

The Benefits of the Blue Billywig

by veradee

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Many thanks go to my beta, Beth Kennedy, for catching my mistakes.

This story was written for the Colour of Sin Challenge at the LJ community "Colourful Bat".

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There she was again.

After entering the Three Broomsticks, she had headed straight for the counter and now sat on a bar stool, not bothering to take her drink to one of the tables. With her right arm she leant on the counter, her upper body slightly slumped over, while her left hand cradled the slim stem of her glass.

From his table, which was placed along the wall at the left side of the room, Snape watched Tonks.

She was alone, staring ahead and seemingly studying the many bottles on the rack. The only other customer at the counter sat a couple of seats right from her, but neither took notice of the other.

It was Friday night, and most of the tables were occupied. At some of them a single man or woman nursed a drink; at one corner table a couple seemed to have a fight; and at other tables several people sat together, engaged in huddled conversations.

Snape took a sip of his bitter before he continued to watch Tonks.

She wore an orange robe. A matching cloak lay on the stool beside her. Her hair was spiky and bright green. Its colour clashed with the vivid blue of her cocktail whenever she lifted her glass to her lips.

It looked as if she was working her way through the colours of the rainbow. When he saw her for the first time four nights ago, she had downed a large number of Red Zeppelins. Tonight, she had decided on the Blue Billywig.

Not even having completely emptied her glass, she already waved at Madam Rosmerta, ordering a second one.

Remembering the sickly sweet taste of the concoction, Snape had to suppress a shudder and took another sip of his beer.

Of the few fancier cocktails Madam Rosmerta served, he only liked one, the Shrinking Violet. Not that he drank it himself. What he liked about it was that people usually did not remain shrinking violets after imbibing a couple of the cocktails. It was fun to watch them as they lost their inhibitions and embarrassed themselves.

If Tonks kept to her rainbow-based schedule, she would order it the next evening. He smirked.

With a huge gulp, Tonks finished off her second cocktail and pushed the empty glass towards Madam Rosmerta for a refill.

Over the noise of the crowd he could make out Rosmerta's voice. 'Don't you think you should go a bit slower, dear?'

Tonks' answer was much louder. 'No.' She shook her head violently. 'You can't drink enough or fast enough. Actually, everyone should drink.' With that she made a sweeping motion with her left arm, which included the entire pub. 'Blue Billywigs for everyone.'

She stopped when she caught sight of Snape.

He waited for her to grimace as she had done the previous nights when she had seen him.

Instead, she waved him over.

Instantly, he buried his nose in his glass, but when he looked up again, she was still waving at him.

He took another sip, hoping she would stop, and nearly choked on his beer when she suddenly shouted, 'Snape. Come over here, Snape.'

His glance dropped to the tabletop. It was a nice tabletop. If he studied it for the next two hours, surely Tonks would have gone home and the other guests would have forgotten about her shouting at him.

'Snape.'

If possible, she had shouted even louder than before. As a Metamorphmagus, she had never been one of the most reserved Hufflepuffs, but this raucous behaviour was unacceptable. He gritted his teeth. If he did not want to be the topic of Hogsmeade gossip for the next couple of weeks, he better go over to her. Hopefully, she would shut up then.

He grabbed his glass, took the seat beside her and set his glass down on the counter with a thud.

'What do you want, Nympha?' He broke off when she shot him an angry glare. Best not to start a fight with a drunk, he thought.

'Me? I want nothing. But what do you want? For the past few nights you've sat at that table, nursing a pint and staring at me. What are you up to, Snape?'

'I have come here for a drink. As far as I know the Three Broomsticks is public.' He made sure that his voice was dangerously low, but she did not seem fazed.

'Isn't it a bit inconvenient to come to Hogsmeade just for a single pint? Don't you have pubs in your neighbourhood?'

'Why do you ask?' He felt his blood pressure rising. After all, he was a free man. Even as an Auror, she had no right to question him like that.

'Because I can't believe that you turn up here without having any hidden agenda after having disappeared from the face of the earth for months.' She watched him from under lowered eyebrows.

'Then don't believe it.'

'I don't. Two nights ago, you even talked to me.' She sounded as if she had never seen him talk to anyone in the past.

He sneered. 'Yes, and I still remember what you told me. You told me to get lost.'

'That's because you behaved like an arse.'

He started to protest.

'Yes, you did,' she interrupted him. 'What did you expect when you asked me whether...?' She did not go on, clearly still incensed by his words.

He did not answer. The truth was, he had meant to rile her, and apparently it had worked.

She leant towards him, fixing him with her dark eyes, which were slightly glassy. 'What do you want from me? Why did you talk to me?'

Leaning back as far as he could without losing his balance, he took a sip of bitter.

She did not stop staring at him, though.

'You looked ill,' he muttered, his fingers painfully clutching his glass.

She raised her eyebrows as if again she did not believe him.

'You did, and it is no wonder with all the cocktails you're imbibing each night.' He nodded at the empty glass in front of her.

She scowled. 'I'm celebrating. I'm celebrating that we defeated Voldemort,' she said before turning towards Rosmerta, who was quietly polishing some glasses, and nodding at her for another drink.

'That was seven months ago.' Snape had always believed that too much alcohol was detrimental, but it seemed that Tonks was particularly susceptible.

'So what?' She lifted her glass, which Rosmerta had just refilled and downed half of it in one go.

She had been an incalculable menace as a pupil, always tripping, always dropping something, and in this respect she had not changed much since then. But she had been a decent Order member. In contrast to some others, she had never lost her head when the situation had become precarious.

He could not help himself, saying, 'It doesn't look as if you were celebrating. Most people don't celebrate on their own.'

'Don't tell me that you care.' She laughed, but it was an ugly sound.

'Of course, I don't care.' He sneered. What a preposterous idea. She had to be even drunker than he had thought. He started fidgeting with his glass.

He knew why he was here all on his own. Although he had never been the most sociable person, spending the entire day at his dwelling at Spinner's End depressed even him. And while he did not really feel like talking to anyone at the pub, he did not mind watching the others.

But Tonks had always had a bubbly personality annoyingly bubbly, in his opinion. She had always been surrounded by friends.

Snape took a sip of his bitter. 'Why are you sitting here alone? What has happened to your werewolf?'

Although conscious of her inebriated state, he had not quite managed to keep the derision out of his voice at the last word, but to his surprise she did not throw her drink in his face.

Instead, she lifted her glass and emptied it. Then she stared at him for a long minute before she finally spoke. 'The wanker has left me.' Her voice was slightly slurred.

Aha, Snape thought. This explained a lot.

The last time she had been depressed over Lupin, she seemed to have lost *her joie de vivre*. Apparently, now she had decided to drown herself in alcohol instead.

He did not want to, but he asked nevertheless, 'Why?'

'He went all noble on me. He said it was the right thing to do. That he was too old, too poor and too dangerous for me.'

Her voice had taken on Lupin's tone, and Snape had to suppress a smirk.

She snorted. 'He said exactly what he had said right after Dumbledore's...!' She broke off, going pink and averting her eyes.

He swallowed hard.

It had all worked out, just as Dumbledore had anticipated it. Within a few weeks after Voldemort had been defeated, Snape's true alliances towards the Order of the Phoenix had been revealed, and Snape was a free man.

Only that he did not feel free, because wherever he went, people stared at him, whispered behind his back and, sometimes, in the open, as well. Some people moved to the other side of the street when they saw him approaching.

He took a deep breath, lifted his glass and gulped. The bitter had become stale, and he grimaced. He beckoned Madam Rosmerta over.

'Another pint?' the landlady asked.

He shook his head. 'No, something stronger.'

'A Firewhisky or one of your own creations?' She grinned at him.

'A Firewhisky,' he said, but before he could berate her for being cheeky, she addressed Tonks.

'And another Blue Billywig for you, dear?'

Tonks nodded and then her head swivelled around to Snape. 'Your creations?'

He glared at Rosmerta, but her grin only became wider while she was filling his glass.

He flipped a Galleon onto the counter, picked up the glass and downed the whisky, enjoying how the liquid burnt going down his throat.

'Your creations?' Tonks repeated, and her voice rose an octave. 'What does that mean?'

He sighed and nodded at the cocktail Rosmerta was just placing in front of Tonks.

'This is yours?' The unbelieving tone in Tonks' voice was decidedly unflattering.

He did not deem her with an answer, but Rosmerta did. 'That's not the only one. He created them for me years ago. He claimed they were disgusting, and no one would ever order them, but I told him that they would be a success, and I was right.' Rosmerta grinned at Tonks.

'Not the only one?'

'No, you created about six, Snape, didn't you? The Red Zeppelin, the Yellow Submarine, the Tangerine Dream and some others,' Rosmerta said.

Tonks stared at him. 'I drank all these in the past few days.'

'Well, you survived, didn't you? They are alcoholic cocktails, not deathly ones.'

He should have known better. There was a reason he had spent the past months more or less in solitude at his home. It had been Minerva McGonagall who had told him that it was time to face the world again, but people always would distrust him even the ones who fought side by side with him.

He started to get up.

'No,' Tonks shouted, grabbing his arm and pulling him down again. 'You know that's not what I meant. I was just surprised to learn that you created them.'

He remained quiet, just watching her for a long time until she started to squirm on her seat.

She gave him a lopsided smile and then cried, 'Have another drink. Rosmerta, a Blue Billywig for me and another Firewhisky for Snape.'

'No, no more drinks for me.'

'Come on, Snape. One more Firewhisky.'

He shook his head. 'No, drinking yourself into a stupor helps only temporarily at best, and apart from that I prefer to keep my wits about me. I only drink in moderation.'

'Pffft.' Tonks smirked when Rosmerta refilled her glass. She picked it up and started sipping the cocktail.

Before he could restrain himself, he went on, 'And I think you've had more than enough for one evening as well.'

As if to spite him, she took a huge gulp. 'Why do you care? What does it matter if I have a few drinks?' she asked, sounding like a stubborn child. Then, suddenly, her eyes widened. 'You care! You care about me.'

'No, I don't,' he replied hastily although now the idea did not seem as preposterous to him as it had earlier. He blinked.

She seemed to sense his confusion, because she was about to pat his arm and only stopped at the last moment. She blushed, and he could see her swallow hard.

After a moment, she spoke. 'I rather like the idea, you know? Perhaps we could try to become friends.' Her voice trailed off, making the last sentence rather sound like a question.

'Friends?' He was stumped. He had no friends.

'Yes, friends. How do you see us?'

He hesitated. 'We're former comrades in arms, and comrades in arms don't abandon each other.' The moment he uttered the words, he thought that they did not sound right.

His assumption was confirmed by Tonks, who choked on her last sip and began to cough.

When she had recovered, she smiled and said, 'Let's meet again here tomorrow night, share a drink and see what happens.'

He was lost for words. He could not remember a time when anyone ever wanted to meet with him for a drink. The only person apart from Dumbledore who had ever shown any interest in him was Minerva McGonagall, but their discussions mostly consisted of her lecturing him as if they were mother and son.

'Snape?'

Tonks was watching him with something like a concerned expression on her face.

He slightly shook his head to stop it from spinning. 'I intended to come here again anyway. Sevenish. I think I wouldn't mind if you came as well.'

She laughed. 'Okay, that's settled then.' And with a wink, she added, 'Which cocktail would you recommend for tomorrow night?'

Suddenly, he felt like himself again and could not suppress a smirk when he answered, 'I believe you haven't tasted the Shrinking Violet yet.'

'Good, I'll remember that. See you around then.' She put a few Galleons on the counter, grinned at him in return and left.