

They're Hanging Me Tonight

by Doomspark

A lovers' quarrel gone bad. Very bad.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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There are no Dementors in Azkaban any more. Not since the War officially ended some twelve years ago. One of the first things Arthur Weasley did after being confirmed as Minister of Magic was to get rid of them. At the time I thought - truth to tell, I didn't think about it. It was just one more side note in an altogether busy time in my life.

The worst days of my life have been heralded by the rain.

It's raining outside. I can hear it. If I stretch the shackles on my ankles to their maximum length, I can reach the window of my cell and look out. I don't, though. It's a cold sloppy rain, the kind that gets into your bones and chills you more thoroughly than Death himself. I've never liked the rain. There is nothing particularly romantic about listening to it patter on a tin roof. It's a sad and lonely sound. It's the sound of futility.

The War had decimated the wizarding world. No family emerged unscathed. Some bloodlines were completely wiped out. However nature took its course, and there were lots of wizards and witches conceived in the following years. Virginia Weasley married Neville Longbottom and promptly set about trying to outbreed her mother.

It was the year that Harry Longbottom first came to Hogwarts that I realized that the war was truly over. I had known nothing but war for years, and it was hard for me to adjust to peace. Hard to relax my defenses. Hard to stop waiting for the Dark Mark on my arm to burn as Voldemort summoned me. Oh, it faded with time. But the memories of it burning were fresh and raw.

So, peace. Once I truly understood, I hardly knew how to act. For the first time in my adult life, I was free to contemplate what I wanted to do. Free to make my own choices. And free to stop taking the asphodel and wormwood that had been my only solace for years.

So it wasn't odd, I don't think, for me to eventually realize that I was also free to pay court to any witch I chose. This was a startling realization - I nearly dropped Lupin's Wolfbane potion when it hit me. Fortunately, my reflexes were quite good.

But who would want me? And then again, what witch would I want to share my life with? My life, my passions, my innermost thoughts? There weren't many. I shoved the thoughts to the back of my head, and began preparing for another year of teaching. And then my life turned upsidedown in an instant.

She came back to Hogwarts to teach Ancient Runes. Miss Granger, the former know-it-all who plagued me with her incessant hand-waving for seven years. I didn't recognize her until Minerva introduced her at the staff meeting.

She'd tamed that wild and bushy hair into something soft and sleek. She'd grown into a striking woman, if not classically beautiful. That meeting left me no doubt that her mind was as sharp as ever. She'd learned tact in the last decade. It suited her well. I remember thinking that it would actually be pleasant to work with her.

I was still twenty years her senior, but wizards are notorious for their long lives. Two-score years is a drop in the bucket against two centuries. She was twenty-eight, an

adult by every standard. Age was no barrier.

We talked, first as colleagues talking shop, then as something more. Our discussions grew to include other things - books, cooking, art... things that I had loved before, but never had time to talk about in depth. And so I came to pay my court to her, almost without realizing it.

The days seemed incomplete, somehow, if we did not see each other, did not speak. I fabricated excuses to talk to her. She did the same, and we laughed about it.

Right before the end of the spring term, I asked her to marry me and she said yes. My timing was not, perhaps, the best. She had made plans to spend the summer with her friends and was loath to change them. I was too happy to protest. The summer was short, and then we would be together. We planned to marry over the mid-winter holiday.

The summer went by swiftly. I was busy making tentative plans for our life together - everything subject to Hermione's approval, of course. I bought her an owl to carry our correspondence, for we wrote each other almost every day. She had mentioned wanting a home in the country, so I began looking for one. Of course, it had to have enough room for our books - her collection was just as vast as mine, with surprisingly little overlap. And then there were the plans for the wedding itself. So I kept myself occupied.

She seemed a little withdrawn her first day back, and when I queried her, she said she was overtired and wished to retire early for a few nights. Of course I agreed to this. I couldn't help wishing she'd been more enthusiastic about our upcoming nuptials though. She'd flat out refused to discuss them.

After a week of this, I began to worry. There were plans that needed finalization. We needed to talk about our future. Too, I missed the easy give and take of our rambling discussions. One rainy Friday I picked a white rose from the garden and took it up to her room. I was going to leave it on her pillow as a token if she wasn't there.

I put the flower on her bed and turned to leave, then I noticed that one of her parchments had fallen off her desk. As I retrieved it, I couldn't help but read it.

My dearest darling,

Soon, soon, we'll be together forever! Please be patient with me just a little longer. There are a few loose ends I need to tie up. I want our new life together to be free from any entanglements.

Your one and only,

Hermione

I smiled as I read it, and quietly left her room. Her owl would probably come tapping on my windowsill sometime today. Possibly even before dinner. I would catch her eye, and smile at her, and she would know I understood.

The rain continued during the day. A cold, wet rain.

So I was rather taken aback when she gave me a single furious glare at dinner, and proceeded to ignore me. She left as soon as it was decently possible, and I followed her.

"Go away, Severus." She'd stopped halfway down the corridor. "Go away."

"But" I didn't have a chance to say any more. She took the ring I had given her and threw it at me.

"You stupid bastard. Did you really think I could care about you? We're through! Finished! Do you hear me?"

I knelt and picked up the ring. "I thought... I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. You don't know anything. You're old! You're sad! You are nothing to me!"

"Hermione, please!"

"Just go away, Severus. I don't want to see you any more."

I left with all the dignity I could muster, which wasn't much under the circumstances. My mind was in a whirl of confusion and hurt. It's odd how much love hurts.

I didn't go to breakfast or lunch the next day. I hoped she would come to me. Hoped she would say she had misspoken. Hoped that she might not shatter my heart into a thousand fragments.

She didn't come.

I went down to the Great Hall for dinner, planning to speak to Albus and resign effective the end of the year. I could not bear to stay here, where everything would remind me of her.

As I strode down the hall, I heard a muffled noise in one of the classrooms. I paused, then went to investigate.

She was there, locked in a passionate embrace with the youngest Mr. Weasley. He had his hands all over her - something she'd never permitted from me. I watched them until it became obvious where things were going; that he was going to take her right there on the floor of the classroom. And then I left.

The whirl in my mind was gone, replaced by a burning rage. My hands shook as I let myself back into my quarters. I could not think of it. WOULD not think of it. Yet every time I closed my eyes that night, I would see them. See HIM touching her. See HER encouraging him.

I couldn't bear it. I retraced my steps to the classroom, half expecting to find them gone. Half hoping to find them gone. I don't know what I was thinking. I'm not even sure I WAS thinking. But they were still there, lying on the floor and smelling of sweat and sex.

I killed them. I killed her for the betrayal, and him for taking away what was once mine. The trial was a simple formality. They snapped my wand and sentenced me to die.

In the days before they had Dementors in Azkaban, wizards and witches sentenced to death were burned, hanged, or drowned. Now that the Dementors are gone again, the old ways are returned.

They're hanging me tonight.