

Tough Little Boys, Tougher Little Girls

by luvshcharlie

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One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Tough Little Boys, Tougher Little Girls

~♥

"Courage, sacrifice, determination, commitment, toughness, heart, talent, guts. That's what little girls are made of; the hell with sugar and spice."- Anonymous

~♥

Their young voices carried on the breeze and drifted up to where Charlie sat with Bill, Molly and Arthur outside the Burrow.

"I am telling my Papa and you're going to be in big trouble, mister." Victoire's voice was angry, just a hint of her mother's French accent in her words.

"I will not. It was all your fault anyway." Teddy's voice followed.

"My fault? My fault? You...you...oh, you just..."

There was a squeal of anger, a loud 'thud' and equally loud protests as the four adults took off at a jog towards the pond.

"Get 'er off," screeched Teddy, using his forearms to shield his face from the little blonde's clenched fists, as best he could.

Charlie froze at the sight of his small niece straddling the boy two years her senior as her fists did their best to pummel his face. And, to give credit where due, she wasn't doing half bad.

"Charlie, help me out here," Bill said, grabbing his six-year-old daughter around the waist and pulling her off the struggling boy beneath her.

It was all too familiar; it cut too deeply, and the similarities were too much. He had been here before. He had lived this so long ago, and before he could stop himself, he was back there again.

~♥

It was June 1979, and he and Nymph were six years old. The first War was raging around them, only they were too blissfully young and ignorant to realise it. An impromptu Order meeting had caused her parents to come to the Burrow that day.

He was excited to see her again. Nymph wasn't like the other girls who would sometimes accompany their parents to meetings. She didn't want to play tea party or dolls or some other stupid girly game.

Not Nymph.

There were times that Charlie forgot she was a girl at all... or at least he had back then. She wasn't afraid when he flew her on his toy broom at breakneck speed through the orchard. She could climb to the top of the apple trees before Charlie could get to the halfway point, though when Bill was around she slowed down and let Charlie get there first sometimes. Oh, how he had loved her for that. When a spider got too close, she squished it without a second thought, and never once teased him for being afraid of them. Brilliant! She was simply brilliant! She was the coolest girl Charlie had ever met. Even Bill thought so, and he was two whole years older than them. If an eight year old thought she was cool, well, she must be.

That afternoon was hot and humid as he and Nymph searched for grindylows down by the pond. Bill swore he had seen some a few days prior.

"Do ya see any of 'em?" Charlie whispered as they swung out again over the pond, each standing on a side of the old, enchanted tire swing.

"No, but Charlie--?"

"What?" He was looking at the water's surface intently, studying it for the slightest sign of abnormality.

"I don't know what grindylows look like." She kept her voice at a whisper, following his lead.

"Me either." Charlie whispered back.

"So how are we gonna know if we find one?" she asked, frustrated.

"Because," Charlie said, "it'll be the only thing we haven't seen before, won't it?"

She nodded at his logic and turned her attention back to the water's surface as the enchanted swing remained in motion. The sun grew hotter as they watched, the sweat trickling down their backs and necks.

"Charlie?"

"Hm?"

"Do you think there are lots of grindylows in the pond?"

"Bill said he saw zillions," Charlie said, his voice becoming excited and his hands animated as he talked...too animated, in fact. His sweaty hands lost their grasp on the rope, and the next thing he knew he was falling backwards into the cold water.

When Charlie surfaced, she was laughing at him. There was nothing that angered a six-year-old boy quite like being laughed at by a girl. Well, he would show her. Charlie swam towards the bank, and halfway there he began to flail about in the water. "They've got me, Nymph. The grindylows..." He sank beneath the water until he heard the splash that indicated she had jumped in, and he swam for the bank once more. He was standing at the pond's edge dripping wet when she surfaced squealing his name and frantically looking around for him.

When she spotted him standing on the bank, laughing and pointing at her, she slammed her hands down on the water then started toward him. She was livid. In her anger, her hair was changing so quickly that it was a blur of rainbow colours. Charlie took off at a run toward the Burrow with Tonks on his heels. He was just beyond her reach and close enough to the back door to feel certain that he would make it before she caught him.

Overconfident, he turned to stick his tongue out at her, and his foot found the hole he had forgotten about digging the day previous, and the ground was rising quickly up to meet him in the most unpleasant way: a blow that knocked the breath from his body. She was on him within seconds, leaping atop him and pummeling his chest with her small fists.

He heard the quick approach of footsteps, and the shouts from her father of 'Dora, get off him. Let him up.'

He felt her being tugged from him, and his own father's hands pulling him to stand. They were both warned to play nicely before their fathers headed back off to the meeting. He was humiliated and furious, and those emotions near doubled at hearing Bill snigger behind him. "You're a freak, you know that?" Charlie screamed at her in an attempt to regain some of his dignity. It was particularly important now that Bill was watching. He couldn't let her show him up in front of his older brother. He would never live that down.

He really should have known better.

She dove at him, her head slamming into his stomach and knocking him to the ground. "Take it back," she screeched as her fists flailed wildly. "You take it back, Charlie Weasley." Her fist connected soundly with his jaw and he saw stars.

"What has gotten into the two of you today?" Ted Tonks' voice was irritated. "Honestly, Dora, what are you--?" His words trailed off when she launched herself at him and buried her face in his shirt to hide her tears.

"He called me a freak," she gasped out between sobs.

"Charlie." His father turned him and forced his face up to look at him. "Why would you say something like that? I think you owe Dora an apology."

If Bill hadn't been watching, Charlie would have obliged. In fact, he would have probably begged Nymph to forgive him. Instead, he looked down and refused to speak. He would never forget the sound of her crying as he watched Nymph's father lift her in his arms and carry her inside.

It was the first of many tears she had shed over him.

~♥

Arthur's hand touched his shoulder. "You okay, son?"

"Dad, um... sorry, I was just..."

Arthur nodded, smiling, and for the first time Charlie realised that all eyes in the garden were on him.

Bill clapped Teddy on the shoulder. "Come on, Teddy. Let's give Charlie a minute, okay?"

Teddy knocked his hand away. He stood himself in front of Charlie and cocked his head, studying the older man intently, as if trying to gauge whether he should follow Bill or if Charlie might need him. He was Nymph in miniature, Charlie thought, laughing at the way he cocked his head. He was so like his mother in physical attributes, but so much like his father in his ability to read people.

Charlie winked at him, and the boy's face broke into a beaming smile. And once again, Charlie couldn't help but think of her. How many times had he winked at Nymph and garnered that same response? With the reassurance that Charlie didn't need him, he skipped off happily after Bill, he and Victoire chattering as though nothing had ever been amiss between them.

When they had gone, Charlie sank down onto the grass and dropped his head into his hands.

"It's hard, huh?" asked Arthur, sitting down beside him and removing his glasses, cleaning them with the sleeve of his robe.

"Mm," Charlie said without raising his head.

"Reliving what might have been isn't going to make it so, Charlie."

A lecture was the last thing he needed right now. "Dad, I..."

His father cut off his words. "Yet, it's impossible to look at them, Teddy and Victoire, and not see the two of you... the way you were; the way you might have been; to ask yourself 'if only'...."

"I just hope..."

"...that it will all be different for them. I know, Charlie. So do I. Teddy is as destined for Victoire as you were for his mother."

"But, Dad, we didn't..."

"What's meant to be, Charlie, and what is to become, sadly aren't always one and the same."

He knew that all too well. "I don't remember a time I didn't love her, Dad."

"I suspect there wasn't one, nor do I suspect there will be one in the future."

"Why didn't I see it when I could have fixed it and made things work between us?"

"Because, Charlie, even when the times are darkest, it is the nature of men to assume that we will have our tomorrow."

There was a squeal from the house that reached their ears, followed by a loud crash and a French-tinged, "You give that back this instant."

"Gotta catch me if you want it."

"When I catch you...."

"I think," said Arthur, chuckling, "she will catch him in the end. However, until then, I think we'd best go keep your mother from strangling the lot of them."

Charlie chuckled as well. "Yeah, it'd be a shame to end another love story too soon."

"That it would," Arthur said, clapping him on the back.

They both laughed when a turquoise head came flying around the corner on a toy broom holding Victoire's favorite plush Hippogriff over his head, taunting the little girl who flew her own toy broom close behind him, silver-blond hair trailing after her.

As he watched them zoom off toward the orchard, it was two very different children he heard in his mind giggling and shouting taunts of "Catch me, if you can."

History, Charlie hoped, didn't always repeat itself. This time, he thought, perhaps there was a chance at a happy ending.

Fin.