

Masquerade

Masquerade

A smile lit his face as he walked through the Great Hall of Hogwarts. So far, no one had realized who he was. Amazing how changing your patterns of speech could do that.

It had been decided to throw a Masquerade Ball for Halloween this year, open to all years, rather than the usual party. Everyone had been excited by the concept, and there were small bets around the school as to who would be able to fool whom.

Weeks had been put into various charms and costuming enchantments, and the night of the Ball proved to be magnificent. One young woman had a costume that caused most of the male to look twice, since she was in a skin-tight red body-suit with a red tail and demonic wings, both of which moved quite convincingly, and helped with the impression of nudity. A few were obvious - the beautiful girl in the oriental costume dancing with the student in the silver stag mask simply had to be Cho Chang. He chuckled as he realized how obvious the silver stag mask was. Cho was obviously trying to make up with Harry. He didn't seem to be fighting it too much.

He himself was dressed as The Beast, from Disney's movie *Beauty and the Beast*. *In a way, it's fitting*, he thought. He sounded like the character as well, and the face moved as if this were truly his natural form.

It was then that he saw her across the floor - an Elven goddess, surrounded by fawning boys. He strode toward her. "My lady Titania, will you do me the honour of this dance?" She looked gravely at him and bowed, then offered her hand to him. He led her to the floor and through the fluid, graceful motions of a romantic air.

When the dance had ended, she spoke again, her voice rich and vibrant. "How did you know who I am here as? You are the first to correctly guess."

"I saw the most beautiful Elf in existence, and knew immediately whom you must be."

She blushed prettily, and looked at him questioningly as the music started again, another waltz. They rapidly became the center of attention at the ball, much to Cho Chang's obvious annoyance. She was quite happy with having snagged Harry Potter, but was not happy to have the spotlight stolen from her.

After several dances, Titania and The Beast headed outside to the front lawn, still well in view of any chaperones. In fact, he looked up and waved at one of them; Professor McGonagall, he was certain.

She looked at him and said, "Will you tell me who you are, Lord Beast? In return, I shall divulge my own true identity to you."

"I have already deduced your identity, dear Titania. The only possible choice is that you are in reality Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. You truly are the beauty to my beast."

She smiled demurely and said, "I thank you, good sir, but I was serious in my offer."

"And I was serious in my assessment, milady. Even in my other guise, I have thought you so."

"Then you know who I truly am?" she asked, her interest piqued.

"Yes, Miss Hermione Granger, I know precisely who you are. You are the avatar of Aphrodite incarnate."

Her hand shot to her breast, and she blushed. "Oh goodness! You can't be serious!"

"But I am, dear lady. Your divine charms have stolen my heart, and thought I that you could return such feelings to me when you knew my true identity, I would proclaim from the rooftops my love for you."

She hung her head. "I'm sorry. I haven't had the courage to tell the person I'm in love with either. He'll laugh at me; I'm sure of it."

"Who would be such a fool?"

"The dancer in the silver stag mask. He's gotten back together with Cho Chang." A tear fell from her eye.

"One cannot get back what one never had," came the bemused reply.

"What do you mean?" she asked, crossly. "They were an item last year, such as it was."

"So you are certain that it is Harry Potter under the silver stag mask? He is the one who holds your heart?"

"Yes, to both," she said sadly.

"Let us go discover the truth, then. What would you have me do if you are correct, that it is Harry Potter? And let us make our choices a wizard's oath."

She pulled her wand and did a small incantation. Expectant sparks hovered in the air. "I would have you unmask in the Great Hall and let us all know who you are." The sparks exploded noiselessly and covered him.

"Simple enough, although you should have asked for more, as I intend to." He turned and pulled his wand from his sleeve, hiding it from her view, and performed the same incantation. Sparks appeared, surrounding her. "If I am correct, then I would have you publicly proclaim your love for Harry Potter, so that he knows the treasure before him. You then will kiss me, not knowing now who I am under this mask. You are permitted to tell the crowd that you do this due to a wizard's oath."

"So you would have me destroy any chance I have with Harry?" she asked hotly.

"You already feel you have no chance with him. Perhaps kissing me might open new vistas to you."

"True." Another tear, this time wiped gently away by The Beast's hand.

"I have loved you for some time, Hermione. I hope to open your eyes to that which has been before you for longer than you know." They turned and headed into the Great Hall, where they found the silver stag and Cho Chang over in a corner, her moving suggestively against him, and he certainly didn't appear to be complaining much.

The Beast stalked over to the couple, Titania in his wake. "Miss Chang," he rumbled, "you seem to be enjoying yourself."

"Not that it's any business of yours, but yes. And I really don't think Harry minds all that much, either." A sly smile crossed her face.

"Titania and I have a bet. I say that this is not Harry Potter, and she says that it is. Perhaps he would be willing to unmask and show us who is right and who is wrong?"

The student in the silver stag mask smiled and said, "I think I can manage that." He reached up and pulled the mask down, a full mop of unruly hair finally being released.

"Ron Weasley?!?" Cho Chang squeaked. "I've been over here snogging Ron Weasley?" She paused for a moment. "Damn, you're a good kisser."

"I was inspired," he grinned. She put her arm around him, pulled him close, and kissed him again to a round of applause. He returned it with interest.

The Beast and Titania walked to the center of the Hall. It grew silent, because word of the bet had already made the rounds of the Hall somehow. She cleared her throat. "I made a wizard's oath to follow through on a bet with The Beast here, concerning who was wearing the silver stag mask. I am to proclaim something, and then I am to kiss the student under the mask, not knowing at this moment who it is. The proclamation I am to make is to admit to the student body that I love Harry Potter, with all my heart and all my soul, and I hope he can forgive me for the kiss I agreed to give."

The Beast spoke. "I think I can guarantee that Harry won't be offended. First off, it was a wizard's oath. Second," he said, pausing for a moment to lift the mask off his head. "Second," he said again in his normal voice, "it's Harry Potter that you agreed to kiss." She turned to face him, holding the mask under his arm, and her eyes went wide. Her hand rose to her mouth. "I want the assembled students to know something," he added. "With no wizard's oath forcing me to say this, I want the world to know that I love Hermione Granger with all my heart and all my soul!" He swept her into his arms, and the room exploded in firefly lights as their lips met and they melted into each other's embrace.

Copyright info: Joanne Kathleen Rowling owns all the characters contained within this short story. No damage to her copyrights is intended, and I am making no money whatsoever from this story.