

Bystander

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The trials and tribulations of two people, as told by a third party.

One

Chapter 1 of 1

The trials and tribulations of two people, as told by a third party.

Disclaimer: Not mine.

A/N: This is my response to the *Insert Character Name Sees It All* Challenge on grangersnape100 at LJ. The challenge was meant for the character in the story, but putting the name here would give it away.

Points to your house if you can spot the Alan Rickman movie reference. As if...

Enjoy!

~*~*~*~

A light snow had just started to fall when I saw them. They were walking hand in hand through the courtyard, her small fingers entwined with his larger ones, his dark head tilted towards her riot of curls as if to better hear what she had to say. She looked content with the world, while he looked more nervous than I had ever seen him.

Strange, that...

Their cloaks billowed in the chilly breeze, the voluminous fabric of each one twisting and caressing the material of the other, like lovers too long parted.

As their wearers had most certainly been.

~*~*~*~

She had just recently returned from a month 'down under,' as it were something to do with her parents. My knowledge of that subject goes as far as knowing that she hasn't seen them since the end of the war, and that was nearly a decade ago.

Suffice it to say, it wasn't easy going for her companion while she was away. Her insistence that she do... whatever it was... on her own, had not been well met.

Watching from afar, as I often do, it dawned on me that he didn't think she was coming back.

Poor, miserable bastard.

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So, I had done my part, offering friendly words of advice as well as reassurance, the validity of which have been proven over the last ten years of my own marriage. I tried

to tell him that she would return because she loved him with all her heart, but that some things were simply best met alone.

He should understand *that* better than anyone.

He had given me his customary sneer and stormed off, but without a scathing retort.

A wry smile splits my face at the memory; perhaps I was getting through to the snarky git after all.

~*~*~*~

I continue to watch as they cross the courtyard to sit on the stone bench by the gently bubbling fountain, hands still entwined. The tiny flakes have started to turn into larger ones by now. The grounds will be covered by morning, and the students will be delighted.

Speaking of which, a glance towards the castle at the other end of the courtyard reveals several highly interested faces pressed eagerly against the overhead windows. I can only shake my head and smile; the grumpy, Slytherin Headmaster wooing the sweet, Gryffindor Charms Mistress had been the hot topic for years now.

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It started out innocent enough. She came to work at Hogwarts after everything was over, apprenticing with Flitwick for two years. Then the man retired and poof... new Charms Mistress. She was welcomed with open arms and quickly carved herself a comfortable place in the world.

When he came back, however, things were not nearly as squeaky clean. We those of us who had been in the Order did our best to be welcoming. I, for one, apologized most profusely for ever doubting him. To his credit, he simply glared and gave me a stiff nod.

Wonders will never cease.

~*~*~*~

It was the students who were the problem. Most had been here while he was Headmaster and were simply too young to understand why things played out like they had.

Minerva said, at the time, that it was simply everything catching up with him. He had been spinning so hard and so fast for so many different people over the last twenty years, that now that things were quieting down, he was losing his equilibrium.

It was utterly depressing to see this once fierce, ruthless, proud man start to withdraw into himself so quickly.

That was when Hermione stepped in.

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The first time I saw them or heard them, rather together was sometime around Christmas two years after the war. I was on night patrol for the week and had just headed up the Astronomy Tower stairs when I came upon them.

"But you must eventually eat *something!*" her whispered voice pleaded.

"For once in my life, I can and will do only as/please, you silly girl. Now leave off!" he spat angrily.

I winced at his tone, shaking my head at his harsh crassness with the girl. She was simply concerned for the poor man, after all.

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There was a moment of tense silence before I heard her say, "Fine," and start down the stairs. I quickly backed into a nearby alcove and watched as she swept by, robes and hair flying. Her expression, however, was one of hurt, not anger.

Curious.

Ever the dutiful one, I did have my patrol to finish, so I cautiously started up the winding stairs.

He was leaning against the parapet, looking gaunt and discomfited.

"Severus," I greeted as I topped the stairs.

"Out with the new, in with the old. Bloody Gryffindors..." he muttered under his breath.

I merely chuckled.

~*~*~*~

"Am I amusing?" he drawled as he continued to stare off over the grounds.

"Well, no... not really. I do find myself curious, however, as to why Miss Granger left so quickly, and with such apparently hurt feelings?" I leaned against the parapet opposite, crossing my arms and awaiting an answer.

None came, but his stony expression faltered for a moment, becoming something skirting on concern, before righting itself once more. Anyone who hadn't known the man for twenty-odd years would have missed it.

"Ah... so it's like that, is it?" I nodded quietly, understanding hitting me like a bludger.

~*~*~*~

His glare could have melted stone. "No, it is *not* Like That..." he snarled, walking away and running his hands through his hair. He leaned heavily against the iron railing of the stairs. "And it never will be..." he sighed, before descending into the darkness of the castle.

I simply stood there in shock, wondering at this turn of events. Shaking my head, I turned to look out into the night. My foot bumped against something on the floor, and I looked down to find that my shoe was wet.

I sniffed; it was soup.

The girl had brought him soup.

~*~*~*~

If not for the fact that my dear wife threatened my life and other pertinent bits... if I interfered, I would have stepped into the situation and tried to help them out. As it was, I

did nothing but become a concerned bystander.

I watched as Hermione struggled through her feelings for the man; I knew she was in love with him... or at least extremely attracted to him. I could literally smell her reaction whenever she saw him. Oh, get your minds out of the gutter... it wasn't like that. Well, *ahem*... not *always*... *sigh*...

But I digress...

~*~*~*~

What I mean to say is that she couldn't have been more obvious had she worn a sign that said **I Want To Marry Severus Snape and Have Lots of Sex and Babies**. Even the students, thick as some of them are, were picking up on things.

Severus, however, when he wasn't angry or brooding, just seemed confused. No matter how much he growled, threatened, ignored, or yelled at her, Hermione would simply smile sadly and leave him be, only to come back later, usually bearing food, a book, or some other trifle intended to simply make his day better.

~*~*~*~

Such things were usually left on his desk, as he was conveniently absent during most of her return visits. I know she brought them for two reasons: one, she had to pass my classroom to get to his office. My door is always open, literally, so I knew that each day she passed by several times with something in her hands, a look of stoic confidence on her face, and would pass by again a few minutes later wearing the most dejected, heartbroken look I've ever seen.

Sometimes there were even tears.

Still, I didn't dare interfere with their dance.

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Secondly, once a month I have an appointment with our dear Potions master. He supplies me with something I need, and I let him rail and complain to me about the state of his affairs or lack thereof for approximately thirty minutes before I am banished once again from his presence.

How this bit of comradeship came about, I have no idea, so don't ask.

It was during these times that I noted the extraneous amount of... items... littering the area around his desk.

Every single one of them had passed by my office door in these last few months.

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There were books lots of them, some old, some new; a package of high-quality, long-lasting raven quills, unopened; a bottle of Rivendale's Everlasting Headache Potion, unopened and highly expensive; a self-filling inkpot; a pair of black, wool gloves; an astoundingly lovely black cloak, still folded in its packing (Severus' old one had needed replacing for a while); and several uneaten trays of food.

I raised an eyebrow at his little collection.

He raised a rather more impressive one of his own and thrust my items at me before shoving me bodily from the room.

Ah, the bonds of friendship...

~*~*~*~

The first real sign that things were progressing was on a day very similar to this one. Snow was imminent, and the weather biting cold. Severus was in the courtyard, sitting on the bench and staring morosely into the fountain. He had no cloak, and from my vantage point I could tell he was cold. Yet, I didn't interfere.

Eventually, Hermione came striding slowly towards him, his long, wool cloak clasped nervously in her hands.

I saw his eyes flick to the side as he noticed her.

She slipped the cloak over his shoulders, her hands lingering while she waited.

~*~*~*~

I remember holding my breath as I waited for any acknowledgment on his part. After one of the longest minutes of my life, and I'm sure Hermione's as well, I heard him release a shaky breath and scoot to the side.

Hermione's eyes closed in a silent 'thank you' as she took a seat next to Severus on the bench.

I left then, not wanting to be caught eavesdropping and risk harming an already fragile new relationship, but not before I saw her tentatively reach out and cover his hand with hers.

And the rest... well, the rest is history.

~*~*~*~

So now they sat on the same bench, in front of the same fountain, in the same courtyard where their relationship had started almost eight years before. People who didn't see them every day wouldn't have noticed the changes that were readily apparent to the rest of us. Where once a confident, pretty young girl had sat, there was now a beautiful, confident woman, comfortable with herself, her magic, and her relationship with the man beside her.

She loved him, accepted him for who he was, and I knew that she intended to spend the rest of her life with him.

~*~*~*~

Severus had changed as well. Oh, he was still rude, sarcastic, and lethal, but without the edge that left the poor first-years thinking he actually *would* chop them up and use them for potions ingredients. The lines on his face had softened as well, and he no longer looked ill. Instead, he had a healthy... well, he would hex me for saying 'glow,' but it was; it was a healthy glow.

It was no doubt due to Hermione's insistence that he actually eat meals during the day and venture beyond the dungeons at least once a day as well, weather permitting.

~*~*~*~

A movement by the fountain brought me out of my reverie. I looked up to see Hermione fling her arms around Severus' neck, and for the first time in our long acquaintance, I saw the dour man... *smile*.

A quick glance up at the windows revealed looks of astonishment on many of the faces, mixed with the soppy, weepy look teenage girls (and some older ones as well...) get on their faces when a man...

My head snapped back to the couple on the bench.

No.

He didn't.

Not that I wouldn't be happy for them if he did, but...

~*~*~*~

Well, eight years was *certainly* enough time to think things through.

Just then, Hermione pulled back and took Severus' face in her hands, kissing him soundly. There was no denying the surprise on his face, nor the girlish squeals that came from the overhead windows.

There was also no denying the sparkle on Hermione's left hand as the sun momentarily broke through the clouds.

I can't believe it.

By Merlin, he finally did it.

I know I looked like a first-class fool with such a grin, but I couldn't help it.

The sodding fool proposed.

And Hermione had said yes.

~*~*~*~

And so it was that my dear wife found me, grinning like an idiot while standing in the cold.

"Remus?" she hissed, "what's going on?" Her eyes widened as she noticed the couple in the courtyard, their foreheads now pressed together. "Are you *interfering*?"

I turned to her and pressed a kiss to her forehead. "No, Dora... I'm not interfering." I glanced back at the courtyard, only to catch a glimpse of their cloaks disappearing back into the castle. I continued to smile after them. "They're doing just fine on their own."

"Oh, well alright then," she smiled.

Alright, indeed.

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