Trouble is a Friend of Mine

by karrenia_rune

Summary

Early in the beginnings of Wonderland The Hatter receives a commission to outfit the entire royal family of the four suits, on the eve of the semi-annual Gala, but it falls through at the last minute. His friend offers to help him out, but not as the Hatter imagined it would be like.

Disclaimer: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass are the original creations of Lewis Carroll. Ditto for the characters of the Mad Hatter and the Cheshire Cat, set pre-series. The title was inspired by the song by Lenka. Note: I was not signed up as a participant but the prompts were intriguing...

"Trouble is a Friend of Mine"

He should have known the contrary beast was trouble the moment it appeared in his shop. Well, it did not so much appear as it seemed to coalesce out of thin air. Not there one second and there the next. As calmly nestled among his display racks of hats, ties, cravats, and ladies' scarves as if it owned the place.

He might have been more annoyed if it hadn't been a slow day; truth be told, it had been a slow week.

Hatter had hoped against hope that big commission from the Royal Suits Minister of Pomp and Circumstance would not fall through because he had already begun to cut and sew the patterns for both the Queen of Hearts and the Queen of Diamonds, not to mention the Kings as well.

The annual event was to commemorate the sweet sixteen birthday of the heirs apparent.
And even if he hadn't managed to swing an invite, he at least could outfit them all. The mannequin in his back work-room had already been fitted with the muslin under-garment and the white and red tulle with onyx beads to represent the various numbers of the royal retainers was set to be pinned and draped to perfection. He had a vision in his mind of what the final product would be like and he was so close to having it realized; it simply would be a shame not to be able to accomplish it simply because someone came down with a case of cold feet at the last minute.

The cat smirked, and he, not to be outdone, smirked back. This went on for sometime before he could no longer maintain eye contact and he was forced to look away. "What do you want?"

"Is that any way to greet an old friend?" purred the Cheshire Cat.

"Tsk, Tsk, Elliot, so temperamental; that's not like you at all. And if you meant that last remark especially as it applies to our last escapade; then I assure you, it was hardly my fault that you fell out of step with Father Time."

"I can if I want to!" The Hatter muttered under his breath, "and while we're on the subject, Please, don't call me Elliot. Makes me think of my mother."

"Well, have it your way," the Cat replied, furling its whiskers in and out before it jumped from the shelf down to a chair and over to the counter where the Hatter stood. "You see, I have come with a proposition that I think will intrigue you."

"I figure I'm going to regret this before I even ask," sighed the Hatter, "but I can't help myself, what did you have in mind?"

"You want to go the sweet sixteen ball, do you not?"

"It's never any use hiding things from the likes of you; is there?"

"Not generally, although I think we shall dispense with the usual by-play and dissimulation for the moment, as much as I enjoy them."

The Hatter sat back in his chair and placed his hands behind the back of his hand, pondering that last statement for a few heartbeats. "Okay, okay, you've got me there. And just how do you plan on accomplishing this. The party is by invitation only and...." 

The Cat jumped up close to him and placed a forepaw in his mouth. "Quiet!" the other admonished. "People so seldom listen to cats, now here's what we'll do. You will go and get dressed in most stylish clothes, or as close as you can approximate."

"Hey, what was that last bit supposed to mean?"

"It means, my friend, that for someone who owns a haberdashery shop, you might consider making a better impression."

Hatter gritted his teeth, but let that last bit slide. "Then what?"

"Then we load up the garments inside a wagon and we take it to the court just like you planned, except this time you won't be alone."

"Then what?"
"Do I have to come up with the entire plan?" The Cat growled.

"Then if we can't bluff our way in, we do it my way."

"What about the dresses?

"We'll have to leave them, I'm afraid. I can poof when I choose too, and whatever they are wearing, with a bit of effort; not inanimate objects."

"You can?"

"Are we agreed?" The Cat asked.

Hatter nodded. "I'll go change and bring the cart around with the dresses. Wait here."  

Sometime later the pair started out for the royal palace of the Suits, most of which the Cat spent inside the cart, saying as how he could have gotten there and back again, but seeing as how did not care to overtax himself unduly. Also, he wanted to see how his friend would be received at the main gate.

The guards stood at attention with their feet firmly planted on the ground and with poleaxes clenched in their mailed fists. "Halt! cried the one on the left. "Who goes there? cried the one on the right.

Hatter gulped and stepped forward "Hatter of Haberdashery Couture, outfitter and supplier to the royal family."

"Where's you're invitation?"

"Ah, it seems to have gotten lost in the mail. But I assure I am expected. You see, I have a commission from the Minister of Pomp and Circumstance."

"Should we check on that?"

"I say we throw him out. I don't like the looks of him."

The Hatter tried to look offended at this but took heart from the guard on the left who at least was considering checking out his claim. Just then when it appeared that both guards, who had been conducting a hushed discussion had come to the conclusion that it would be best and easier for them to simply turn him away; approached to apprise him of this; when the newcomer in question was yanked back into a nearby hedge lion.

And gradually began to dissolve, booted feet first. It was an uncanny and a little bit uncomfortable sensation. For someone who had been accustomed to being solid and whole his entire life, to gradually lose that solidity bit by bit, feet, shins, legs, torso and then his arms finally, his head; it was more than a little unsettling. ** When he was solid and visible again. he nearly fell down again. "Hey, what did you do that for?" Hatter sucked in deep gasp of rose-bush scented air and tried to get his bearings.

"I did it to save you from a perhaps well-deserved pummeling. Guards, they should have been less zealous in the performance of their duties, but that's just my opinion."

"Thanks, I think," replied Hatter. "Now what?"

"Now, you mingle, you eat, drink and be merry. I've done my part of the bargain. The rest, my friend, is up to you," replied the Cheshire Cat.

"Wait, wait!" stammered Hatter, "Aren't you going to stay?"
"Of course I am. I enjoy a party as much as anyone, but well, cats and human beings and other assorted bipeds, well, let's just say I have different priorities."

"I, I guess I knew that," stammered Hatter, "I was just, well, thanks."

"You are welcome, my friend. And I wish you good fortune," the Cat said as it disappeared once more, "for you appear to need it."

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