

Uniformly Brave

by dracontia

Episode 5 of the Al & Scorp Show. True loyalty dies hard. So do old habits. Albus and Scorpius take refuge in the Shrieking Shack and prepare for a fight. (Like the rest of the series, this story leaped from my head one wintry day, Athena-like—fully formed and ready to do battle.)

Episode 5, Al and Scorp Show

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I give up. They continue to belong to someone else, but as long as they don't do anything Potions-related in my kitchen, I'm resigned to having them over for fic on a regular basis.

Snape immediately knew that something was wrong. The lads were pelting towards the Shrieking Shack at full tilt, but instead of looking full of vexatious fun and irritating mischief, their faces were grim...almost desperate. He sensed their pursuers before he saw or heard them.

As the boys crashed through the front door and barricaded it behind them, he instinctively took up a defensive stance in front of it.

"Upstairs, Al!" Scorpius panted as they pounded up the stairs.

"Right." Al saved his breath for running.

They fell into a crouch below the window, listening to the mocking voices threading their way in through the gaps in the boards.

"Give us the ponce, Potter, and we'll let you go!"

"Go fuck yourself, Smith, and you can let your virginity go!"

Scorpius let out a choked giggle in spite of himself. "Oh, good one, Al."

"I've been hanging around you too long," Al responded with a tight smile. He clutched his wand and peeked through the remains of the grimy windowpane, trying to figure out who to take out first. It was rapidly looking as if it would come to that.

Insults flew in the broken window, primarily variations on 'poofter' and 'shirtlifter.'

"Not very creative, are they?"

"Nope. But they're spreading out... it's going to be a bitch of a fight if they surround the place."

"Cut your losses, Potter. Your brother's not around anymore to cover for you...just let us deal with the fag, and we'll all be better off."

Scorpius grabbed Al's arm, silently warning him not to reveal their exact location before they could figure out which way their four antagonists were going to jump. He yelled, "Dunno why you're worried, Atkins... Neither bird nor fag would have a double-bag-job like you."

Unfortunately, Atkins' ugliness seemed to have no adverse impact on his ability to hone in on the direction of sound.

"Shit! Slicing hexes?"

"They aren't fucking around, Scorp." Al hastily cast Protego while Scorpius fired back.

"Boils?"

"First thing I thought of."

"Impressive."

"Keep them pinned down, that's the ticket."

"Right...if we can stun enough of them, we can send a Patronus."

Their tormentors apparently had no intention of presenting enough of a target for a Stunning Hex to make contact. They also showed no signs of backing down.

"Scorp, your hexes are brilliant. Your aim sucks."

"They have good cover!"

"Not that good. You need glasses, mate."

Scorpius growled and squinted out the remains of the windowpane. "Stupid glass is dirty."

"I'm gonna draw them out."

"You're mad, Al!"

"Probably. You with me?"

"One shot, then a shield."

"Sounds good."

They both fired off stinging hexes, then Scorpius took over the shield while Al hit a rock with 'Reducto,' spraying their antagonists with shards.

"Yeah, defend him! Probably a poof yourself! Named after two cowards...the big nance and the traitor!"

"LIAR!" Albus roared, throwing all the passion in his being into a Stinging Hex that sent his opponent reeling...and screaming. "I'M NAMED FOR THE TWO BRAVEST MEN MY FATHER EVER KNEW! HE SAID SO!"

The sky around the Shrieking Shack turned black. Not gradually, over a matter of moments, but immediately, as if the blue had been turned off. The air went from cold to arctic just as instantly. Al reached to steady Scorpius' wand arm, which wavered slightly casting 'Protego' in the face of this new development. It managed to hold as their opponents faltered in their attacks, unnerved by the bizarre occurrence.

The ringleader opened his mouth as if to yell something to rally the others. His face suddenly contorted into something very much like absolute terror.

"Al?"

"I'm not doing that, Scorp."

"Go! GO!" Smith stumbled away, and one of his accomplices dragged him by the arm, too rattled to counter the Jelly-legs Jinx.

As their tormentors retreated, the sky returned to normal and the cold abated. Albus and Scorpius drew closer together.

"So... what do you know about this ghost?"

"Aside from the fact that he's saved our arses twice? Nothing." Al blinked, and grabbed Scorpius' face, pushing matted hair away from the cut on his forehead in distress. "Fuck! What did they get you with?"

Scorpius sank to his knees, shaking a little at the sudden realization that he was looking at his own blood. "No, it was just the broken glass, I think. No need for a counterspell."

"Fuck, no, it wasn't. It was a Slicing Hex," Al fretted, glancing out the window anxiously as he tried to figure out exactly where the wound was amidst the mess along the side of Scorpius' forehead.

Snape ignored the stairs and floated straight to the roof, frantically circling until he found them.

Of course the miserable little ball-aches are in the last window I look in. Merlin!

He darted through the wall, just stopping himself from trying to grab Scorpius and ask him what he'd been hit with.

"About the ghost...you're sure it's a 'he'?"

"I don't know how I know, but he is." Al cleaned away all the blood, relieved to see that the cut was tiny. "At least they only winged you with it." He elected not to tell Scorp that his hair had suffered more than his skin, with a noticeable lock sheared cleanly off just above his ear.

He didn't need his friend fainting.

"I didn't think ghosts could do that sort of thing."

"Neither did I."

Scorpius licked his lips and glanced around the room nervously. "Thank you, sir."

"Yeah. Thanks again, Mr. Ghost."

Scorpius shuddered, his eyes going wide. "He's right here, isn't he?" he whispered.

"Yes." Whispering seemed to be the order of the day.

"That's how you knew. You can feel him, even when he's not this close."

"The loneliness?"

"Yes. How can you bear it?" Scorpius' words came out slightly ragged. Al turned to him, unsurprised to find his eyes bright with unshed tears.

"I... it gets less, the longer we're here." Completely unafraid of being interrupted, Al lifted his wand to heal the cut on Scorpius' forehead. He trusted their hidden companion to keep them safe.

"How'd you get to be so good at that?"

"Dad made me practice. Said you should never go out into the world without a good repertoire of healing spells."

The room almost seemed to shiver in reaction to some unquantifiable emotion of their invisible benefactor.

"Is that really what your dad said about why he named you?"

"Yeah. There were...I guess there still are...a lot of people either still believe that trashy book, or think that Dumbledore screwed up the war somehow, that it could've been handled better. And even after Dad, the Minister and the Headmistress arranged for the big funeral, and the portraits and everything...well, you've heard what people say about Snape."

Portraits...plural?

And a big funeral?

...

Oh, God. It was arranged by Gryffindors.

It must have been... garish.

"Wonder where they got all that shit from, anyway."

"Huh?"

"About you, I mean."

"Oh. Um... maybe Jack said something. You know, about that first week, when I went to your bed for a bit."

"Merlin's pants! Scorp, everyone knows that Jack has about the mental capacity of a carrot. They shouldn't have taken him seriously! I mean, we were first years, and we both forgot to pack our Teddies. Of course we slept in the same bed until they got owed to us."

"And in second year, when I went back because of those big thunderstorms."

"Yeah, well, the acoustics in the dungeon are wicked scary when there's thunder over the lake. I didn't blame you. Though I doubt Jack even knew about that. Poor slow git sleeps like he's under a Draught of Living Death."

"And end of last year, you..."

"I don't pretend to be a Gryffindor. I woke up to find the soddin' Bloody Baron doing a midnight bed-check. I wasn't staying in my bed after that, and I sure as hell wasn't going to Jack's."

Scorpius smiled weakly. "That **was** pretty damned scary."

All right... I can see the bit about the Baron. But thunderstorms?

Rightly or wrongly, the student body will not uphold either of you as the poster boy for Slytherin heterosexuality with a record like that.

"Are we brave, Al?"

Al smiled a little wanly. "Not that anyone could tell by your tone of voice now, but yeah. I think so. I mean... we accepted the Hat's invitation to be in Slytherin, didn't we?"

Scorpius involuntarily drew closer to him. "Maybe that just means we were too stupid not to make great green targets of ourselves."

"You're not stupid, Scorp."

"Everyone hates us, Al."

"Okay, you're not stupid, but you do say the occasional stupid thing." Scorpius glared at him. "Yeah, so, some people still think it's open season on anyone in green, even after all this time. But you know that Hufflepuffs are all right with us, and most everyone else at least gives us the benefit of the doubt. Hell, Professor Longbottom is probably our biggest defender..."

"...better than old Sluggo, that's for sure..."

"...and he's head of Gryffindor."

"Professor Longbottom did say that there are different kinds of courage."

"He's not stupid, either."

Longbottom, don't make me have to thank you for anything. It would be painful.

"You know, no one would've done anything about rumors about us when James was around. Even if they came from a more reliable source than Jack."

"True. I think you're going to have to suck it up and admit that your brother was good for something. He may have been a bit of a git, but he was a git on our side."

Albus sighed. "He's probably been saving our arses for years, if you think about it. I mean, damn... If they'd go after you now, when you're a Prefect, imagine what they would have tried before, if James hadn't been blinding them with his popularity all the time."

"I'd rather not think about it, thanks." Scorpius slumped over a little. "They wouldn't even do this if I wasn't in Slytherin. Everyone knows that Jenkins in Hufflepuff wanks to Quidditch Illustrated, and no one's ever tried to hit him with a Slicing Hex."

"First thing after dinner, we're having a talk with Hugo."

"What? Al, he hates my guts!"

"He doesn't hate you! He's not exactly going to give you his last Chocolate Frog or anything like that, but he knows that you and Lily & I are best mates. You meet with him all the time for Prefect stuff...you know that he's scrupulously fair. To the point where it gets a little annoying."

Scorpius laughed. "Well, there is that."

"You'd better believe it. He takes after Aunt Hermione. He'll not let an arsehole like Smith get away with something like this a second time."

"But, Al...I'd...I'd have to tell him why they went after us."

Albus touched the small mark on his friend's forehead. "What if they get the jump on us next time?"

Scorpius said nothing.

"Scorp?"

"Yes?"

"Was it... I mean... Do you really like... boys?"

Scorpius' expression froze. His skin almost seemed to shrink away from Al's hand, and he could feel his friend's fingers go rigid with fear, even with them only meeting at the tips.

After a long pause came the wretched, despairing whisper: "Yes. I think so."

Al's hand never moved from the tiny scar. He blinked a few times... his lips parted, but words refused to come.

Scorpius wrenched away. "Don't worry. I mean, not like you'd have keep your back to the wall around me, or anything."

"Huh? Scorpius, what are you on about?"

The house's silent tenant seemed to hold his breath as the boys stared at each other, both completely nonplussed.

"You're not... Uh... It's okay?"

"Well, um... I thought you liked girls! I mean, you took Lily to the Yule Ball again this year!"

"Yeah, ah... Well, she knows. I kind of said some things... and she figured out what I was talking about."

"Oh."

"How'd you, er, know, that is?"

Scorpius muttered something about 'noticing.'

"Please tell me that wasn't James that you said you 'noticed.'"

"Well... he is really fit."

"Oh, crap."

"He is!"

"Oh, yeah. James is fit, all right. Fit as a herd of Abraxans." Albus rolled his eyes.

"Of course I've heard of Abraxans," Scorpius said with a lopsided smirk.

Al looked askance at him. "I thought gay blokes were supposed to be witty."

Scorp elbowed him. Al snickered. "Just shut up. So, you're... okay with it?"

"Well, yeah... I mean, I thought you... I'm kinda pissed off that you didn't tell me, but, yeah." Al still looked a little puzzled. "You're my best friend."

"It's easier, sometimes, to tell girls. You know."

"Yeah."

Scorpius bit his lip. Al absently thought he'd have to remind him to stop doing that. Scorp's dad disapproved of nervous tics. "Thanks."

Al gave him a little nudge with his shoulder. "Besides, now I really don't have to worry, if you invite Lily to the Yule ball again..."

"You prat!"

Al laughed all the way through the house with Scorpius in hot pursuit. But it was all right, because Scorp was laughing, too.

Snape followed them back to the school, watching until they were safely under the supervision of their professors. He elected to float quietly across the forest back to the

Shack. He wondered if Spring had always looked like this as he drifted along, allowing his thoughts to drift as well.

How many years has it been since I left that place in daylight?

He sat on the roof for a few hours just because he could. Habit finally moved him back to the room where he had died, where he obliged his thoughts to focus on the events of the day. He hadn't known that he could do anything like that, either. He was quite sure that he didn't want to analyze why he had.

*If either of them brings a...**date**...here, I'm going to make them cry.*

FIN

The 'double bag' comment refers to British slang for an especially ugly person...that is, no one would shag said person without a bag over that person's head as well as their own (just in case one of the bags fell off.) Charming little turn of phrase...

Many thanks to Peppermint for the beta!