

To Fall In Love With You

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To Fall In Love With You

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Summary

For the first time since escaping the circle Anders allowed himself the moment to breathe, face turned up to the sky. Fatigue and his aching body forgotten, lost in the relief of fresh air and rain against his skin.

Or In Which Anders Meets Hawke Before Kirkwall During One Of His Escapes And They Fall Stupidly In Love

Notes

So this was supposed to be a one shot prequel for the fic I actually wanted to write originally but then it's gotten a lot longer than I'm comfortable doing in a one shot and it still isn't finished so here we are, i'd love any constructive criticism you'd like to give it's been years since i've written anything this ambitious but i'm really proud of what I have done so far and what I have planned!

The rain began not with a drizzle but a dizzying violent downpour; raindrops cutting like daggers through the air. What little light had been bleeding through the storm clouds was quickly fading as Anders hastily stuffed the map he'd been trying to decipher back into his robes.

The clearing he stood in was tiny, framed by the thick forests he'd been stumbling through all afternoon. Anders knew he couldn't stay stopped for long, and he'd have to get out of the rain soon before his map got ruined, but he savored being out in the maelstrom not just hearing it dully through grey stone walls.

For the first time since escaping the circle, Anders allowed himself the moment to breathe, face turned up to the sky. Fatigue and his aching body forgotten, lost in the relief of fresh air and rain against his skin.

Then a girl fell out of the trees in front of him with a shout and his heart stopped.

"Marian... Marian no-" Garret groaned, tugging on his twin's sleeve, desperate to talk sense into her so they could go home and get out of this blighted storm, "Please. Look at those robes he must be from a Circle and Templars won't be far behind him,"

Marian distractedly pulled her arm away, watching the apparent runaway smile up at the storm-swept sky, threadbare circle robes clinging to a tall, skinny frame while hair like melted gold stuck to high cheekbones. Pure joy and relief seemed to radiate from him, lighting up the tiny clearing. Marian couldn't find the will to tear her eyes away.

"All the more reason to say hello," She murmured, unconsciously leaning farther out of the tree they'd climbed a few hours ago while hunting to get a better look at the pretty stranger, "See if he needs any help,"

Marian looked back startled when Garrett tugged on her arm again, with enough force this time to make her nearly lose her grip. He huffed sharply, an all too familiar expression on his face. Frustrated and fond at the same time, Garrett had used it since they were children and Marian knew she had a look to match it for him when he was the one acting without thinking.

Feeling the blood rush to her cheeks Marian cleared her throat, "Oh don't look at me like that, it's just... well he can hardly stay out here! He'll catch his death... or worse,"

The Templars will catch him.

It went unsaid but heard all the same. The thought chilled Marian more than the rain could, clearing her head and firming her resolve. Again her gaze drifted to the clearing, the boy didn't even have shoes on she wasn't going to just leave him to wander the woods at night in a storm.

"They could catch you too or Bethany and if we're found helping him..."

“Father-” Marian stopped at the growl her brother shot her, taking a deep breath before continuing as she stood carefully, struggling to keep her balance on the soaked branch, “I know you’re just worried about us and I appreciate that, but I’m worried about him and the very least we can do is offer to help,”

“Marian.” He was glaring now; she could feel it against her back.

“You can just leave if you don't want-.”

“No. It’s too dangerous, he isn't some lost puppy. We have no idea who he is or what his intentions are,”

“Just look at him, Garrett! He’s half-starved and it’s pissing down rain and he’s just so-”

“Pretty?”

“Happy. Relieved. Don't tell me you can't see that,” She fixed her own glare on him.

He was one to talk.

Marian was about to bite back to him about that handsome rogue he had invited to spar with him not even a fortnight back who’d made off with Garrett’s best dagger when suddenly a deafeningly close crack of thunder shook the forest and Marian found her grip on the tree suddenly gone. Scrambling to catch herself Marian braced to hit the ground even as she reached out for purchase. Miraculously the back of her knee hit a branch and she focused on using it to stop, wrapping her legs together around it desperately despite the pain.

Marian hadn’t even had a chance to think of catching her breath or righting herself when she realized she’d fallen far down enough that she was in plain view of the clearing. The noise from her tumble down the tree and her twin’s shout louder than the rain and drawing the attention of the boy right to where she hung upside down.

The boy was no longer smiling, fear freezing him in place as he stared at her with wide amber eyes. Like a frightened deer faced with a hunter. Marian felt her breath catch even as her heart broke. Not daring to blink she carefully raised a hand, focusing as best she could on summoning a flame or something, anything to show him she was no threat. She had to get her mind to calm down enough to concentrate, one wrong move and he’d run. Even from her precarious position Marian could see his hand twitch, how his breath had turned ragged.

“It’s alright, I promise, I...I... I’m a mage too,” Marian said as softly as she could, becoming aware of her brother quickly and quietly descending the tree; knowing if he came into view that would be the end of her chance Marian finally felt her magic flow up within her, softly igniting a flame between her fingers to curl up flickeringly around her wrist, “See?”

It felt like even the forest held its breath at that moment, everything going still as the boy’s eyes slid from her face to her hand only to return quickly this time accompanied by a return of that relieved smile. Marian felt the warmth of it spread through her faster than a wildfire and she smiled back, letting the rain win its battle to extinguish the flame she'd summoned.

Then Garrett dropped to the ground next to her, eyeing the startled apostate suspiciously before turning to his sister, silently cursing her and the soft heart he knew was melting in her chest.

“Would you like help or are you going to hang there all night grinning like an idiot?”

Anders watched silently as the dark-haired girl was helped down gently despite her companion’s gruff demeanor. When she was finally on her feet she winced; her leggings had torn in the fall, the skin beneath practically shredded by the rough bark and bleeding steadily.

Without thinking Anders took a step forward only to hesitate with his hand half outstretched.

We should leave, a part of him urged, just because she’s also a mage doesn’t mean they won’t turn you over to protect themselves.

Anders wanted to, needed to even, he knew better than to stay still too long or involve anyone else in his escapes by now. All the times he’d been caught before ran through his mind, making his restarted heart beat faster. Yet he stayed rooted to the spot as the girl looked up at him with breathtaking hazel eyes, her gaze gentle without any pity or fear. Emotion clogged his throat for a moment and he cleared it before gesturing to her leg.

“You’re hurt,”

“No more than usual,” She smiled crooked and wide then as she elbowed the boy still glaring at him, “Ignore my brother, Garrett’s just overprotective,”

“With good reason, Marian,” His eyes remained on Anders making him all too aware of how he must look to the shorter man. Strange mage running about the woods in a storm still in his robes from the circle, an obviously well-used staff strapped to his back. Dangerous in his own right, doubly so to another apostate.

“I don’t mean you any trouble,” Anders started, holding his hands up “I just... I’m just passing through... I can heal your leg if you’d like though before I leave, it really shouldn’t be ignored,”

“You’re a healer?”

“Oh well... it’s just...” Anders fumbled for words. She looked amazed, the wonder in her wide eyes making his heart skip another beat, “I mean... Yes, I am,”

“Well if it’s no trouble for you, our house isn’t far,”

“Marian.”

“Well he can hardly heal me out here, Garrett. It’s getting too dark to see and this rain is only getting worse,” Marian met her brother’s eyes, and there was silence for a moment until Garrett looked away, shaking his head.

"It's alright really I can-"

"Nonsense! The house is close by and then you can get dry and warm too," Marian was determined, her eyes sparkling like she'd won some great battle and looking to her brother and his glower Anders conceded she had.

He knew he should still say no, simply heal her out here as best he could and then get on his way, find someplace to wait out the rest of the night and get back to running in the morning. Shouldn't be so selfish as to involve her further, put her in danger of getting caught by the Templars. However meeting her eyes again he found himself nodding, unable bring himself to disappoint her and aching for a just a few moments in her company.

How long had it been since the last time someone talked to him without being forced to?

"Perfect! Oh, I almost forgot- what's your name?"

"Anders,"

"Anders? That's neat,"

"Yes yes now that everyone knows everyone else's name and we've committed to this course of harebrained action can we please go home," Garrett interrupted, wrapping an arm under his sister to help her walk, "before Mother sends out Carver and we have to listen to him whine for the rest of the night,"

Marian made a face motioning for Anders to follow as they forced their way through the underbrush until they came upon the well-worn path out of the forest and towards town proper.

Anders couldn't stop himself from constantly casting his eyes around the darkness, certain at any moment he'd hear the familiar clanging of Templar armor behind him, feel his magic leech away drained by their lyrium infused abilities. He watched silently as the pair ahead of him groused about their day, the weather, the lecture they knew was coming. The camaraderie and obvious affection they displayed despite their earlier frustrations bringing the smile back to his face.

Marian looked back at him laughing and rolling her eyes when Garrett complained about having to drag her home injured again.

"I'll have you know this doesn't happen nearly as often as he's making it seem, I can at least usually walk on my own,"

"Don't listen to her this is the third time this year,"

"I can help her the rest of the way if you'd like a break," Anders offered, telling himself it was only to be fair and not because he wanted to be closer to her.

Garrett caught the look Marian gave him even in the darkness and rolled his eyes, stopping to hand her off to Anders, casually stepping behind them so he could keep an eye on the apostate, "Be careful, she's heavier than she looks,"

"Hey!"

"Doesn't seem so bad," Anders said, internally cursing his lying self when Marian reached up wrapping an arm around his shoulders and leaned against him, so soft and warm it was easy to ignore how his own body throbbed from the strain as he wrapped his own arm around her waist and they began walking again.

It wasn't long before the siblings set to taking bets on what was going to piss their mother off the most: the injuries or the runaway circle mage. When Anders offered again to just heal her outside, heart in his throat, Marian just laughed and leaned her head against his shoulder.

"Don't worry about mother, she's not actually that bad,"

"Not to strangers anyways, us on the other hand..." Garrett trailed off with an exaggerated shudder making both of them laugh.

Despite their reassurances Anders felt a knot form in his stomach.

The storm was just beginning to lighten up as they rounded a bend and Anders saw a small cottage of worn stone and wood. Warm light spilled out the windows giving glimpses of a small but well-tended vegetable garden, a pen off to the side covered to protect the chickens he could hear clucking as they walked up to the door. With each step the urge to flee grew stronger and stronger, the fear of the unknown that lay just beyond the door almost paralyzing.

Then Marian looked up smiling at him, "Really Anders, don't worry, I promise everything is going to be ok,"

Anders knew he was being stupid, knew he shouldn't believe that, but she was so earnest and endearing he found himself smiling back just a little, anxiety fading away at the warmth in her eyes.

Marian only grinned when her mother whirled around prepared to lay into them when they walked in, only to stop at the sight of them standing in the doorway half drowned and her leg still bleeding, slower now but still enough to drip down onto the floor. It was comical how her mother's face shifted from anger and frustration to an annoyed resignation in a second.

Leandra rubbed her forehead, feeling a headache starting already, "I thought we agreed no more strays, Marian,"

"I tried to tell her," Garrett said.

"Mother, this is Anders, he's a healer. He's offered to fix my leg," Marian lifted her leg up so Leandra could see the gashes more clearly, "Wheres Carver and Bethie?"

"Out looking for you two, dinner was nearly finished," Leandra turned to Anders looking him over, eyes critical but not cruel, "Well come in, you can just put her on the chair there. Garrett come with me,"

"Oh uh... yes, ma'am,"

Marian watched Garrett go help their mother hunt down some dry clothes for them all and fill her in on what happened before turning to Anders who got right to work, carefully rolling up the remains of her pants over her wound, his brow furrowed. Still dripping strands of golden hair practically shone in the firelight and clung to his forehead, falling in his eyes making him shake his head a little trying to move them without taking his eyes from the still bleeding wounds on Marian's leg, she reached down gently tucking them behind his ear her fingers lingering a moment too long before she could stop herself.

Anders peaked up at her through his lashes, color rising in his cheeks, "Uhm, do you have something thin I can use to get some of this debris out? A needle maybe?"

"Mother's got a sewing kit next to the fireplace, why?"

"It's not a good idea to heal around debris like this if you can help it, your body can't really get rid of it on its own and if you leave them in it can cause infections that are trapped by the newly healed skin," Anders quickly retrieved the kit, pulling out a needle and started gently picking out splinters of bark, sending a soothing aura of pain relief over the area as he did. He was calm and confident while he worked, hands sure as he moved her leg to see better in the firelight, completely focused on his task.

"I would never have thought of that," Marian just watched him work for a while, mesmerized and without thinking she asked, "You're really good at this,"

Anders was quiet for a long time before putting the needle down and finally answering while he started to heal the wounds slowly, the magic washing over her leg knitting her flesh together carefully leaving only shiny pink scars in its wake, "I've had a lot of practice,"

Marian wanted to press, ask more questions but those bright amber eyes that had seemed to shine as he worked were now dulled, a distant expression on his face and she wanted to kick herself. It was silent then as he poked at the new skin, Marian in the unusual position of not knowing what to say.

Thankfully Leandra came back in, arms full of clothes, breaking the awkward moment.

"I was hoping the boys' clothes would fit you, but they're both so much shorter than you. Some of my husband's older ones should fit you just fine though,"

"Oh that... that's not necessary ma'am," Anders stuttered out, standing up, "I was just about to leave-"

"Not in those robes you're not, walk around like that and the Templars will find you in no time," Leandra handed him the bundle, "And you should at least stay the night, you'll just get soaked again if you leave now,"

"I don't want to be any trouble," Anders clutched the clothes to his chest, throat thick.

"It's the least we can do for you for healing Marian, not trouble. Now go get out of those wet robes before you get sick," Leandra shooed him off towards where Garrett and Carver slept to change.

Marian waited, picking at the loose threads of her pants knowing a lecture was coming, but instead all her mother did was look at her for a second before telling her to go get changed as well, that Garrett would be back with Carver and Bethany before long and that dinner had been delayed enough. Marian knew better than to press her luck, but she couldn't help blinking at her mother before getting up.

Anders wasn't sure what to make of his current situation, couldn't quite process all that had happened in the last day and a half that had led to him laying on a couch wrapped in a warm quilt in front of a dying fireplace.

Anders was barely asleep lulled by the slowly dissipating storm when a soft whisper of footsteps bolted him upright, heart pounding. Anders relaxed immediately though when he saw it was Marian, another conjured flame in her hand. The light of the fire casting her face in a warm glow, highlighting the beguiling shape of her mouth as she smiled at him apologetically.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you,"

"No no it's alright, is everything ok?"

Marian bit her lip looking away as she went over to the fireplace, placing more wood inside and stoking it back to life, "Just wanted to make sure the fire didn't die on you, it can get really drafty in here,"

It was at least partially the truth. The full truth was she hadn't been able to sleep, left tossing and turning thinking about Anders and the wistful sad look in his golden eyes as he'd taken in the family while they ate, the hesitance in his voice when he spoke. The bruises on his shoulder that she'd spied when her father's shirt slipped down, a little too baggy for Anders thin frame. It drove her to madness laying in the dark, unable to quell the need to go check on him.

"Oh... Thank you," Warmth swelled in Anders' chest, making it hard to breathe for a moment and he pulled the quilt tighter around him, "You didn't have to,"

The rain had slowed drastically, no longer beating against the roof; the loudest sound now the crackling of the fire as Marian turned back to Anders, "It's no problem really I couldn't sleep anyways,"

"Are you alright?"

He sounded so concerned, his voice a low gentle whisper. Marian just shrugged, unsure how to - or indeed if she even should - put words to the thoughts swirling chaotically in her head. The heat of the fire at her back was nothing compared to one inside her when she thought of

what he must have been through to have marks like that, the tiny bits and pieces of what her father had told her about his days in a circle echoing through her head. It was far from the first time the thought of what the chantry did to mages, to people just like her and her father and her sister who couldn't bring herself to smash bug let alone harm another person, made her heart pound in anger and agony but this time seemed so much worse.

This time it wasn't some faceless hypothetical person, it was boy barely older than her with kind amber eyes and gentle hands. It was Anders with his tiny smiles when the rain would pound harder, who'd nearly cried when Leandra fussed over him insisting he take another helping of food making sure he didn't need an extra blanket when they settled down for bed. They'd locked him off all people away, labeling him such a danger he couldn't even go outside, feel the sun on his face; Marian had never seen someone so pale, so thin.

"It's not fair... what they did to you, do to others," Marian said, "To them, there's no such thing as an innocent mage is there?"

If there was it would be you, she only thinks that part, fingers pressing against where he'd healed her leg.

"No, there isn't," He doesn't sound sad so much as resigned.

"I should probably let you get some rest-"

"Marian?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you," Anders smile is small but it's there and suddenly the heat in her isn't the burning of anger, it's too soft for that as it moves through her veins filling her with an aching need to see that smile again. She wants to lean over, wrap him in her arms safe from the world, protect him.

Instead, she just smiles back, reminding her heart he's going to be gone tomorrow and says despite wanting to cry, "Anytime, Anders,"

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