

Valentine Mischief

by chivalric

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One-shot story

Chapter 1 of 1

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Acknowledgement: This is for my best friend Deedee who lives somewhere near the Swiss border. She told me last year about a tradition at her child's school: On December 6 (Nikolaus Day), the pupils can send either roses or chocolate to their classmates or friends, even if they don't attend the same school. So little gifts are getting delivered like mad but not just between students. Deedee told me that there is a teacher who gets flooded with roses regularly each year, although he is neither teaching Potions, nor has black hair or a crooked nose. Strange, really, isn't it?

Deedee, I promise to concentrate solely on my King Prawns next time we meet *g*

And my endless thanks for beta-reading go to... Dreamy_Dragon! Three cheers for you!!

It was breakfast time at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Owls were streaming in through the open windows, not only a few, but dozens, hundreds. Each one was either carrying a rose in its beak or a small pouch filled with chocolate frogs.

One landed in front of Harry. "Another rose, mate." Ron grinned, but then an owl landed on his plate, knocked over his tea cup, and dropped not only one rose but three.

"Hell," he grumbled. "I would have thought the girls were brighter and send me chocolate instead of those stupid roses. What shall I do with them, anyway I can't eat them, and I certainly won't put them in a vase. Only poofs put roses in a vase. I wish I could dump them, but I think the girls would get angry if they suspected it."

Hermione looked up from the book she had been reading. "The girls are just fond of you," she said mildly and took a bite of her toast. Several roses were piled up in front of her. She had cast a preservation spell around each one until she could find some time to put them in water.

The next owl delivered some sweets, luckily, otherwise Ron would have gone on moaning about how unfair the world was. Since the end of the war and Voldemort's death, and since he had become a hero along with Harry, they both got flooded with love letters, and girls fainted on the spot whenever one of the boys cast a look in the wrong direction. Hermione found it quite tiresome. But then, she got some love letters, too. Only from the wrong boys.

"Look, this is from a girl at Durmstrang," Harry exclaimed. "Oh bugga, *that* girl Ron, let's go and hide in the dungeons, maybe the owls won't find their way down there."

Hermione laughed dryly. "That's certainly the first time since I've known you that you are voluntarily going anywhere near the Potions classroom." Turning a page of the book she was reading, she cast a look around to see what else was going on. But there were only owl wings to be seen.

Harry patted her gently on the shoulder. "Not everyone is as mad as you and chooses a project that keeps you down there week after week," he mocked. "In my opinion, it

is still the best thing to get as far away from Snape as possible, whether his name was cleared or not."

Shaking her head, Hermione was about to give an acid reply that she liked working with the Potions master, actually, when Ron suddenly said, "Look!" and nodded towards the teacher's table.

An owl had landed there, which wasn't an unusual thing in itself as several students had sent either roses or chocolate frogs to their favourite teachers. In front of Hagrid stood a plant that resembled a small dragon a present from Madame Maxime who was very fond of Hagrid and knew how fond he was of dragons. The Headmaster had been given a huge amount of different sweets and was happily munching along. Professor McGonagall had several roses in a bottle standing in front of her, and Professor Trelawney was ankle-deep covered in fluffy little pink buds, sent by her adorable students. In fact, there was only one teacher who was silently eating his breakfast, the area around him being completely rose - and chocolate - free.

Snape, of course. No one would ever dare to dream about sending the greasy git a Valentine's, although everyone had to admit at least that much his hair was nearly always perfectly clean nowadays.

And now, an owl had landed in front of him and wanted to drop a rose on his plate. Snape looked positively bewildered, the stunned expression on his face being what had caught Ron's attention.

"Shoo," Snape hissed, trying to make the owl understand that it had chosen the wrong teacher. "Get along, the rose will be for Sybil!"

His actions, though as sparse as possible, triggered several giggles from the students who sat nearby.

But the owl insisted, dropped the rose, and hopefully eyed Snape's toast.

"Stupid animal," growled Snape and unceremoniously pushed the owl away. Indignantly, it fluttered up, hooting accusingly. Unfortunately, it left the flower behind.

Snape eyed the rose as if it could explode any minute, which wasn't completely unlikely as some roses had been bought at the Weasley twins' shop and did all sorts of nasty things. But this one, the one in front of Snape, seemed to behave normally. It just lay innocently next to his bowl and looked beautiful. It was a typical Valentine's Day rose: very straight, with a long stalk, and red, of course like all roses that were getting delivered today. Its nearly closed petals were of a velvety, slightly artificial texture. It smelled nicely of some perfume that had been applied in order to make it smell at all, and Snape clearly had no idea what to do with the blasted thing.

He looked up and saw the Golden Trio looking back at him. Painted on the faces of the two boys were the widest grins Snape had seen today, even given the ridiculously cheerful circumstances. The girl tried to hide a smile, but of course didn't master the task. Obviously, they were just about to laugh their heads off at the thought that someone had considered the great bat of the dungeons worthy of a Valentine's Day rose.

Snape sneered. It was equally obvious no one had done so it was a joke on him to see him react stupidly, to see how he would try to figure out who had sent it, and to humiliate him.

Instantly, the Potions master became aware of the expressions that must show on his face: surprise, anger, and maybe a tiny little bit of hope that someone *had* wasted a moment to give him a present. Additionally, embarrassment was on its way when Snape became aware of the fact that he actually had wished for a sign that not everyone hated him. After all, every teacher had received either roses or Chocolate Frogs was it too much to at least harbour a tiny sparkle of hope that someone thought fondly of him?

That was too much Snape couldn't allow those imbeciles to think he had hoped for a rose today. Within the blink of an eye, his face went blank again, and he reached out, picked up the rose with two disgusted fingers, and turned it into ashes. Then, as if nothing had happened, as if Potter and his friends hadn't tried to make fun of him, he returned to his breakfast, wiping the reminders of the flower off the table with his hand.

"Hey, that was impressive!" Ron grinned after Snape had crunched the rose. "I mean, he looked nearly terrified, as if the flower would bite his nose off at any moment. Guess he was scared, or what d'you think, Harry?"

Harry snickered into his tea and could only nod. "We should send him another one, Ron," he managed to say after a while. "Don't know who had the brilliant idea to shock the git like that, but I think a few more roses and he will go off like fireworks."

"Boys," sighed Hermione. "If you put as much concentration into your homework as you do into annoying Professor Snape, you wouldn't need my help every other night."

But neither Harry nor Ron listened to her. They were both gathering up their roses and left the hall in order to find a delivery owl. On their way out, they bumped into a few other boys from Gryffindor Snape would be covered in roses by the end of the day, knowing that none were given in a friendly manner. He would surely go bananas, and he couldn't even blame them for making fun out of him. After all, it was Valentine's Day. What was more natural than to get some flowers?

The next three owls landed in front of Snape whilst he was finishing his tea. They dropped in nearly simultaneously, were beating each other with their wings, and one tipped over Snape's cup. The tea soaked the table cloth and the sleeve of his robes, but before he could do anything about it, the owls dropped their roses and soared off. Obviously, they didn't care to stay any longer than necessary. Maybe even owls shared gossip about who gave a titbit and who didn't.

Snape growled low and dangerously at the sight of the roses. He snatched up all three flowers they were thornless in order not to hurt the owl's beaks and vanished them by just staring at them in a most hateful way.

Then he heard the chuckle. Slowly, he turned to his left and saw Albus's twinkling eyes looking at him.

"My dear boy," the Headmaster said mildly, putting some extra jam on his toast. "It appears to me that someone has taken a liking to you, sending you all those roses. Don't you think it's a bit rude to treat them so harshly?" With a sunny smile, Dumbledore took a bite of his toast.

Through gritted teeth Snape hissed, "Those brats are just making fun of me. You know it. I know it. And *dislike* it."

Dumbledore chuckled once more, took a box of Valentine's chocolates he had received, and pushed it over to his Potions master. "You are too sensitive, dear Severus. Not every nice gesture has a nasty background, you know? Did you consider that the roses are what they are meant to be a gift, a sign to show you that you are liked?"

"Just look at Potter and Weasley, and you know the meaning behind the damn things," Snape snarled.

Dumbledore looked up, only to see Harry and Ron drop their heads quickly in order to escape the Headmaster's friendly, inquiring eyes. *Aha*, he thought, *so Severus is right they are merely mocking him*. But unlike the Potions master, Dumbledore saw as well that the girl, Hermione Granger, cast a sad look at her professor. Thoughtfully, Dumbledore patted his nose. "Here, Severus, take a sweet. Otherwise I fear this rose-business will get on your nerves," he said.

Snape gave him a cold look. "I hate chocolate even more than I hate roses," he snapped, pushed his chair back and rushed out of the Great Hall.

An owl followed after him it looked as if the feared Potions master was fleeing the bird, which had another rose in its beak. The sound of laughter hit Snape's ears just as he slammed the door shut.

"Good grief," said Dumbledore and licked some butter off his beard. "You are such a liar, my dear boy."

Snape didn't escape the owl, although he tried his best to reach his private rooms faster than usual. But the owl had been given a task and was determined to fulfil it. Chasing its target, the owl reached out and landed right on Snape's head, drilling its talons into the long hair and the scalp of the Potions master. When it dropped the rose, the flower landed neatly in Snape's hands, which he had just brought up to strangle the bird. "Ouch!" he shouted, trying to get hold of the bird, trying to get it off his head, but all he got was a rose. A damn, sodding, red rose. It smelled of violets.

The bird took off. A student came round the corner and stopped dead in her tracks when she saw the Potions master struggling with an owl and a flower, having the most curious look on his face. "He looked as if he wasn't sure what to do kill the bird, rip off the petals of the flower, or bring it to his huge nose to smell it," the girl told her classmates only minutes later in a hushed voice, as the professor in question was bound to enter the classroom any second now. He was late, surprisingly enough. He was never late.

When Snape finally managed to leave the corridor, two more roses were already lying on his desk and soft snickers were filling his classroom. With gritted teeth, Snape managed to pick up one of the flowers, casting a deathly look at his pupils. It was as equally red and beautiful as the previous ones, and Snape was tempted to give detention to the whole class. He reined in his wrath in the last second only because they were first years. This wasn't their doing, he was certain of it, so no reason to punish them. Nevertheless, the instructions for the potion he wrote on the blackboard were dreadfully complicated.

The roses were vanished with a quick flick of his wand.

The students set to work, but peace lasted only about forty-five minutes. Then there was a knock on the door.

"Yes!" Snape snapped, and a young boy tipped his cauldron over at the harshness in his voice. Luckily, Snape didn't see it, as just in that moment the door opened and Hagrid strolled in.

The Potions master's jaws dropped, and he didn't notice that his students cleaned up the mess behind his back in order to avoid his anger. He didn't hear them giggle, either, as he was thunderstruck at the sight in front of him.

Hagrid's face was not to be seen. In his arms he held a whole rose bush or so it seemed, at least. "All for you, Professor," the game keeper huffed and puffed, dropping his bundle onto Snape's desk. "They come in by the minute," Hagrid said nervously. "Thought I'd better bring 'em ter ye, in case ye need 'em for yer potions."

Snape opened his mouth and closed it again. He was at a loss for words what on earth could he do to stop this nonsense? It wasn't even possible to get visibly annoyed about it it was Valentine's Day; it was a tradition to send roses and chocolate, and he should be happy that he was obviously the best-liked teacher in the school.

If only he could believe it. *Certainly the first time that I get tormented with flowers*, he thought, feeling surprisingly hurt at the sight of the bouquet. *It works well, I must admit.*

If he started to make a fuss about it, he realised, he would be the target not only of even more rose-deliveries, but of the pity of his colleagues as well. *They will think I am paranoid*, Snape thought distressed. A few roses had fallen to the floor. The sight of them, lying in the dust under his desk, was unpleasant. *And if I explode, those damn children will laugh their heads off.*

"Thank you, Hagrid," he therefore said, forcing his voice to sound friendly. His class held its breath. "I was indeed expecting them. I need them. But in case that there are any more of them, please bring them to my private rooms."

"Sure," Hagrid said, glad to get out of the dungeons in one piece. He had seen Snape's face at the breakfast table and knew that the kids were pulling his leg. Sighing with relief, the half-giant turned and left the classroom.

As soon as Hagrid was gone, Snape's thin smile was wiped off his pale lips. One wave was enough, and the flowers got shredded to little bits. "Just in case anyone considered it a good idea to make fun of me," he hissed. "And now back to work, or you will lose house-points!"

The students put their heads back to their task immediately. On all faces a grin could be seen.

The roses didn't stop getting delivered, and unfortunately Snape never caught anyone red-handed. He could only assume he knew! that Potter and Weasley were behind it, and certainly he saw them snorting during lunch as well as during classes whenever an owl made its way into the Great Hall or the classroom and inevitably headed towards the High Table and Snape's place. Actually, all Gryffindors were grinning as well as the Ravenclaws and the Hufflepuffs. Even his Slytherins couldn't hide their smiles at his grim expression. But Snape's hands were bound.

"I think he will never be able to stand as much as the picture of a rose after today," Ron whispered in Hermione's ear, but she just shot a hard glance at her former boyfriend.

"You are so massively silly, I wonder why I ever thought we could match," she hissed.

Ron hugged her. "Believe me, Lavender is really glad that you let me off the hook," he purred, but more than glad that the girl in question looked in the other direction. "And don't you tell me you feel sorry for Snape the look on his face whenever an owl comes in is simply priceless. As if he's constantly sucking on a lemon I guess I've never seen him so pissed off at the world."

"And you think he has earned it?" Hermione asked and looked at her friend sternly. "Because, you know, I think it's a nasty thing to do, especially to him. Without his help, we all would be dead, and Voldemort would still be ruling."

"Goodness, Hermione, drop it will you?" Harry said angrily. "It's just a little fun, and we were sending him roses, for Merlin's sake! That's hardly such a dreadful thing to do!"

Hermione got up and took her bag. "The whole school is laughing at him. They all know that those roses are nothing but a joke. And it's a cruel joke it's Valentine's day, and you make it crystal clear that no one cares about him," she stated. "And that *is* a dreadful thing to do."

It was evening, and Snape had been rarely so grateful that a day was over. After his last classes, he had swapped his patrol with Flitwick and had retired to his rooms. He had skipped dinner, hadn't even dared to summon a house-elf who knew if an owl would cling to one of Hogwarts little helpers. But then, he wasn't hungry anyway.

Now he sat in front of the fireplace and tried to figure out why he wasn't angry, but merely *sad I should have hexed those imbeciles into oblivion*, he thought and rubbed his eyes. *Or maybe I should hex myself into oblivion would be easier. And more effective.*

Someone knocked. A hesitant knock, so it wasn't Hagrid. And Snape doubted that it was an owl for one, they didn't knock but hooted, and of course there was no fun in annoying him without anyone to witness it. The students had stopped sending roses as soon as he had been safe behind his door.

He got up and opened. What a surprise a student.

"Miss Granger," Snape said and heard how tired his voice sounded where was his sarcasm when he needed it? "To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit? Would you like to have a little laugh? Do you have an owl hidden under your robes or a rose? Whatever it is, be done with it, and leave me in peace."

Not only tired, Snape realised, but bitter as well. How pathetic. But he found he didn't care. He was bitter. It had been a long day, he had been the constant target of a quite innocent little joke, and it had shown him in bright colours that the end of the war hadn't changed a thing. He was still the most hated teacher in the school; he was the one no one trusted and no one liked; he was the most worthy target for mischief. He had known this before, and usually this didn't even bother him, but today, as Albus had guessed correctly, it had got to him.

The girl *well, young woman, actually; she must be around nineteen*, stepped in and closed the door behind her. The boldness of her action made him raise a mocking eyebrow.

"You are aware that these are my rooms and that you are an intruder?" he asked, more surprised than annoyed. He couldn't help but wonder what she wanted. Since she had taken on an additional Potions project, he naturally had spent more time with her. He had had to admit, recently, that she was not only bright, but nice as well, and that she was able to keep her mouth shut when given a task complicated enough for her wits. Actually, he had been stupid enough to think that she wouldn't participate in mocking him until he had seen her laughing with her two friends this morning.

Now she stood before him and looked at him with her big brown eyes. "I'm here to apologise, Professor," she said hesitantly. "It's my fault that all of this happened, and I wanted to say sorry."

Snape crossed his arms over his chest. Surprisingly enough, her confession hurt. That she had participated in this... "I do not know what you are talking about, Miss Granger," he said coldly. "Getting roses is the sole purpose of Valentine's Day. Therefore, I should call this day a perfect success." A small nod of his head allowed her to have a look round, to let her eyes wander through his rooms; something she hadn't done so far.

Her eyes became even bigger when she saw the vase on the table behind him, filled with dozens of roses. The ones Hagrid had delivered directly to his private rooms.

"I thought you destroyed them all," she exclaimed, taking a step. "I know you hated this, today. They all made fun of you, and you know that. So... why did you keep those roses?"

Snape turned his back to her and looked at the offending plants. For some reason, his natural defence mechanism didn't work. Without thinking about it, he lowered his personal ward and allowed her to see a glimpse of the man behind the teacher. "Even I can't destroy beauty on a constant level," he said quietly. "Not even when I know that the beauty the rose is given only in order to mock and to hurt me."

"Goodness, I'm so sorry," she whispered and stepped next to him, admiring the roses. "I didn't know it would turn out like that, with Harry and Ron coming up with such a stupid idea. I only wanted to give you a Valentine's Day present. I choose a rose because I know that you don't like chocolate frogs and of course couldn't send you your favourite pralines that would have caused some talk, and I didn't want that. So I placed a rose order, guessing no one would notice one more owl amongst all the other deliveries. Actually, I even ordered it to arrive a lot earlier. You should have found the flower on your place before we all arrived for breakfast, but apparently the owls were too busy to keep their time schedule."

Snape snapped his head round and looked at her incredulously. "The first rose... it was from you?" He couldn't believe it. He remembered his faint hope that someone had sent it who actually meant it as a present, not as a joke.

She smiled ruefully. "Of course. What did you think that I could work with you on a regular basis and then forget to give you a Valentine?"

"I burnt it to ashes," he said weakly. He couldn't even remember if he had ever got a Valentine. That he had destroyed that one... no, he didn't like to contemplate that.

"I know, and I really don't blame you, given the circumstances," Hermione answered. "And that's why I brought you another one." She snapped her fingers and picked a rose out of the air. Quite a nice little bit of magic as she had performed it silently as well as wandlessly.

She held it out to him. "I got that from my dad's greenhouse," Hermione said softly. "He has a knack for roses, and this one was the nicest I could find. I know you like roses; I know you like that specific colour. Happy Valentine's Day, Professor Snape."

The rose she held in her slender fingers wasn't red, but deep, bright orange, mixed with shades of light red and even a bit of dark yellow here and there. It nearly shimmered in the candle-lit darkness of his rooms. It didn't have a long stalk; it wasn't straight; it had a massive amount of little, sharp thorns. Unlike the other roses, it was completely natural, and it was nearly fully blossomed. It smelled of summer and meadows and freedom, and it was the most beautiful rose he had ever seen in his godsforsaken life.

Like a sleepwalker, Snape took the rose and brushed the girl's fingertips when he did so. This time, he did smell it, and he didn't care that the girl would see the smile on his face when he inhaled the delicate, wonderful fragrance.

It took him a while before he had control over his voice again. Finally, he remembered Hermione still standing near him. Looking down into her open, friendly face he said, "Thank you, Miss Granger."

"It was my pleasure, Professor," she replied and left his rooms, closing the door behind her silently.

A/N: There is a sequel to this story, named "Unkissed".