

Understanding

by karelia

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Ownership means nothing. Love means everything.

Snape stepped out onto the balcony and breathed air that was palpably cleaner than in the English countryside and distinctly lacked humidity. He glanced across the landscape. *Such a difference from England... Leave it to Narcissa and Lucius to choose the most fantastic places for their anniversaries...* Last year it had been Giza; the year before, Ayers Rock. And before that... he couldn't remember.

The clock in his room—surprisingly corny and oddly out of place amongst the adobe-style design—cuckooed the full hour. Five o'clock. His lips curled upward when he heard the knock at the door, and he moved to open it. He had never paid attention to time differences—or his own birthday—but someone apparently still did.

"Happy Birthday, Severus," Narcissa said softly and entered when he stepped aside. "Is it warm enough to sit on the balcony?"

"It's as warm as a nice summer's day back home." He motioned for her to step outside and relieved her of the bottle she carried. "I'll get glasses."

"Cheers!" Narcissa toasted him. "May this be a happy one for you."

"Thank you. And Happy Anniversary!"

Narcissa smiled. "Thirty-three years. Who would've thought..." Her face took on a dreamy expression as her eyes skimmed the ragged landscape that had turned red with the low sun.

"I've always wondered... What exactly made you choose Lucius? You could have had anyone."

She looked at him intently. "I didn't *want* anyone. I wanted to spend my life with Lucius. I wanted to be there for him, and I wanted him to be on my side."

At his blank look, she took a deep breath and continued. "Love is a wondrous thing, Severus. It can be the cause for joy, and it can even stop earthquakes. And wars. Yes, it stops wars." She met his eyes.

He inclined his head. "It does? Is that how the Dark Lord finally fell?" He didn't bother to hide his disbelief.

Narcissa smiled—not the polite smile reserved for the public, but a genuine, heartfelt smile. "You weren't there at the end, but yes, I believe so." She took a sip of the

champagne and returned to watching the landscape, which was now slowly changing from red to various hues of purple while the sky offered a spectacular display of blues and reds and pinks, suggesting even to Muggles that magic was reality.

"That day, when we were frantically searching for Draco and didn't know whether he was alive or not... I realised then that the Dark Lord's cause was a lost one, for it entirely ignored the fact that the universe is driven by love—unconditional love. Any actions that are based on greed rather than love will eventually fail. It was a true revelation, and I felt all the stronger for it. Lucius realised it soon after I did, and then we found Draco, alive. Not well—he'd just witnessed his friend's death—but he was alive, and with our love, he was able to heal."

Severus remembered rather clearly how he'd gained new respect for the Malfoys once he had reacquainted with them after he'd woken up from the snake-induced coma. He pondered her words, taking sips from his glass and watching the rocks turn black and the sky's hues darken. "Really?" He admitted to himself at that moment that he lacked the grasp she obviously had on the subject and realised with horror that he understood the concept of hate much better.

"Severus," she said softly. "If you comprehend hate, you'll comprehend love. It's a very small step."

He drained his glass and cursed his hands for shaking as he refilled it. "What do you mean?"

"You loved Lily. You hated Harry." She elaborated no further.

And suddenly, he comprehended, became conscious. It was indeed a revelation. He started when she spoke again.

"Make a go of it, Severus. What do you have to lose aside from maybe some male pride?" Then she had the audacity to smile at him, her genuine, sincere smile.

"Damn you, woman," he grumbled, but it was half-hearted at best.

His dreams were filled with spectacular colours of desert sunsets and the silhouette of a young woman sitting on flat red rock lining a stream, her hair blowing into her face from the constant desert breeze. She laughed and shook her head to stop her hair from tickling her. Then she cast a coy smile at him. The contrast of colours between rock and water was magnificent, as was his realisation that beauty came in many shapes.

He woke up refreshed and walked with a new spring in his step. He'd never looked forward to mingling with others, only ever did it as a favour to his oldest friends, but today, he at least did not dread the socialising aspect of attending the Malfoys' anniversary.

The day was filled with—was it love, perhaps?—presenting a truly deep blue sky in stark contrast to the sandy and lime and ballast shades of red the rocks brought forth.

Suddenly, dread overcame him as he remembered the last encounter near the Great Pyramid.

"Mrs Weasley..."

"Professor! How nice to see you. How are you?"

"That is none of your concern." He sneered and turned to leave to spend the remainder of the day with his usual miserable self.

He looked around and spotted her speaking to Draco. Passing the Potters with a curt nod, he tried not to hurry in too obvious a fashion. The band started playing a rumba, and he was slowed down by couples heading for the dance floor, crossing his path.

"Miss Granger... Draco."

"Severus! How are you?" Draco looked genuinely pleased to see him.

"Professor Snape." Her smile hid nothing. She was apprehensive.

"I'm fine, Draco, thank you." He turned to her and took a deep breath. "Perhaps a dance?"

Now her smile was dazzling. "I'd love to."

One dance turned into many, and eventually, they moved outside for some fresh air.

"It's so beautiful here," she said, her tone carrying a wistful note to it. "So peaceful."

"There is a stream, barely five minutes' walk from here. It's said to offer the most superlative sunset."

"Oh! Well, what are we waiting for?"

He took her hand, and when she didn't pull it away, his heart rejoiced, and every layer of hate experienced was purged.

Forever.

A/N: Written for AnnieTalbot's birthday.

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