

Best Man

by RedOrchid

The Wizarding World gathers for a high profile wedding, and someone else is in love with the dark, sarcastic groom. AU on several levels.

Best Man

Chapter 1 of 1

The Wizarding World gathers for a high profile wedding, and someone else is in love with the dark, sarcastic groom. AU on several levels.

A/N: This started out as a parody, but rather abruptly left that genre when the plot turned serious rather than funny. So now it's kind of angsty, but hopefully in a good way. :-)

Best Man

The chapel was buzzing as old friends and new acquaintances made their way into the pews. White roses were everywhere, filling the space with their delicate fragrance. Magical fountains bubbled with cool champagne and hundreds of live fairies glittered on every surface. In a small adjacent chamber, Hermione Granger took a deep breath and turned towards the man next to her with a tense smile on her face.

"Severus, I'm not sure I can do this," she said nervously, raising her hands to smooth the front of his dress robes. "Last night..." The man before her visibly stiffened.

"Last night didn't happen," he said resolutely, summoning a single white rose and gently charming it to the front of his robes. "There was enough alcohol to sink a ship involved. A moment of temporary insanity." He took one of her hands in his, stroking it gently in supplication. "Please, Hermione, we both know I'm not queer...as a matter of fact, I'm convinced neither of us are...so let's not make any more of it than it was."

"And what was it?" She noticed her voice trembling slightly and tried to force her nerves to calm down. "It..." She swallowed hard and forced the rest of the sentence out. "It didn't seem like a drunken mistake."

"Well, it was!" Severus snapped, immediately taking several deep breaths to counter the outburst. "Please forgive me, I didn't mean to..*Shit!*" He turned from her, busying himself with picking up the wreath of flowers lying on a nearby table and fastening it gently into her curly hair. "We can't do this now. The ceremony is about to start. Can we just please go out there, smile and get this wedding underway?"

"But then it will be too late!" she whispered urgently, trying to ignore the soft notes of the string quartet that were starting up in the background.

"Too late for what?" he demanded, eyes suddenly boring into her with a coolness she recognised from before she got to really know him...before she came to love him. "I *want* to get married today. A drunken... *shag*," he flinched slightly at the word, "does not mean that I don't love...that I don't want to spend the rest of my life with..." He pinched his nose and took a deep breath before facing her again, his face pale with serious intent.

"You know I love you, Hermione," he said, taking her chin in his hand and tilting her face up towards him. "But I can't let you talk us both into a frenzied mess because of

this. Last night was an isolated event. It was not who I am. It was *not* a reflection of what I truly want. Now where is your bouquet?"

"Right here," a deep voice answered from behind them, startling them both. Severus watched Hermione's face stiffen and pale as Lucius approached them, holding out a small bundle of roses to her. A warm, steady hand came to rest on his shoulder, and pale, grey eyes met his with a carefully neutral expression. "Is everything alright?"

"Yes," he confirmed, the word breaking from his lips like a simple breath. "Yes, everything is fine. Hermione?" He looked back at her, black eyes filled with questions, demands and a silent plea for her to let the matter between them drop and join him in celebration. She hesitated, images mixing together as they flashed before his eyes. Severus's hands coming up to tangle in her hair, his breath hot in her ear and his lips wet along the column of her throat. And then those same hands, wrapped intimately in the blond strands of the man standing next to him, lips slightly bruised from kissing and a look of pure lust shared between them, spanning out as a force field across the room. Lucius's arms around him, and then *her* arms around him; Lucius chest against his as they kissed passionately in the middle of the dance floor, and her chest brushing the same one gently, sparks igniting from the way the coarse hairs would stimulate her aching breasts... Closing her eyes, she tried to stop her head from spinning, tried to shut out the confusing pictures and focus on where she was, on what she wanted. She knew she loved Severus, but was it the right kind of love? The love required to stand next to him in the chapel today, two steps away from Lucius, and complete her part without hesitation? He had made it very clear that he wanted to go through with the wedding, that last night's drunken haze hadn't changed how he felt about her...or Lucius...in the slightest. Could she do it, knowing what she did? Having seen him...? Opening her eyes, she looked at the two men in front of her, forced a smile to her lips and accepted the roses from Lucius's hand.

"I'm fine. Let's go inside."

"Thank you," Severus whispered, placing a quick kiss on her hand before linking arms with Lucius and stepping through the doors. The look of happiness on his normally so guarded face made something ache inside of her. The music played up, and she followed through after them, looking around for another blond head among the many guests inside.

"You look beautiful," Draco murmured, stepping up to stand next to her and putting her hand through the crook of his arm. "If you weren't a girl, I'd be quite besotted."

A genuine smile spread on her face, and she gave him a quick peck on the cheek, winking at the man in the front row who, even now, couldn't seem to take his eyes off her handsome escort. "Perhaps it is lucky that I am a girl then," she whispered. "Harry would hex me to within an inch of my life if I so much as looked at you the wrong way."

"Well, he *does* love me more than life itself," Draco drawled, throwing a quick smile at his husband. "Now, I believe they are waiting for us. Shall we?"

Suddenly cold with apprehension and not trusting her voice enough to speak, she simply nodded and let Draco lead her down the aisle. Keeping her gaze away from the two men in front of her, she looked to the guests, smiled and nodded. There were Dean and Seamus, with Neville and Blaise Zabini next to them; Luna and Ginny, who waved at her; the Hogwarts professors, McGonagall and Sinistra, and little Professor Flitwick, leaning on Professor Vector for balance as he levitated himself up for a better view. Parvati and Lavender, Remus and Sirius, Fred, George and Lee Jordan...the scandalous three...several people from the Ministry, and, finally, Fleur and Narcissa, standing next to a lonely Ron, who was keeping Harry company in the front row.

Coming to a stop at the end of the aisle, Draco gave her a small wink and stepped to the left, releasing her arm so that she could go right. She forced herself to look up at Severus, who gave her a thin smile before turning his attention to the Ministry official. Clutching her bouquet almost painfully tight in her hands, she focused on her breathing as the ceremony began.

"Dearly beloved. We are gathered here today, in the presence of friends and family, to join together these men in holy matrimony..."

A strange sort of pain circled her as she looked on, as she watched her best friend and close colleague pledge his faith to the man he loved.

"I, Severus Snape, take thee, Lucius Malfoy, to be my lawful, wedded husband..."

I'm in love with him, she realised, pain intensifying as the blond man gave his vows in turn, pure sincerity in his eyes/*m in love with Severus...in love with aman...and I'm witnessing his wedding.*

"The rings, please."

She pulled the small, velvet box from her pocket automatically, handing it over. The pain increased, throbbing within her as the platinum bands slid into place on strong, beautiful fingers.

Pathetic, Hermione, that's what you are, she told herself, biting down on her lip to keep from crying as the Ministry official read his blessings over the newly bound couple. *Oh, and apparently queer as well. Won't your girlfriend be happy about that?* Turning her head a little, she spotted Gabrielle from across the room, breathtakingly pretty in pale gold robes. *What is happening to me?*

The first tear fell to thundering applause, and she wiped it away with the lace of her short glove. Thankfully, many of the guests were sniffing as well, so no one seemed to notice that the witness of honour was in quite a state. The music began to play, and she joined hands with Draco once more to walk back down along the aisle behind the happy couple. Smiling had never before been so difficult.

"Are you alright?"

The words were soft in her ear and somehow cut short the automatic, reassuring response that came to tip of her tongue. She looked up at Ron, meeting his deep blue eyes, filled with naked sympathy.

"Not really."

"I suspected as much. Come on and take a little stroll with me. You look as though you could use a shoulder to cry on, and you probably don't want to do it in front of all these people. Not to mention the *Daily Prophet* cameras over there." He indicated the other end of the room, where three photographers and two journalists were in the middle of documenting what had been called "the wedding of the decade" in every paper over the last several months. It wasn't every day the Assistant Chief Mugwump of the Wizengamot married the Department of Mysteries' Head of Experimental Research. Ron took her arm and guided her out of the reception hall and into the grounds, steering her towards Malfoy Manor's rather impressive rose garden. On their way, they passed several couples, kissing softly in the moonlight or simply strolling together, hand in hand. She recognised Peter and Lucas from the Department of Mysteries and Susan and Hannah from the Auror Department, among others. Finally, Ron chose a small bench by one of the fountains and pulled her down to sit next to him.

"It's not fair, you know," he said, pulling her out of her frozen state and turning her attention to where Lisa Hobbs (Assistant Scribe to the Wizengamot) and her third wife sat cuddled together some distance away. "Normal couples can cuddle and kiss in public as much as they like, but every time I'm on a date, people stare at me. If they're nice, that is." He shuddered in disgust, and Hermione felt a pang of sympathy mixed with fear. She remembered the headlines from a few years back, how the papers had revelled in the scandal of an up-and-coming Auror (from a respected, if not very rich, family at that) revealing himself to be a *heterosexual* (or a 'queer' as most wizards and witches still used to call it). She also remembered how she had reacted...with disbelief and wariness, some part of her mind wondering what would happen to their friendship now and if he secretly fancied her. Shame still rose within her when she thought back on it now.

"So," Ron said, breaking the long silence that had spread out between them. "Wanna talk about it?" She shook her head.

"I wouldn't know what to say. Or where to start for that matter."

"Well," he prodded, taking one of her hands in his. "Why don't you start with how long you have been in love with Severus Snape?"

The words struck her like tiny stingers, and she reflexively jerked back. He kept a firm hold of her hand, stopping her from running, trailing his thumb across the back of it in large, soothing circles. She swallowed.

"It doesn't matter. He's married now."

"Does he know?"

"God, I hope not," she muttered, the words followed almost directly by a choking sob. "Yes. I've as good as told him last night, and he's not stupid."

"What happened last night?" Ron asked gently, holding out a white handkerchief for the tears that were suddenly running down her face.

"We...I...well, I practically jumped him," she whispered, mortified. "We were so drunk and he was staying at my place...the whole 'last night alone before the wedding' and all that rot...and I don't know. I don't know what happened. One second, he's helping me navigate across the sitting room, and the next we're naked on the floor. You know... *doing things*." The last sentence was accompanied with a massive flush of her cheeks. Ron chuckled.

"Yeah, I do know," he said conspiratorially. "I sleep with girls, remember?"

"Well, so did I until yesterday," she retorted, annoyed with his amused tone of voice. "God, what am I going to tell Gabrielle?"

"That depends," Ron said, serious now. "Is Snape a passing fancy or something deeper? And is he a one-time exception or are you attracted to men on a more regular basis?" Hermione looked up at him, a haunted, pleading look in her tear-filled eyes.

"I just want to be normal, Ron," she said. "I don't want to fight for my right to love, stand on the barricades like you do, not giving a fag about what people might think. I just want to have a normal, conventional, so-unoriginal-it-bores-you-to-tears kind of marriage with a nice girl that I love. Please, can't I have that?"

"Not if it means that you have to deny who you are," Ron replied. "If you actually do 'swing the other way' as people call it, suppressing it will only make you miserable. And it's not fair to Gabrielle."

"How do I make that call?" she asked, shaking her head sadly. "How do I know if I'm... you know?"

"How do you know if you're gay?" Ron said bluntly, causing her to flinch again. "You just do. The answer is already there, it's just a question of not hiding from it, no matter what it might be." He raised his hand and gently wiped at her smeared make-up with a second handkerchief. "Now, dry your tears and follow me inside. Hang with Harry and me for a while until you're able to look at Snape without that heartbreaking expression on your face, and then we'll take it from there, okay?" She nodded and got to her feet, accepting his arm on her waist as he led her back to the house. Steps away from the French doors, she stopped, trying to make out her reflection in the stained glass.

"How do I look?" Ron smiled...a thin, wistful version of his usual grin that she doubted ever having seen before.

"You're gorgeous," he said, leaning in to caress her gently as he pushed a stray curl out of her face. As they stepped through the doors, he added, voice low and close to her ear, "If you do decide to try walking on my side of the street, I call it right now to be the first bloke to take you out for a drink."

There shouldn't have been a small pang of excitement at his words, nor should they have filled her with calm rather than fear and confusion. A small smile tricked its way unto her lips as they made their way across the room.

"It's a date."

THE END

A/N: I never, ever, for the life of me thought that I would ever ship Ron and Hermione. I just did, and I still can't believe it. Must be shock. :-) The format of this story is greatly inspired by a book called *Egalia's Daughters*, which is a gender reversal universe (i.e. the women have most of the power, the men stay at home with the kids, young men are afraid to walk home alone at night for fear of being raped by gangs of girls, men wear tight clothes and penis holders and so on) and heavy on word play ('girlkind' instead of 'mankind' and so on). The story itself is a response to one of my own art prompts for the SS/HG exchange and a general outlet of the frustration I feel whenever I debate "conservative" people on American forums. :-)

Anyway, hope you liked. Please review!