

Charlotte Sometimes

by Jade_Orchid

Love isn't enough to make a marriage work.

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She wondered if he understood why she'd left.

The man could effortlessly recite the properties of a thousand different potions ingredients, but Hermione was willing to bet he'd had no idea of why she'd been so unhappy.

Well, she snorted in an eerie resemblance to her clueless husband. I bet he's got an idea now.

She stared at the white walls around her. They reminded her of the song she'd left for Severus. She hadn't intended to write on the library wall with lipstick. She still wasn't sure exactly what had possessed her to do it. She had planned to have a calm, rational discussion with him. Leaving while he was at Hogwarts had not been very Gryffindor; she knew that. But after three years of bitter disappointment and dashed hopes, she had realized she was bloody sick and tired of being so Gryffindor where he was concerned. What good had it done her during their marriage? None. None at all. So she'd decided to speak his language: the language of the snake, the scorpion, the spider. The language of betrayal. Before she knew it, she'd started inscribing the lyrics on the wall. And then she'd gotten the hell out of Dodge.

She sighed. He'd never actually betrayed her, per se. But his attitude about their marriage had wounded her just as surely as if he'd made some sort of assassin's attack on her. Except unlike the victim of an assassin, she had lived to despair every day. Her deaths had been slow, agonizing, and entirely mental and emotional. Nothing she'd done had ever seemed to move him, had ever made any difference. When her papers had arrived from the Ministry, she'd realized it was time to act.

And it wasn't as though she hadn't tried. She had been quiet (not that she was loud to begin with), unobtrusive, helpful. She'd given him love. And he'd wanted it: oh, yes. She'd worked hard to slake the thirst of his need for it. But he'd never returned the gestures, the words, the little gifts. He was a black hole that only wanted to devour the sweetness within her, never seeking to give her anything back. They were so out of balance the scales had no chance to do anything but collapse under the weight.

Well, to be fair, she wasn't always easy to live with. She angered quickly at times, and when he insulted her she never hesitated to give as good as she got. They'd both done their share of raising their voices. She'd stormed away more than once, tossing words over her shoulder, knowing she had to stop before it went too far. She remembered they had to live together, sleep together: even if he seemed to forget on occasion.

The sex was... well. Pretty amazing, considering how he felt about her. She'd hoped that their physical intimacy would pave the way for other areas. Ha! How could she be so smart and be so bloody stupid at the same time? He wasn't interested in snuggling, or meaningful conversations, or mornings spent together discussing the *Prophet* over a nice cuppa of Lady Grey. She, Hermione Jane Granger, one of only twenty-three students in the history of Hogwarts to get a perfect score on both O.W.L.'s and N.E.W.T.S., was a first-class idiot. All her romantic dinners had been eaten without comment on his part, except to tell her it wasn't bad. All her slinky lingerie (she'd even

worn green and black for him) had been taken off her in five seconds, with no comments that she was sexy, or pretty, or anything else. Her optimism had slowly devolved into wishful ness, and finally settled somewhere near despair.

She couldn't see a future for them. Correction: she saw a future, and it resembled the aftermath of an apocalypse.

(Earlier that day...)

After leaving Snape Manor, she went to Grimmauld Place, to Harry, Ginny, and Remus: she'd debated going to the Burrow, but she wasn't ready to recant the events leading up to the dénouement of her marriage to the passel of Weasleys just yet. She adored them, each and every one, especially Ron and Molly. But she knew the sort of comments she'd get. So Harry and Remus it was.

Remus wasn't there, and Ginny was sleeping, but Harry took one look at her and fixed her a cider liberally laced with brandy. She poured her heart out to him in a torrent of tearful recriminations. Her voice was as thick as beef stew, spiced with sadness and peppered with anger.

When she got to the part about writing the song on the wall, Harry laughed. She glowered at him, but he only laughed harder. "Well, Charlotte Sometimes: you wanted to make a statement: you bloody well made a statement," he chuckled.

"Charlotte Sometimes?" she asked, perplexed.

Harry smiled. "Don't tell me you know something as obscure as "I'm Cold" but not "Charlotte Sometimes?" It's one of the Cure's most beautiful songs."

"I've never heard it," she replied. "Why does it make you think of me?"

He went over to his stereo and started flipping through CD's. He'd made a few modifications to Grimmauld Place, with her, Remus and Dumbledore's help. Small muggle devices could be used without interacting adversely with magic: a fact she had appreciated every morning she'd awakened there before her marriage. Freshly brewed tea was something even magic couldn't quite duplicate and do justice to.

He placed a CD in and came to sit beside her again. She tilted her head, closed her eyes and listened to the words.

All the faces

All the voices blur

Change to one face

Change to one voice

Prepare yourself for bed

The light seems bright

And glares on white walls

All the sounds of charlotte sometimes

Into the night with charlotte sometimes

Night after night she lay alone in bed

Her eyes so open to the dark

The streets all looked so strange

They seemed so far away

But charlotte did not cry

The people seemed so close

Playing expressionless games

The people seemed so close

So many Other names

Sometimes I'm dreaming

Where all the other people dance

Sometimes I'm dreaming

Charlotte sometimes

Sometimes I'm dreaming

She hopes to open shadowed eyes

On a different world

Come to me scared princess

Charlotte sometimes

On that bleak track

(See the sun is gone again)

The tears were pouring down her face

She was crying and crying for a girl

Who died so many years before...

Sometimes I dream

Where all the people dance

Sometimes I dream

Charlotte sometimes

Charlotte sometimes crying for herself

Charlotte sometimes dreams a wall around herself

But it's always with love

With so much love it looks like

Everything else

Of charlotte sometimes

So far away

Glass sealed and pretty

Charlotte sometimes

Hermione felt the tears sliding warm and wet down her face.

Harry clicked the stereo off and gathered her into his arms.

"Where did I go wrong?" she asked, when she was capable of speech in-between sobs.

Hadn't she done everything she could think of? In typical Hermione fashion, when she first realized how bad things were, she'd bought books. Wizard books, muggle books: she'd kept them hidden in a chest with so many wards on it sometimes even she had to stop and think for a moment to remember them all. She'd devoured them in a desperate effort to sate her hunger for the knowledge of how to improve her marriage. The books had said to teach by example. Failure. Others said to be direct. Stony silence, or an inquiry as to why she felt it necessary for them to make changes. After all: *he* was content: surely *she* should be content as well.

"I want more than just contentment!" she'd shouted at him once. "I want to be happy!"

"If you think you'll be happy by me buying you flowers or telling you how nice you look, you're a fool," Severus had told her.

"Then I'm a fool," she'd replied sadly, furiously: "But at least I'm not afraid to try."

She'd stared at the tomes in accusation the next day. How dare books betray her! She could unlock the secrets of the universe through books, yet she couldn't enrich her relationship with her husband. She'd set them on fire in a moment of pure rage, and almost immediately felt ashamed and helpless. This wasn't like her. She was getting out of hand. She wasn't used to these feelings, she had no idea of how to cope with them. She withdrew into herself for days after that. When she emerged, she was tired and wanted to give up. There were no more rabbits in her hat: no more tricks up her sleeve. If he didn't care, neither would she.

Except that she still did.

Harry sighed. "Mione, sweet, it's not a case of you doing something, or not doing something. You tried, and he wanted no truck with it. He's a right bastard. End of story."

She sniffled into the handkerchief she'd conjured. "I love him, Harry. As stupid as it sounds."

"So you love him," Harry shrugged. "Love isn't enough to make a marriage work. You have to have respect, trust, openness, affection."

"Ho, the expert on wedded bliss now, are you?" she managed to laugh.

"No," he smiled. "But I know Ginny and I are happy, and those are the reasons why."

Hermione sighed. "I just... I hate knowing that I failed."

"Listen to me, Mione," Harry said firmly. "It's not all on you, do you hear me? He's as much to blame as you are, if you're so keen to blame yourself. You've told me how you tried. There's no shame in failure when you gave it your best shot."

"I hope I feel that way someday," she answered.

"You will. Now, listen. Why don't you have a kip, and later we'll all go to dinner, eh? It'll take your mind off things, to be around people that love you."

"All right," she agreed, wiping her red-rimmed eyes. "I am pretty beat now."

He'd taken her upstairs, to her old room, kissed her cheek.

So here she was, in her old room, like nothing had changed when in fact everything had changed. There was still light outside, though it was fading fast. Soon it would be night.

Her eyes so open to the dark

She yawned. Maybe she would feel better when she woke up. Maybe things wouldn't be as bleak as they seemed now.

She hopes to open shadowed eyes on a different world

Some day, she'd be able to go on with her life. Someday this futile love she felt for Severus would be gone.

But it's always with love

With so much love it looks like

Everything else

She could go back to being the way she was before. Before the marriage. Before Severus. The old Hermione. Free from this pain. Free to be a happy Know-It-All again.

Glass sealed and pretty

Charlotte sometimes