

Love Comes in Many Guises

by *karelia*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Not mine.

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"If I'm honest with myself—and that has become easier over the years—I've known from the start it would happen. When Lucius—*my* Lucius—began to visit Severus and his Mudblood more frequently, I expected him to return home one day and come clean. And now that he has, well, as I've known for many years, it was inevitable... and I don't find it within myself to throw a tantrum of jealousy, envy, or anything else unreasonable. What kind of wife would I be if I begrudged him such a gift?"

"A triad in our world isn't quite the same as in the Muggle world. In fact, it couldn't be more different. And it is never based on sexual attraction alone. Certainly, it helps if that plays a part, but by no means does it constitute a necessity. Lucius has been living with the guilt about her ever since she was captured and brought to the manor." She stopped herself. "Why am I telling you this? You know it as well as I do."

He remained silent, waiting for her to continue.

"When I look at the Muggle world these days, their TV programs, their newspapers, even many of their books, I'm under the impression they all live in a giant whorehouse. Sex and, worse, sex scandals, everywhere, and when one bigwig doesn't get what he wants, you can bet the next war is around the corner. What a sad way to live one's life.

"How grateful—how *blessed* I am—that my most weighty problem is that my husband is part of a triad and I am not. It's not as if he's been neglecting me—Lucius would never do that. We've always given each other plenty of space, and even more so when the war was finally over, as you well know.

"I know I am wholly within my rights to form my own triad; he would have no issues. But do I want to? No. One trait of the Black women is loyalty; it may be misplaced, as it was in Bella's case, but nobody can accuse us of being treacherous. I enjoy being with Lucius, but I simply cannot imagine the same level of intimacy with any other man.

"I could seduce the Granger girl—she'll always be the Mudblood in my mind, though I've learned not to refer to her as that—and neither Lucius nor Severus would mind, but do I want to? No. Being sexually involved with a woman has never held any attraction for me.

"Oh, goodness, where are my manners? Let me arrange for some more coffee. And I suppose some sandwiches won't go amiss either..." Narcissa rose abruptly to call a house-elf.

When she sat down again, a small smile played around her lips.

"Cissy—When was the last time you ate?" Kingsley asked, certain she was done with her soul searching. Perhaps there would be more, but for now he would focus on the

practical side of things.

She shrugged. "Who knows...?"

"Would you rather go out for lunch? I have no commitments until late afternoon." He knew her answer, but giving her options seemed important for the moment.

She shook her head. "No, thank you. I don't think I'm fit to be seen by the wizarding world today." Her smile was very small now.

"Don't be daft. You look as splendid and elegant as always, and you know it." His words at least coaxed the smile to reach her eyes once again, making him almost giddy.

He didn't remember when his periodic Thursday visits had turned into weekly occurrences; he didn't know when exactly they had become something sacred. Perhaps it had been when he realised her advice on wizarding politics was always sound and never self-serving; for someone so immensely private, her insight into the wizarding psyche was extraordinary. Perhaps it had been when she greeted him one morning, wrapped in a sea of blue and green silk, giving the impression of something ethereal from a world beyond rather than a woman of flesh and blood. It didn't matter. What mattered was that it had happened.

He watched with satisfaction as she ate the first sandwich rather quickly. *Good*. At least she'd overcome the stage of not being able to eat from shock. She would recover.

Of course she would. She was Narcissa.

For a fleeting moment, Kingsley hated Lucius. *How dare he hurt her?* Then he pulled himself together. *I'm the luckiest man alive. I have her friendship. Her trust. Her loyalty. I'm no less lucky than him.* It was time to plot how to shield her from any potential fallout. The not-so-kind press factions might descend on the new triad like vultures as they were wont to do, given how prominent those involved were.

He would make an exception to his usual routine for this year's annual Ministry ball.

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It was the most grandiose entrance in recent history. The Minister for Magic, together with the Snapes and the Malfoys, regally nodding in greeting as they passed the witches and wizards lucky enough to be here tonight, not only attracted the attention of the crowds but at the same time reinforced just why Kingsley was loved by the entire wizarding world. Making a Muggle-born and purebloods look like friends was a feat not just anyone could take credit for, not even ten years after the war's end, not even with the world knowing the Muggle-born was involved with one of the purebloods in more ways than one.

The *Daily Prophet* would wax lyrical about Narcissa's and Hermione's outfits for days to come and only mention casually the fact that after nearly a decade in office, the Minister had attended the ball for the first time in the company of friends. Not a single article alluded to the triad.

Seated around a table just large enough to accommodate the quintet—lest there be anyone with no manners trying to gatecrash the party—Kingsley raised his glass and looked from one friend to the next. "To lasting friendship."

When everyone had responded to his toast, he rose. "Lucius, I hope you don't mind me stealing your beautiful wife for the first dance."

If Lucius had objections, he did not raise them. Instead, he inclined his head. "Treat her well, Kingsley. Her feet are as precious to me as the rest of her."

"Never fear, my friend. Never fear," Kingsley murmured as he led Narcissa to the dance floor. She was a rhapsody celebrating meadows in May, blooms of wild flowers between long, thin stalks of grass that never stood a chance against the force the multitude of their colours brought about, her hair representing nothing less than the sun.

He spent much time on the dance floor that night. Lovely Hermione was a vision in all hues of purple in beautiful contrast to the bottle-green robes her husband was wearing, and she moved nearly as gracefully as Narcissa. Kingsley hoped Hermione and Narcissa would become friends some day; they would be good for each other.

The night came to an end. *Success*, Kingsley thought with satisfaction. Now he could look forward to next Thursday. In the meantime, he would revel in the universe so freely offering love in its many guises.

A/N: How do you come up with a gift that is meant to please five individuals, all kind, brilliant, compassionate, knowledgeable, blessed with a critical eye, and have I mentioned kind? One hates Lucius, two love him, one likes him, and one is kind of indifferent about him. A couple are die-hard SSHG shippers, the rest are open to various other pairings. None seem to oppose gen!fic; some simply don't read it. Anyway, this is the result of contemplating how to give something back to the awesome people who helped me with my exchange fic. You know who you are.

Many thanks to Voxy, aka peppermint, and sbrande for the alpha/beta/concrit, who jumped in without knowing what they let themselves into and who dropped everything they were doing to humour me.