

Apollo and Riley's Valentines

Following another very boring lecture on the 14th, in which you elected to only half pay attention, splitting your time up with Ancient Rune vocab, you waited around until a certain Slytherin boy was done packing up and done with talking with a few of his old soldiers or even just random students asking him questions or chatting. When this year had started, you wouldn't have even noticed that people liked Elliot, wanted to be around him. Towards the end, you were jealous. And yet, now you had your own friends. *He* was your friend. There were people who wanted to come sit with you at lunch. Wanted you to spend time with them, even if you were still convinced you made things less fun.

It was not just your soldiers either, to your surprise. In particular, a short and pretty Gryffindor with a ridiculous tuft of blonde in her hair and very odd colored eyes seemed to like you more than normal. One who you had made a small batch of sugar cookies for, safe in your trunk with a freshening charm on them and their bag.

Seeing your sister's boy...friend just able to swim through these kind of interactions still filled you with a small sense of envy. He wasn't that good of a wizard, by most metrics. Apparently not extremely popular, comparatively. But there he was, doing the things you couldn't. But you needed some more advice. Elliot was, other than Arty, your best friend. You think.

Once the people around him had dispersed, and he began leaving, you called out,

"Hey. Elliot. Can I ask you a question? In private?"

He turns, and gives you a stupid smile. At least he didn't have the mustache on.

"Sure Apollo. Don't have class till after lunch. Want to go to the old hallway nearby?", he asks.

There is a tiny feeling in your gut. Left over from when you had threatened him. Twice, technically. But he still wanted you around. Invited you to his parent's house. You looked down for a moment, then responded.

"Yes. T-thanks, Elliot. I'll follow you." You say, a familiar monotone overtaking the bit of color you had tried to add to your speech lately.

Trailing behind the smaller brown-haired boy, you can't help but notice a bit more pep in his step than was probably normal. Granted, a number of the boys you had seen today had a similar one today, in spite of it being the end of the week when people seemed to be exhausted normally. The holiday?

Entering in the poorly lit corridor, Elliot put his back against the wall and set his bag down,

"So, what is up, Apollo? Did Riley say something to you? Worried about giving her your gift?"

"Yes. And Yes. She wanted to meet up somewhere in the evening. So she could give me something. Said I was her Valentine. You helped me make something for her, but... She wanted me to pick the place; its probably better she not know about the Room, for now. And I haven't done this before. I-just wanted some advice. Arty is really... fond of you. And I think I want Riley to be fond of me. Like that.", you say deadpan, but then look down a bit. It feels like you have butterflies in your gut as well as bees. It is unpleasant and mostly foreign.

"Alright, alright. We got this. There is an old unused storage room by your Common room, the direction of the Gryffindor Common room. That should work for your meeting place, I can show you on the way to lunch.", he says, hand against his chin.

"As for making her like you... you can't. If she does, she does. And I am pretty sure she does. You don't need to do something incredibly different. Act different. Being you is enough, since that is the guy she wanted to have Valentine's Day with. We *could* do your hair up some, maybe change up your outfit a bit, if you want to try and impress her some... Hmm.", he says and pulls out a ridiculous fake pipe from his pouch and exhaling some pink bubbles into the air, thinking while you speak.

"I do. I think. I want to try, at least. She likes to walk with me to classes. Eat lunch at my table. When she asked to study with me, she didn't talk much, just read her book. Then took a nap. Then did some stretches... I put down my book. For those. She is very flexible. And I like how her hair fell over her face, when she touched her toes..."

"Haha! Nice. Alright. I have a plan. We are going to get you dressed up. Just a bit. A nice pair of jeans, a button down. Stuff you got from mom and dad for Christmas. I am going to borrow some cologne from Eland, he has the good stuff. Let Arty help you with your hair. Before you get ready for all this, do a few pushups and squats. Crunches; if you have anything heavy to just lift up and down a few times, do it. Then shower off. I suck at transfiguration but I think I can manage to find some way to make the room

more festive so I will get there before time to meet and see what I can do then bounce.”, Elliot says with a certain conviction.

“And working out and wearing a different outfit is going to... help?”

“Don’t know, you already have a stupid good body and she seems to like your robes fine but... Can’t hurt.”

“What should I... say to her?”, you ask, almost wishing for a quill so you could take this down.

“What you want. Complement her, but only if you believe it. If she is especially pretty today, tell her. If her outfit is great, tell her. If her smile makes you want to rip the stars from heaven, tell her. Well, maybe hold off on that last one till the second date! Just don’t lie. Girls can sniff that out in a second.”

“Okay. I’ll try. Thanks, Elliot. For helping.”, you say a bit overwhelmed.

“Excellent. Let me show you that room. Then we can grab some food. Sound good, bro?”, Elliot says, smiling. Seems like just doing this for you had lifted a bit of weight from his shoulders. Knowing what was coming, Avalon, you think you understood. A bit.

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At the end of classes for the day you made it back to the common room with a couple of hours to spare before needing to meet Riley; Elliot had said he would use an ancient means of Slytherin communication to let her know where to go. You didn’t really doubt him. Slytherin’s were cunning, more than you, so you agreed and just wrote out the card telling her where meet and signed it, at his insistence.

After placing your school materials back in your dorm, you picked out a set of the nice muggle clothes you had received from the Slytherin boy’s parents for Christmas. At one point, your bunkmates had headed over to offer some advice as they saw you fishing the neatly folded items from the trunk Arty had given you. A trunk that was far too large for what you had but which she had assured you that you would grow into.

It was a bit surprising when your dorm-mates had come up, offering advice when you were trying to decide between shirts and the handful of shoes you now had. One was a soldier in the 4s, sure, but the other, you had barely spoken to in the last few years. Still, they helped you pick out a set of clothes which when you held them up did seem like they would look good. You sat them down on your bunk, and began to take Elliot's other advice. 50 pushups, the same for squats, and crunches. Then another three sets while a couple of the guys looked on. And then, since you recalled that there were normally small barrels of pumpkin juice in the common room, you headed down in just a tee and some muggle gym shorts, wiping a tiny bit of sweat from your brow.

When you entered, a few of the younger girls seemed to softly scream.

Yeah, that's what you meant; you made things less fun. You had probably scared or weirded out those girls; they were staring, like a Nundu had just walked in. Still, you decided to do this. Elliot said it might help for some reason and he was normal. You would take his advice about a quick work out. So you grabbed a small keg of juice in either arm and began curling them up and down. Lifting them up behind you so your back stretched. A few more squats with one on either shoulder. By the time you finished you had a bit of sweat soaking into your old muggle tee and a small audience of girls looking on from behind a couch. Yeah. You were weird. It hurt to think you might have scared these 2nd and 3rd year girls; before you went towards the men's showers, you turned and apologized.

Once one of the girls began bleeding from the nose and fell over backward, you quickly left, feeling embarrassed and regretful. You knew you put people off. Girls had been doing things like that since you were a second year. You probably should have neglected that last bit of lifting. Stayed in the boy's dorm. People liked you now some. You didn't want to ruin that by... being you.

With a sigh, you brushed your teeth, rinsed off in the showers and then made it back to your room to get dressed before Arty was supposed to help with your hair and face. A couple of the guys patted you on the back or just gave you thumbs up, which you returned without really getting it. Still, when you came back down, Arty and a couple of her friends were waiting on a couch.

"Apollo! This is Jill and Emily. They helped me when I went to Slughorn's Party. Jill's mom is a hair dresser and Emily's dads do make-up for muggle TV shows. Come on, come on I have to meet Elliot before long and you have to meet Riley soon! Nothing too crazy, girls.", your sister says, her hair done up and wearing more make-up than you had seen her in for the past couple of months.

The trio of girls drags you into a side room you had not ever noticed near the girl's dorms, one with a large wall to wall mirror, long counter, and a few chairs spaced along it. After being sat down, one of her friends began working your short curly hair with some muggle product then using her wand to produce a

slight warm breeze while the other worked your face over with a floral scented cream, before rubbing a small amount of a different product under and over your eyes, and putting some minty balm on your lips.

Arty stood over the girls, giving her approval or telling them something was too much when they asked her. At the end, Arty sprayed your wrists with a tiny bottle of cologne, courtesy of Elliot and Elland, she told you and asked the other girls to leave, placing a few knuts in their hands.

“Thanks, y’all! Let me talk to my brother for a bit! You did great!”, Arty shouts as the two other girls exited.

“Take a look, Apollo. You look very handsome, I think. Quite dashing.”, your sister says, directing your eyes to the mirror. You looked like you but *more*. Your face just a bit brighter, eyes less intimidating. Unruly hair tamed, till only a few small locks fell over your forehead. It... looked good, you think. Never being one to care that much about appearances, it was hard to say but- you liked it. Felt just a bit more confident.

“I-thanks Arty. I have been worried about this. A lot. I know how I am so-“, you begin to say before a glare from your small twin shuts you up.

You stood up and looked down at your tiny sister, the one you only had as she continued.

“Yes, Apollo. You are *you*. And if you are ever act ashamed of that, I will hex you.”, the far, far smaller girl says. Eyes full of fire brighter that you think yours have held in a long time.

“You are brave. Kind. Smart. Strong. My brother. So never ever put yourself down by saying ‘that’s just how I am’. I love you, Apollo. You saved me. Saved us from... there. And if you have some problems? Who cares. I don’t. Our friends don’t. And if Riley does? I will make her puke slugs for a week. But I don’t think I will need to do that. You go sweep her off her feet. Or don’t, let her down easy if you want. You deserve the chance to be happy, happy like Elliot and I are. But only if you want.”, your sister says poking you a few times in the chest, frowning, her button nose crinkled up.

You hate it when you make Arty frown.

"I'm sorry. I will try. I think I like her so.... I will try. Be me, the best me I can. And... you look really nice Arty. You are going to see him now? Elliot?"

"Riley seems good so I hope it works out! And yeah. I am in a minute. Said he had to take care of something beforehand. Thanks for finally noticing how amazing I look, though!", your small grinning sister says with a laugh, spinning in her white and yellow trimmed dress in front of you. Even in those memories you fought to suppress, you recall her always smiling, dancing around, even if all you had were barely more than rags. Always helping you. And now she could wear something so nice, smile so wide. You decided to look away, before you thought too much and ruined the mood. Ruined the work her friends had done with tears.

With a quick hug, Arty helped usher you out of the room. Told you she might miss breakfast for some reason. And set you on your way towards the meeting spot with Riley.

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When you arrived, Riley was already standing outside the old class room; she was in a set of muggle clothes, ones that looked nice but made you wonder if maybe you had over dressed a bit. The smiling violet eyed girl had on seemed to be a pair of tartan pants in red, green, and black, a tight white button down and a pair of brown moccasins. And still when she saw you, Riley just rushed up into an almost hug before she stopped her herself and settled on an arm around your shoulder.

It was nice. Different but good.

Letting go of your shoulder, she turned and grinned.

"Hey. Hey Apollo. Thanks for finding a spot. Happy Valentines? Do you want to go inside? I got you something."

"Sure. Of course. I-I made you something too. Happy Valentines."

"Awesome! How did you find this place anyway? I pride myself in knowing most of the secret places in Hogwarts but I had over looked this one Merlin knows how many times! Right between our common rooms and even scouting it out earlier in the day, *no one* comes this way. Perfect!", she says with a gentle laugh as you enter into the very, very old classroom. It must have been 50 years since it was used...

Or that's how it would look if not for the red and pink hearts dangling from the ceiling, a new table cloth on a table, the lit candles... Thanks Elliot.

"Oh Merlin. Did-did you set this up Apollo! It so... Valentine's-y! When did you have time... I've been waiting right in the hall for... a while... but this is great!"

"Uh- yeah. Wanted it to be...fun for you so. Had a little help though.", you say, embarrassed. Riley was looking you straight in the eyes, a huge smile on her face.

"How did you find this room? Just a question", she asks.

"My, ah, friend showed me it said it was usually not occupied. Also, that it was a House secret, but it was okay if we came here. That they had more."

"Is your friend a Slytherin? Short? Brown hair?"

"Yeeeessss?", you say, setting down the small bag of cookies and staring as Riley begins to pace back and forth, hand near her wand.

"Of course. Naturally. And did a certain Slytherin boy help you with that gift? Maybe the decor?", Riley asks looking at you, her ridiculously colored eyes boring a hole in you.

"Maybe? I am not all that good at cooking or stuff... like this."

"Ah ha! And guess who helped me get this gift?", she says.

"Um. Elliot?"

"Brilliant deduction! So he helped us with both our gifts, found a good place to meet up... what is his game? Is he hiding her under the Cloak of Invisibility, waiting to get blackmail on us? That cunning bastard..."

"I think he was just being nice, Riley. Because I asked him. And he and Arty are... together. He feels like he has to be a good friend, I think. Brother-in-Law? And we aren't stealing the Cloak for 2 weeks. Ah fuck." You say before slapping your face. The shorter Gryffindor always makes you say things you shouldn't. Becoming an Occulmens can't happen fast enough.

"Oh. Oh really. Brother-in-Law. Interesting. So you are... alright, you know, with Slytherins then? Elliot is probably the most snake-like person I have seen, pretending he is weak but ripping people apart in Battle Class. Pretending to be innocent when all of us know... but well, I am half Slytherin too. Some tendencies got passed to me; mom was the baddest witch the House had seen in 30 years after all. But I guess that means you are okay with some snake blood? In your family. If-if he is going to be your brother, right? I know we don't have a sterling reputation.", Riley says, completely ignoring the fact you admitted to plan on stealing one of the most powerful magical artifacts in existence, stopping her pacing to look at you, her eyes twitching down a couple of times.

"I guess? I am fine with you. And Elliot is way too nice, I think. He did invite us to stay with him for Christmas after all. Did you want to exchange gifts now?" you ask, a bit weirded out by her tirade. Elliot is fine. He is clever and can speak well, better than you at least, but why does Riley seem scared by him?

"Yeah. Sorry. Being the most powerful mystery solver in Hogwarts, it can get to you sometimes; you have to figure stuff out and be a bit paranoid. So, here. You- you like muggle candies, right?", she says sitting next to you and handing off a small box with a ribbon on it and both of your names in a printed heart at the top left of the box.

"Yeah I do a lot, they are good. And here. They are just some cookies, Elliot helped me."

"Are you sure these aren't poisoned. The former General of the Raiders is crafty..."

"We ate the ones that came out bad. And I was there when we made them. I don't think they are."

"Okay... oh fuck me, these are good! Merlin's balls! Apollo, you can cook like this?", Riley says in between bites.

“Not really. He helped a lot, but I am better than Arty at least. Pretty sure she could burn water. Think she might have in Potions one time.” You tell her, popping one of the sweets in your mouth, strawberry on the inside. It is good no... great.

“Ha! Is that a nice way to talk about your sister?”

“Well... its true? But if any one else said it, I would turn them into a spider and let my sister keep them in a jar.”, you say, putting down the box of chocolates for now.

“Haha! I bet. The cookies are awesome. I’ll save the rest but, do you mind if I... sit next to you. Maybe hold your hand?”, Riley says, looking a bit small in spite of the huge grin she has on her face.

“That would be okay? I- you don’t have to ask? I’m not going to hurt you if you do something I don’t like.”

“You just said you would turn someone into an arachnid if they insulted your sister’s cooking prowess. But, yeah. I think you are harmless as a fly, mostly. Don’t get me wrong. I know from experience you can fuck people up when you need. You blasted me into a tree that first battle, when Hugo was being an over confident prat.” she says sitting down next to you, wiping a few crumbs from her lip.

“I didn’t realize. Sorry?”

“Don’t be. If I wasn’t ready to get tossed around some, I wouldn’t have signed up. But that was our first sign that Hugo is an idiot, despite his grades, you know. Sending us in after we lost all our brooms? Nitwit. Should have deposed the fucker sooner.”, Riley says, fire in her eyes and her hand entangling with yours.

“You know my Army is going to kick yours into the dirt this season, right Pertinger? Just a warning.”

“You got one battle, Snyder. The next four? I’m glad you are okay being tossed around.”, you inform her, your pride in your soldiers taking hold.

“Oh, I am very okay with being tossed around, as long as it is you Apollo. So feel free to try. Who knows, maybe I will be the one to toss you around some.”, she says with a giggle, pushing back the blonde tuff of hair to only have it fall right back down.

“Okay.”

“O-okay?”, she says, cheeks red.

“Sure, that is what this class is for.”, you say, your eyes locked with her own.

“Y-you! I am going to do something very stupid right now, something I will likely regret. And don’t you think for a second this gives you a pass! I will grind your Army into dust again and again... as many times as it takes. Now close your eyes.”, Riley says, her voice commanding, if only slightly shaky.

You oblige her, and then quickly feel another set of lips against yours. Before you can stop it, your body reacts, ignoring every instinct you possess to pull away, to push *her* away. Instead you just press back, only a hair. And then, quickly as kiss came it is gone. When your eyes open again all you can see is Riley scampering out of the room with the bag of cookies in her hand.

Valentines’ day... it might not just be an excuse to have the library to yourself. It might even be interesting.

Today was a good day. Best Valentine’s you could recall.

You were having a lot of ‘bests’ recently.

You only hoped that with the coming struggle, with Avalon nearing, you wouldn’t end up paying for them.