that thing with feathers

by The_Apocryphal_One

Summary

Or, once again, Dimitri goes to Sylvain for girl advice. Dimileth Week 2019 Day 3: Future/Past.

Notes

A/N: soooo this might actually end up being my last entry for Dimileth week after all :( I just got a lot of work dumped on me, so I don't think I'll be able to work on anything else for the rest of the week. I might be able to crank out tomorrow's, but that's it.

Dimitri hadn’t imagined he’d end up here again.

After freeing Derdriu, they had stopped by Garreg Mach to restock and take inventory of their new Alliance troops. Then they would begin the final push to Enbarr. With everyone sequestered in their old student rooms, Dimitri had figured now was as good a time as any to seek out a certain philanderer for (Goddess help him) advice. The conversation he planned to have required more privacy than could be gained in the thin canvas of a tent.
So now he stood in Sylvain’s room, a wave of déjà vu sweeping over him. Last time he’d been here, he’d needed help running from a girl. Now, he needed help going to a woman.

Once he’d heard Dimitri out, Sylvain’s grin easily outmatched the cat with the cream. “A woman? Would this, by any chance, be a certain professor with, oh, what was it you once said? ‘Stars in her hair and eyes’?”

He shushed his friend and glanced furtively about, as if Byleth would leap out from the walls and ask ‘how dare you love me?’. “Sylvain, please, not so loud!”

It was no secret among the Blue Lions that Dimitri had feelings for Byleth. Even back in the Academy days, his friends had picked up on it quickly. Annette, Ashe, and Mercedes had thought it adorable; Ingrid and Dedue had offered support if he needed it; Felix had ignored the matter; and Sylvain…

Well. Sylvain had been quite amused by the whole affair. Especially when he caught a glimpse of the scribbled poem Dimitri had tried writing for Byleth’s birthday.

He’d then tried to offer some writing tips to make up for the teasing, but in the end the poem ended up burned.

Sylvain held his hands up playfully. “Alright, alright. So, what can I do to assist your not-courtship of this totally mysterious woman?”

Dimitri’s fingers jittered against his unarmored thigh. “I want…I want to tell her how I feel.”

It had taken him a lot of time to come to that decision. How could a monster like him be worthy of her, in all her light and brilliance, her sharp edges and soft curves, her cool head and warm heart? It wasn’t possible. Telling her was pure selfishness—but she’d asked him to be a little more selfish, hadn’t she?

Not that he held her accountable for his feelings. His torment was not her fault, but his, for daring to want her as his own. She was in no way obliged to return his love. But for his own sake, he had to tell her, lest he revert to old habits and be slowly crushed under the weight of his unvoiced feelings.

Sylvain laughed in delight and slapped his back. “Hey, good for you, man! It’s about time, you don’t know how painful it is to watch the sexual tension.”

“Sylvain, this is not—what do you mean, sexual tension?”

Ginger eyebrows rose. “What do I mean—she’s into you, Your Highness. One hundred percent.”

The hope that rose up at those words almost choked him. His heart seized. His throat closed. No. It was wishful thinking that she might love him, nothing less. “That’s a cruel joke, Sylvain.”

“I’m not joking. Out of all of us, you’re the one she spends the most time with. She’s always holding your hand, too.”

She just does that because she’s indulging my childish desires. But he couldn’t say that. Admitting how much he craved Byleth’s touch made him flush with embarrassment.

Sylvain took his silence as permission to continue. “When you’re in the room, she’s like, fine-tuned to you. Earlier at breakfast, she was getting you a refill for your drink as you ran out.”

That, Dimitri could counter. “She’s just very intuitive, that’s all.”
“Intuition doesn’t explain why she looks at your mouth. Women do that when they think about kissing the owner of said mouth. Trust me, I’m a physician.”

“You are not.”

“Yes I am. A physician with a degree in the minds of women. And I can tell: she likes you.” His joviality faded, replaced with an expression that mixed concern and brotherly affection in equal measures. “You seriously had no idea?”

Dimitri shook his head. Hope’s little, fragile butterfly wings began to flutter in his chest again. “I…I planned to confess solely to get it off my chest. Not for reciprocation.” Even now, he still couldn’t quite believe there was a chance she might feel the same. “But I don’t want to make her frightened or disgusted, or…that’s why I came to you. You’re more experienced in these matters than me.”

Sylvain ran a hand through his hair. Chewed his lip. Sighed. “My experience lies with flings, not with serious love.”

“But Mercedes—”

“Hey, we’re talking about your feelings, not mine. Besides, Mercie and the professor are way different. What one likes in a confession isn’t necessarily gonna be what the other likes.” At Dimitri’s crestfallen look, he relented. “But I guess I can give you some general advice.”

“A present’s a nice touch,” Sylvain said as they moved through the crowded marketplace. “You don’t want something too expensive—that looks like you’re trying to buy her off—but you don’t want something cheap—that says you didn’t put a lot of thought into it.”

The town of Garreg Mach wasn’t as prosperous as it had been in their academy days, but it was doing far better now. Many of the shops had been repaired or at least had the holes covered by wooden planks. The streets were once again lined with merchants’ stalls and bustling with people. Dimitri’s nose twitched with the smells of fish, meat, spices, incense, oils, sweat, horse manure, ale, and leather.

Given the utmost secrecy of this mission, they’d opted to come incognito, out of armor and with their weapons concealed. There was nothing to be done about his height, but with a cowl up and without his signature mantle and armor, Dimitri thought he blended in with the commoners rather well.

Sylvain paused in his chatter, eyeing up a pretty baker. Dimitri was about to scold him when he noticed it wasn’t the baker Sylvain was looking at, but the scrumptious pastries on display. A small grin crossed his lips—somehow, he knew exactly who Sylvain was thinking of.

“What was I saying?” Sylvain muttered, giving himself a small shake. “Oh, right, presents. Our professor’s not a very flashy person. She’ll probably like it more if you give her something practical yet personal, like new gardening gloves or a new fishing rod or a new tea set. Or, heh, maybe you could give her a dagger…”

“Speaking of,” Dimitri said, spotting a familiar sign. “Earlier this week, I dropped some lances off for repairs. They should be ready for pick-up now. Why don’t you wait here while I do that?”

Sylvain waved him off, already moving towards the baker. Dimitri turned and began making his way to the blacksmith.

Unsurprisingly, the blacksmith had seen an enormous increase in business. She wasn’t the only one in Garreg Mach, but she was the most sought-after, and their army personally hired her many times.
In fact, she’d taken on several apprentices to help her manage the almost-endless workload.

He emerged from the smithy a few minutes later, his newly-repaired spear and silver lance in hand. As he scanned the crowds for Sylvain, Dimitri caught sight a particular stall, not far from the blacksmith.

As if spellbound, he moved closer. It was a jeweler’s stall, and locked behind glass cases were his wares, spread out for perusal. A quick scan of his work showed it to be high quality indeed. One ring in particular caught Dimitri’s eye. It was made of the finest silver, with three large emeralds that brought to mind the shade of Byleth’s hair and eyes. How would that look on her finger, he wondered?

“Thinking a little far ahead, aren’t we?” Sylvain teased, appearing at his side out of nowhere. In one of his hands was a basket with a delicious smell rising from it.

Shame-faced at the direction of his thoughts, Dimitri took several steps back. “You’re right. It’s presumptuous to assume…”

The amusement dropped from Sylvain’s face. He studied Dimitri, a crease forming between his brows. When he spoke, it was with unusual seriousness. “Do you love her?”

“With all my being,” he said instantly. Every time Byleth smiled at him, love swelled in his chest, suffocating and freeing all at once. It was the most glorious joy he’d felt and the most excruciating pain he’d suffered. But he would never regret loving Byleth, not when she had done him an indescribable favor by reaching out her hand. Nothing would change the gratitude he felt.

Of course, that act was not why he loved her. Rather, it was just one of the many reasons he did. Her smile, her hands, her calm logic, her deadpan sense of humor, the way she propped a hand under her chin while thinking…all her habits and favorites and quirks and flaws…all of those parts formed a sum that was uniquely Byleth, wonderful and irreplaceably precious.

‘Love’? Hah. Love was insufficient. There were no words to describe how much he adored, revered, worshiped her.

“What do you want to marry her?”

Goddess, to spend the rest of his life with her...to call himself her husband, and she his wife...he craved it. "Yes."

“Then buy that ring! As long as you don’t pressure her into something she doesn’t want, I don’t see what the problem is.”

“I would never do such a thing! But we haven’t—there hasn’t been a courtship—”

“There’s been a war, Dimitri. That kinda pushes everything else aside.”

“She deserves better,” he tried, feebly.

At that, Sylvain crossed his arms and scowled. “No, Dimitri, you don’t get to decide who she loves. Only she decides that. And if the man she picks is you—and it will be—you will fall to your knees and thank her and the Goddess both. Throwing her love in her face with some ‘you deserve better’ crap is not gonna end well. Especially since you’re the one confessing.”

It was an unusually astute observation, and it hit its mark. Hadn't he vowed to become a better man—to become a man again? He couldn't presume to be worthy of happiness, but—if he could
somehow bring *her* happiness... Dimitri looked at the ring again, then back to his friend. “I…you speak true, Sylvain. Thank you.”

And just like that, the grimness vanished, replaced with a cheerful grin and wink. “What are friends for?”

That afternoon, Dimitri returned to the monastery with a ring in his pocket and a tentative hope for the future in his heart.

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