

The Lady in the Corner

by beaweasley2

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Chapter 1 of 1

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She was sitting all alone in the corner of the room.

He stopped a moment, frozen, watching her.

She sat almost sideways on the chair, her back against the cold stone wall. A glass of wine was sitting on the small table in front of her, untouched. Along the edge of the tale, next to the glass on the smooth wooden surface, lay a single flower, a single perfect yellow rose. Her head was slightly bowed, and from where he stood watching her, he couldn't tell if she was staring at her hands lying in her lap or at the rose lying on the table.

Why she affected him, he didn't know, but he was transfixed staring at her. *She is pretty, in a casual sort of way* he observed. Her eye makeup had smudged, and her lipstick had been mostly dabbed off on a handkerchief she was balling up in her hands. *She's been crying or desperately trying not to cry and failing* Her clothes were fashionable navy robes worn over a black dress. She had a simple clip holding most of her thick auburn hair from her face, except one strand that fell across her cheek and the soft wisps of hair framing her face.

*She isn't much older than my brother, Bill* whom he was supposed to be meeting for lunch. *Or she might be younger than Bill is perhaps. Hard to tell with her face smudged like that.* But this witch reminded him of a girl from school he had dated briefly. In a way she also reminded him of Ginny.

*It is her posture, that look of feeling deflated, of having something torn away never to be replaced, of rejection or deep regret, a look of loss* His mind ran over several possibilities, each one a possible fit. He leaned against a pillar watching her, mesmerized, as he waited Bill's arrival.

The Leaky Cauldron was nearly empty of patrons, but those who were here were talking softly, everyone sitting in pairs or small groups *Everyone, but her.*

A friendly voice called his name from the other side of the room, and his gaze shifted away from her, resting on Bill's smiling face. He glanced back at her as he moved to walk over to join Bill, and as he passed her, a large single tear rolled down her cheek. His heart skipped a beat, and he fought the urge to reach out and wipe away that tear. Instead he walked on past to grip the hand of his brother and sit at an empty table.

Although he was facing his brother Bill, he found his attention slipping over to look at her. Years of practice at Hogwarts, keeping an eye on the professors while also preparing some mischief with his twin, honed his skills at hiding his lack of attention. He watched her now, his mind wondering what had happened to make her so sad, as Bill talked about work and family.

As he ordered his lunch from Tom, he paused, considering her. From his pocket he pulled out a small shiny ball, a Weasleys' Whirl Weezer. Handing it to the barman, he asked Tom to drop it on her table on his way past her as he returned to the bar. Tom looked doubtfully at the opaline little ball, hesitantly considering the request. Tom gave him a hard, questioning look until he handed the barkeep an extra few Knuts. "What damage will it do?" he asked suspiciously.

"Makes lots of sparkles and spins a bit, then it bounces a few times, and spins and sparkles all over again, and again, and again. It won't do any damage at all actually. It's a mini-firecracker, a palm size sparkler that won't burn your skin. Designed to be safe for kids!" he replied. He pointed to the girl across the room. "Maybe it will make her smile."

"It won't set fire to my place or go all haywire in here?" Tom asked, needing reassurance.

"No," he said, laughing at the suspicious look in Tom's eyes. "Designed specifically for little kids to play with, and perfectly safe. Just drop it on a hard surface and watch it go. The higher you drop it, the more times it bounces. Not *everything* we make is destructive, Tom," he said, smiling at the barkeep. "Otherwise, mums wouldn't let their kids buy our products. Besides it may cheer her up a little."

"Doubt it, but I'll drop it on her table for ya," Tom said, shaking his head. "The things you two come up with. Mini-sparkles that don't burn ya. What a hoot!"

As Tom passed her table, he stopped and spoke to her briefly. Tom pointed over to him, made a gesture, and dropped the small, shiny ball onto her table. It bounced once and then froze mid-air spinning, little sparkles flying from it, and it made a soft whizzing sound before it spun out and dropped. Tom shook his head, smiling, and walked off, keeping an eye on the little Whirl Weezer. As it hit the table, it bounced again three times before freezing mid-air, spitting little sparkles as it spun whizzing again. It did this three times before resting on the table next to her rose.

She looked like she may have almost smiled briefly, the tiniest flicker of her lips, as she picked up the Whirl Weezer and dropped it again on her table watching it spin and sparkle. As the Whirl Weezer finished its final spin and dropped to lie on the table next to her rose, a pair of heavy tears rolled down her cheek, and she buried her face in her hands, sobbing.

He was confused. His heart fell watching her cry. *Our Weasleys' Whirl Weezers have never failed to make someone smile before. Every kid who saw it in the shop burst out laughing with joy, and the parents did too! It's only been on the shelves a month, and we can't make enough of them to keep up with the demand!*

He turned from watching her to his brother. Bill shook his head, bewildered. "Nice try, bro," Bill said in a consolatory tone.

They talked about work, about women, about family and about the reports in the *Daily Prophet*. After thirty minutes Bill rose to return to the bank. "Nice you could join me for lunch. Maybe next time both of you can join me. I miss having you around during meals. You always were a pair. I miss the antics," Bill said as he got up to go.

"Can't, sorry. We've been so busy one of us needs to stay and run the shop," he said teasingly. Only he wasn't teasing. The shop was doing great, and during the holidays, business was at its busiest. "There is always dinner?"

"That would be great. Maybe next week though." Bill laid his half of the fare on the table. "I'll check my schedule and send you and an owl."

"Sure. Any night will work for us next week." He looked in his pocket for change to pay his part of the bill and pulled out a small bluish Pigmy Puff, their newest color. It fluffed itself as it rested on his palm, seemed to purr a bit, and turned around. He'd meant to give this to Bill as a joke, but he changed his mind.

Bill saw the Puff on his palm. "Don't think Tom will accept that as payment!" he said good-naturedly. "See you later. I'll tell Mum you said hello." He walked away, laughing.

He left his fare on the table, and as he passed by her on his way out, he stopped and turned around. "I was going to give this to my brother as a joke, but I think you could use the smile." He laid the fluffy Pigmy Puff on the table in front of her.

"Thank you," she said simply, looking up at him, and unchecked tears rolled down her cheeks again. Her voice, though soft and sweet, sounded heavy. She lowered her gaze to wipe the tears from her face, but didn't look back up.

He walked away, stunned. *I utterly failed! I've never failed so miserably before. Completely unable to make someone smile! It's... it's unbelievable! It's completely mind-blowingly inconceivable!*

Two days later a small tawny owl flew into Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, carrying a perfumed letter.

*Dear Mr. Weasley,*

*Thank you so very much for the little sparkler ball and the little Pigmy Puff. Your gifts couldn't have been timelier.*

*I buried my little brother that afternoon.*

*I dropped the little sparkler ball in his grave at the end of the service and watched it until it lay quietly on his coffin. It seemed fitting somehow. He would have loved playing with it.*

*My little brother was a big fan of yours and your brother's and loved your shop very much. Every letter he wrote me described some mischief he got into with one of your products or something he wanted desperately from your shop.*

*I named the Pigmy Puff you gave me, Randall, after him.*

*Your little gifts meant the world to me. I'm just sorry that I wasn't able to thank you properly at the time.*

*I wish you all success, happiness and good fortune.*

*Sincerely,*

*Tanya Delmeyer*

He read and re-read the letter several times before tacking it up on the wall above his work desk in the back room.

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Author's note: Although no beloved characters die in this story a death is implied. I hope that didn't offend anyone.

I want to thank Southern\_Witch\_69 for the beautiful banner for my story that she made me for my birthday. I really, absolutely, love it!

Please leave reviews I'd love to know what you are thinking right about now!

To my beta Phoenix: Thank you so very much. I really appreciate all your work and suggestions. You truly make my stories more than just readable you help make them real.