules.

Because she was here, and taking an interest, probably. Severus chose not to examine that thought too closely.

She took a step closer to his desk and leaned forward to get a better look.

'Do you mind?' Severus asked. 'This is private correspondence!'

'I'm sorry, sir.' She drew back again. 'I was just thinking that it must be taking up a lot of your time. Is it delivered together with your normal post? I mean, why do you even need to go through it one letter at a time?'

Severus couldn't tell her that at first, he'd done it because he'd been flattered. And then, because he felt a certain revolting temptation to keep going. So he opted for a half-truth.

'You may have noticed that the staff usually doesn't have their post delivered to the Great Hall. It happens at times, but most of the school owls and other regular owls are aware of this. Instead, unless it's something very urgent and the owl has been given specific orders, everything addressed to one of the staff apart from the Headmaster or Headmistress is received by the Hogwarts post elves, who then sort the post and deliver it straight to the staff member's office.'

Granger nodded. He wondered if she already knew some of it.

'In any case, the post elves have been instructed to set anything obviously of, of this sort, aside from anything that looks like legitimate correspondence. However, it is not always possible for them to tell, so sometimes quite often, in fact there are important letters among this pile of nonsense, and vice versa.'

'So you do need to look through everything.'

'Indeed.' He considered for a moment whether he should be even more forthcoming. He did not want her pity, but as she was showing such obvious interest, and as it really was such a waste of his time... perhaps he could make use of her, in some way. So he continued: 'And I also need to check the letters, even those clearly destined for the fireplace, for hexes. There was an incident early on when a letter exploded in the flames. I'd rather avoid that happening again, although you are correct; it does take up a lot of time.'

He remembered that letter well. Wrapped in pink parchment, with little hearts all over. And apparently sent by a person far more inventive at spell-casting than he'd given her at least he thought it had been by a woman credit for.

'But that's horrible!' Granger exclaimed. 'Why would... Well, I guess there are all kinds of people out there. I've been lucky, I suppose, to avoid the clearly crazy ones.'

Severus raised an eyebrow. It hadn't occurred to him that Granger might be familiar with the problem herself. Potter, certainly, but Granger had, now that he thought about it, been surprisingly absent from the hero-worshipping in the papers.

'Of course I haven't had nearly as many problems as you, sir,' Granger added. 'Just a few letters, mainly from witches cautioning me that I shouldn't try to steal Harry's glory, and some threats due to my role in Voldemort's downfall, and a handful of marriage proposals, mostly from elderly wizards, but all very harmless really.'

All to be expected, he supposed. Although her casual, dismissive mention of threats made him somewhat uncomfortable.

'I trust that you know how to check your post for hexes and poison?'

Granger smiled. It was a weary smile, but sincere, from what he could tell, and it gave him a curious feeling in his chest.

'Of course, sir. I expect there are spells I wouldn't know to look for, but I've read up on the basics.'

Severus saw his chance. 'If you wish, I could give you some pointers.'

'You'd let me practice on your post?'

Was that a smirk on her face? Dear Merlin, the girl was much quicker on the uptake than he'd hoped. But she seemed amused by the idea, so perhaps...

'Under my supervision of course. And with an understanding that you would pass any letter *not* of this sort directly to me. And I'd want a...' He paused. Not a wand oath. Not that he had any faith in Gryffindors as a whole being of the honest, honourable kind, but Granger could be trusted. Probably. 'A promise, that the contents of any correspondence you look at will not go any further.'

'Of course, sir. You have my word.'

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By mid-October, they had established a comfortable routine: Granger would come over twice a week, Tuesdays and Fridays after dinner, sort through whatever piles there were Severus took care of the post on other days, but was more than happy to leave anything arriving on those days for Granger.

He still found himself oddly reluctant to examine his reasons for this arrangement. It spared him of a few hours of tedious work, that was true; at the same time, it wasn't as if it actually left him free to enjoy his leisure time in private. Mostly, he spent the hours marking essays, but every now and then he caught himself throwing a glance in Granger's direction.

He also wondered, more than once, why Granger seemed keen on continuing this. She had learned everything he could teach about detecting common letter-attached hexes during their first evening together. The next time, he had her demonstrate her skill in using them on a new pile of post. After that... Granger had every excuse to stop coming. And yet she turned up on time, like clockwork.

Except...

Severus squinted at the grandfather clock hidden in the shadows of his office. He had left dinner early, as usual, but she'd been there. She should be down in the dungeons by now.

Granger was late, and Severus was annoyed.

The now-familiar brisk knock came ten minutes later. He didn't bother responding; Granger never waited for his invitation anyway before barging in.

'You're late,' he said, making his annoyance known.

'Sorry, sir.' She didn't sound particularly sorry. 'A first year needed a word, and a shoulder to cry on. A homesick Hufflepuff. *to* have Head Girl duties, you know.'

Severus raised both eyebrows. For a moment, he contemplated taking off points for such a rude response, but if he was honest with himself, that particular activity had lost its shine. And he doubted that Granger, after everything she had been through, would care about a few house points but she could choose to take offence and leave him in the company of nothing but piles of rose-scented parchment and underwear.

She looked at him for a moment, then gave a slight shrug and took her usual seat at his desk, starting to sort the post into smaller piles. She pushed a few more official looking letters over to him and checked the next, a large, soft-looking parcel, for anything dangerous before opening it.

A pair of silk knickers fell out surprisingly, Severus realised, the first that she'd come across since their meetings started. He felt a stab of discomfort: was this really

something his student, his *female*, of-age, pretty student should be dealing with? Something in the back of his mind suggested that this was something not everyone would find appropriate or suitable.

'Oh, you have to hear this!' Granger said, once she had shaken the accompanying letter out of the parcel. She kept the knickers well away from her. 'It's even worse than the usual, if you can believe that!'

She used her wand to manoeuvre the letter in front of her, clearly not wanting to come into contact with it, and read *As You are a Master of Potions, my Darling Severus I hope You don't mind me calling You that, as we shall soon be on even more familiar terms, I trust I know that You are fully aware of the Power that Scents have. I am fully confident that You and I are meant for each other, and to make You aware of that, I have hereby enclosed a token of my Affection, freshly soaked with my Natural Scent, which I produced as I was Dreaming about You, my Love. Once You have taken just the smallest sniff, I know that You will hurry to my side at the earliest opportunity.*

She made a face. 'I mean, I know about pheromones, and all that, but... really!'

Severus wrinkled his nose. 'Yes, I can smell it from here. I think it's safe to say that while she was right about scents having power, she was wrong about my reaction. Into the fireplace with it, please.'

'With pleasure.' She grinned.

They watched the scrap of silk and the letter burn. Finally, Severus cleared his throat. 'I think the desk needs to be scrubbed clean as well. I'm not sure a Cleaning charm would be enough.'

He wondered if he should mention his misgivings about having her do this. She wasn't his hired secretary, after all. But she didn't seem to mind, and really, she was clearly both old enough and mature enough to decide for herself.

Instead of voicing his doubts, he asked if she'd like a cup of tea.

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Severus fretted over the little package. Should he give it to her? He had no idea what was appropriate was a teacher giving a student a Christmas present appropriate? But she'd spent so much of her time, willingly, helping him out, and truth be told, there had been moments, moments spent over tea and letters and whatever nonsense the *Prophet* had published that particular day, where he'd forgotten Granger was a student, instead of, well, Granger.

It was only a book that he planned to give her, anyway. One that she'd once mentioned in passing as being interested in.

In the end, he decided to give it to the house elves to deliver with the rest of Christmas presents. He wished he could see her reaction, but handing it over in person was well, it was just a bit too personal.

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He ignored the way his heart beat just a little bit faster when the knock came.

Granger stood at the door, her cheeks flushed. The corridor light, muted as it was, shone through the curls framing her face, making it look like a halo.

'I must be off in a minute don't want to miss the train but I just wanted to wish you a happy Christmas, sir. I hope the post won't drown you while I'm gone; it's only a couple of weeks.'

'I'll manage,' Severus said. 'Happy Christmas, Miss Granger.'

In truth, the amount of post had been dwindling down for a while. Four months ago, he'd have been happy about that. Now there were days when he deliberately didn't open anything himself so that there would be enough to keep her busy for a few hours. He'd have to be careful with the Christmas correspondence; some of the lunatics put a date on their letter. If Granger realised he was keeping the post for her...

*

'This one is actually rather sweet.' Granger looked pensive, a piece of parchment in her hand. 'Just a lonely soul; I don't think she's actually expecting to capture your heart.'

'Amazing.'

Granger's lips twitched. Severus had to force himself to look elsewhere.

'Sir, if you don't mind me asking... Have you never considered any of the offers? Not all of them are, um... Well, some of them seem like rather nice people. Are you just not interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with anyone?'

A daring question. Oh, the temptation...

It wouldn't do to say anything, though. One wrong word, and... And she was still his student. For another three months, he reminded himself.

Instead, he looked at her intensely, making an effort to make his eyes smoulder. If there was something that was sure to make young women weak in their knees, it was a man giving them a smouldering look. Or so he'd read. He'd never actually had a chance to try it on someone before.

Granger stared at him. 'Are you okay, sir? You look ill.'

His shoulders fell and he closed his eyes. 'Just a momentary lapse. Nothing for you to worry about.'

'Are you sure? I could get Madam Pomfrey.'

'I'm fine. Really.'

He hoped she wouldn't notice he hadn't answered her question. And he really had to work on that smouldering look. Perhaps he'd have to dismantle the charms that kept his mirror silent, at least if he wanted to get advice from it. The trouble was that his mirror wasn't just irritating; it was its endless ability to wax lyrical about Horace Slughorn's masculine allure that had forced him to silence it.

Granger was still looking at him, her head tilted.

'So you don't want me to put the more reasonable letters aside for your perusal?' she asked at last. There was a curious edge of emotion in her voice that he, even with his years of experience, couldn't decipher.

'No. I'm not interested. Not in any of them.'

She nodded and returned to the letters, working through the rest of the small pile in silence. When each and every one of them had burned to ashes, she rose and left,

quietly bidding him a good evening.

He felt bereft.

*

Something had changed between them. He didn't know what it was, and he couldn't really put his finger on it, but things were different.

Granger still came by twice a week, although at times, she could reasonably stay for just half an hour before they were done. He noticed on those days that she would work slowly, as if she was as reluctant to leave as he was to let her go. Occasionally, he would offer her tea and engage her in a discussion about her N.E.W.T.s preparations although she didn't seem to want to talk much about either the exams or her plans for the future or something she had come across in the course of her Head Girl duties.

He had caught her looking at him a few times. He had no idea what to make of it.

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Granger looked at the single rolled-up letter on his desk, tied up with a ribbon striped pink and green and emitting a strong, pungent odour. Severus's nose told him that it was expensive perfume one that would probably have smelled rather pleasant on human skin but reacted most unfavourably with parchment.

'I think it's safe to say that you could handle the post on your own from now on, sir.'

Severus found himself at a lack for words. 'It would seem so,' he said at last.

'It's only a week until the exams,' Granger added.

Severus was only too aware of that.

'And then I'll have to leave anyway.'

'Quite.'

'Should Skeeter publish some more articles about you... I mean, if the post becomes too much again, and if I have time...'

Severus looked up sharply. Was she...?

Now was a good time to put his last months' practice into, well, practice, he decided. *You're doing almost as well as Horace*, the mirror had finally praised him last week. *Now there is a man who can smoulder ah, the memories, my poor heart can barely take thinking about it. He used to practice in front of me too, did you know that?*

Severus suppressed a shudder. It was time to act.

'I doubt that will happen.' Honesty, he decided, was the best policy in this case. 'I may have had a word with Skeeter last year, after what she wrote at the time, and I expect she understood my meaning.'

There was a brief, but unmistakable flicker of disappointment on Granger's face. *Yes!*

He looked right into her eyes and said, keeping his voice smooth: 'However...'

Granger's beautiful brown eyes sparkled in the firelight.

'However,' he continued, noting with satisfaction how her cheeks flushed, 'if you have time, and are not averse to the idea, perhaps we could meet for a cup of tea sometimes.'

'I'd like that,' she said. 'I've really been... Um, never mind.'

'You've really been what?'

She looked down, her blush even more evident now. 'I've enjoyed these evenings. At first it was just a way to escape from everything else the noise and the people and the attention and the duties and... well, everything. Even if I knew you were just using me.'

'And that didn't bother you?'

'Well, I also knew that you knew that I knew. So I suppose I didn't mind. And as I said, it was a way to escape from everything else.'

She raised her head and looked at him. 'I'd really like to see you again too after the exams. I don't know yet how much time I'll have in the summer, as I need to go to Australia and spend some time with my parents there, but I won't be leaving immediately, and I still need to decide about a job, but I'll definitely be coming back, and... I'm babbling now. Sorry.'

He gave her a crooked smile. 'Tea it is then. You will leave the day after the Leaving Feast, right?'

'Yes. Taking the Hogwarts Express one last time.' She smiled wistfully. 'It's strange to think that I won't be coming back.'

'Not as a student anyway.'

Granger's blush deepened. 'Yes, I suppose so.'

'You'll probably need a few days to settle in.' He didn't want to look too keen. 'Perhaps you should owl me when you have the time.'

'Perhaps that would be best. Harry and Ron will want to meet me immediately anyway, I expect.'

Weasley. Damn. He'd completely forgotten about the boy. Didn't he and Granger have some sort of arrangement at one point? Damn. Damn. Damn.

'How are Potter and Weasley?' he inquired, trying his best to sound casual.

'Oh, they're doing well,' Granger said. 'Harry writes to me sometimes that's how I keep up with them. They're both studying to become Aurors.'

That wasn't quite what Severus needed to know, but still informative. 'Weasley doesn't write?'

There was a certain wistfulness about Granger's smile. 'Ron's never been a big letter writer. And I expect he's been keeping busy.'

Severus nodded. Granger wasn't referring to Weasley's studies, and they both knew it. 'I expect he has. He's young, successful and famous.'

'Yeah.' Granger sighed. 'Anyway, I should probably go. I still have a lot of revising to do.'

Severus was certain she didn't need to, but he understood. 'You'll do well. If I don't see you again...'

'I'll owl you.' She smiled. 'And thanks.'

When the door closed behind her, Severus steepled his fingers and rested his chin on them. Four more weeks. Four and a half, perhaps, until her owl. And then...

He stood up and went to practice his smouldering.

The End.