

A Toast to the Newly-Weds

by Rhea Silvia

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"You're late." The voice is bored and insouciant and one he really does not want to hear. Not now.

But he turns and smirks because he cannot afford to have his masks slip in front of pretty boy Black. "I was under the impression that the pub was still open." He gestures at a passing waitress.

Black intercepts her. "A bottle of whisky for me and my..." pauses, rakes him with knowing eyes, **friend** here. The usual table." She smiles at him and leaves. Black puts what looks like a companionable arm around his shoulders and steers him to the table in the corner farthest from the door. "I'd thought you'd run in, out of breath, when the Muggle priest asked anyone who had objections to speak up." Grins. "Such a quaint little custom. Now, I guess you'll have to hold your peace." He hears it for the warning it is and keeps his eyes on Black's face. Even then, he almost misses the shadow that crosses it. "Pity. I could have done with the amusement. Never attended such a routine wedding. Went off like clockwork, it did. Right down to the happy couple departing." Looks at his watch. "He's probably screwing her brains out right now. Or not. Lils is far too reasonable to lose her mind for James. Even if he is as good a lay as he wants me to think." Black reaches for the bottle, fills both glasses, then empties his. "Please don't give me that affronted look. I've known for ages that you want her."

"It's amusing," he retorts, gripping the glass hard so his fingers won't shake visibly, "how much you like thinking of Potter in bed. Makes one wonder."

Black grins wider, tips his chair forward on the front legs and leans in. "Snivellus, you're losing your touch if you think that's going to get me angry. James and I being a couple is ancient history on the gossip circuits. The newest story is that I'm shackled up with Remus. There are even some," he lowers his voice to a confidential whisper, "who say I'm bedding you. But that," Black says, filling his glass again, "is something I'd need to be heavily drunk to even think about." He watches, mildly amused, as Black smiles at him, holds up the glass in a toast and knocks it back. "Don't worry. Take a lot more than this to get me drunk."

"Gratifying as it is to be treated as a substitute for your mindless bed mates, Black, I'm afraid I must decline the honour." He smirks. "But perhaps that hasn't always mattered to you, has it?"

He knows he's hit the mark when Black pales and the smile slides off his face. "You shouldn't believe everything Bellatrix tells you," he says, then forces the smile back. "For instance, if you ask who gave her the scar on her right hip, she'll tell you her Lord wants all others to know she belongs to him." He arches his eyebrows. Black laughs, a harsh humourless bark. "She hasn't slept with you yet? No, I don't suppose she has. After all," the searching look again, "Bella's always had a weakness for beauty." Why, by all the gods, did he have to meet Black today? To have to pretend to care about these petty barbs... "She looked lovely today." Black's voice has quietened, and he supposes the man's trying to be kind, but this is almost worse than the obscene ribaldry. "You have good taste. Unfortunately for you, she has better, Snivellus."

It is on the tip of his tongue to say, "She always does," but the grave grey eyes watching him will be quick to store that away as ammunition. "Indeed. Is he still able to get

his feet off the pedestal you have him on?"

Black smiles, ignoring him. "You're a fool, Snivellus. You should have attended the wedding." Keeps watching him, index finger circling the rim of his glass. "Lily wanted you there to give her away." For a moment, Black looks almost as though he can see the poignant irony of it, but the moment passes. "James wasn't too happy about it but he agreed."

"Kind of him." It's more than he'd have expected from Potter, but the man has got all he wants and can afford to throw him a scrap.

"You want to sleep with his wife," Black says, no heat or accusation behind the statement. "**It's** kind. More than I would have done, or you."

All too probable, because if he had obtained Lily's favour, he'd have guarded her like a miser's treasure, and Black... he has seen what lengths the man's kin will go to in order to keep their own. "Did he send you here?"

"I'm not his lackey, Snivellus. This is a coincidence. I wasn't aware you favoured this establishment. I'd thought it'd be some dingy hole in the wall in Knockturn Alley."

"Why do all Gryffindors think in such stereotypes?"

"This from one of a crowd that runs around in hoods killing people because their parents cannot wave a wand?" Black grips his left forearm before he can move, but does not push back the sleeve. "You really are a fool, Snape."

"Are you going to tell me I should renounce my evil ways and turn to the side of goodness?" he asks sardonically.

"I'm telling you," Black says, releasing his arm, "that I love Lily very much, and she would not want your blood staining her husband's hands. And," he adds, almost as an afterthought, "I'll kill you if it's his staining yours."

"Your devotion to Potter is touching," he sneers. "Do you also lick his boots?"

"Sometimes," Black says; his attention has strayed to the door. "It's been lovely talking to you, Snivellus. You're a scintillating conversationist." He can almost see the formula being drilled into Black as a child. "But my **friend** has arrived and I've to go **talk** to her."

The pub is a Muggle one, so he doesn't notice the note Black leaves on the table till the waitress comes back to take the money he's left. When she hands it to him, he's half-tempted to throw it away unread. But it could be something Black let fall by mistake, something important. So he opens it, out on the street.

Lily's voice envelops him, telling him to meet her on Wednesday, near a bookshop in Soho run by a Mr. Fell, promising to come alone. He doesn't recognise the spell, though it's clearly a modification of the Howler. But the voice was low, and the paper, which has her handwriting on it, doesn't disintegrate.

He doesn't go, of course. He's just begun to gain the trust of the Dark Lord's inner circle. It wouldn't be hard to fake Lily's handwriting, and there are spells to imitate the sound of a person's voice. It could all too easily be a trap or a trick. So he doesn't go, makes it a point, in fact, to be in the company of other Death Eaters on the day.

The note he preserves.