

## The 54 - Long Goodbye

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Summary: A long-time FoLC and prolific fanfic author bids farewell to the fandom via this final story, this swan song from his various muses. This story follows his other muse-centric tales, “When Muses Go Bad” and “Fellowship of the Fanfic.”

Story Size: 2,377 words (13Kb as text)

Read the previous stories: “When Muses Go Bad” and “Fellowship of the Fanfic.”

The familiar characters of this story are not my own but are the property of corporate entities (DC Comics, December 3<sup>rd</sup> Productions, ABC, etc.) other than myself. This work is a labor of love and is presented with no expectation of remuneration.

Many thanks to Sara Kraft for her excellent GE work on this and many other tales of romance and adventure.

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I sit in my dark gray office, look at the gray suit coat – size fifty-four long – hung up on a corner of a drawer of the gray filing cabinet, flick my gray tie, and shake my gray head. The shadow of the outside window and the logo painted on it catch my eye. Even that’s a shade of gray.

I realize that I’ve never counted to see if I have as many as fifty shades of gray in the office. I think about it for a minute, then I decide I don’t have the energy to make the effort.

There are no pending case files on my desk, and every investigation I’ve finished has been billed out and paid for. I really don’t have enough foot traffic or phone calls nowadays to keep a secretary as good as Effie busy, but she just waves me off if I suggest that she find a better job – “better” being defined as one that pays more regularly than I can pay her.

I lean back in the beat-up wooden office chair and listen to the tortured squeak. It sounds old and tired. Almost worn out.

Like me.

I look around the office again. I’ve had some really great times here. A lot of the cases I’ve worked had been difficult to resolve, a few had been downright weird, but I’ve had a bunch of good laughs. And a few tears, too. Not every case ended in a party.

I think back to my very first case, one I took over from another guy when he wrapped it up in a bright pink bow and I didn’t think he’d tied it up right. He was nice enough to give me some pointers on my technique, then he did me a real solid and helped to set me up in the business. He’s retired now, and I haven’t heard from him in years, but I still have files of most of his cases. Sometimes I browse

them for hints or pointers, but I rely on my team a lot and they’ve always come through for me.

Odd, though, that I haven’t heard from them for a while, either. Oh, well, I guess even muses need vacations at times.

Effie chooses that moment to lean into my office. “Sam, there’s a very serious blonde lady who says she really needs to see you.”

I shake my head. “Sorry, sweets, I’m not receiving visitors today. Have her make an appointment for some time next week.”

Effie shakes her head back at me. “I really think you should talk to her.”

Effie’s not my boss, but she’s not stupid, either. If she thinks I need to see someone, I see that someone whether I feel like it or not. I can’t remember the last time she was wrong about something like that.

I’m not sure she’s ever been wrong about a potential client.

I sigh. “Okay, show her in.”

I sit up and move a couple of legal pads around on my desk and pick up a pencil so I can pretend to take notes. Then I look up and freeze.

I almost don’t recognize her. But it’s Harley.

And, as Effie described her, she looks serious.

She’s wearing her standard red-and-black outfit without the mask, and her blonde hair is down instead of braided or pony-tailed on either side. She’s not holding a wooden mallet or a pneumatic nail gun or a baseball bat, either. Is that really Harley?

I blink. Yeah, that’s Harley, all right, but something’s different about her face. I can’t quite figure it—

Got it. She isn’t smiling.

That’s really weird. Harley’s not smiling. I’ve never seen that before.

She waves at the chair in front of my desk and says, “Mind if I sit down?”

I unfreeze enough to gesture toward it. “Be my guest.” “Thanks.” She sits down, leans back, and folds her hands in her lap. Not once does she crack the tiniest of smiles.

After a couple of long breaths, I ask, “Is there something I can do for you?”

She sighs and shakes her head. “No. You’ve already done a lot.”

Now I’m worried. Harley is usually as energetic as a chihuahua full of espresso. “Is something wrong?”

She shifts in the chair and looks up at me. “Not really. I just – it’s hard letting go, y’ know?”

I nod. “I know. It’s hard for me too.”

She looks around the office and almost smiles. “Polly and Trope wanted to come with me, but I convinced them I should come alone. All three of us together today would have been more like getting a visit from the Furies than your muses. At least – it would have been this time.” She pauses and bites her lower lip, then adds, “They want me to say goodbye for them.”

I nod back. “So you’ve all heard, then?”

She shrugs. “Hard to keep something like that a secret, Sam.”

“You know my real name isn’t Sam.”

A half-smile creeps onto her lips. Not like the old Harley, but still it was something. “Sure, I know. But Psychotropia called you Sam the first time I met you, and that’s who you are to me now.”

“I remember that day. I was scared of all of you, but especially of Polyskitsodia. And I was afraid I couldn’t handle whatever you three wanted to give me.”

“You didn’t show it. I thought you handled both of them very well. I’ve seen them overwhelm other people and scare ‘em away for good. You always came back for more, even when the premise was hard to take. And you almost always watered it and fed it and fussed over it and pruned it like a pro until it grew into something really nice.” She turned her head to one side and the old Harley peeked through. “At least, I always thought it turned out nice.”

My half-smile matched hers. “Thank you. That’s high praise, coming from you.”

“And I don’t give it lightly. You’re one of the good ones, Sam.”

I nod and decide to change the subject. “You said Trope and Polly aren’t coming in person? They sent you?”

“They wanted us to come as a team because they both work well with you, separately and as a pair, but I told them I’d relay their message, whatever it might be. I hope you know that they’re not any happier about this than I am.”

It’s my turn to shrug. “I’m sorry. This has nothing to do with the three of you, not together or individually. It’s all me.”

“That’s what I told them. I think they believe it.”

“Good.” I push up from my chair with my hands on my desk and stand up slowly because my legs and back hurt. “I need to finish wrapping things up here, Harley, so if you don’t mind, I’ll have Effie show you out.”

She stands up and puts her hands together in front of her, fingers intertwined, her posture uncharacteristically that of a diffident schoolgirl. “Sam, I – can I give you a hug?”

The last time she tried to grab me for a hug I had to dodge two electric joy buzzers and swat a firecracker out of my shoe. But she looks so serious that, after a moment’s hesitation, I nod.

She reaches up and squeezes my neck and snuffles once in my ear. “We had some great times, didn’t we?”

I hug her back and say, “Yes, we did. And you’ll have more. You three aren’t out of ideas, not by a long shot.”

She lets go and steps away, then brushes at her eyes with one hand. “No, we’re not done. But I don’t know anybody quite like you. You’re just about my favorite. And you – you’re really special.”

“Thank you.” I step back and look at her as if measuring her. “You know, Miles would’ve liked you a lot.”

She chuckles. “Miles would’ve liked Puddin’ if there was money involved.”

“That’s true.” I smile again. After another long moment, I say, “I’m glad you came by. I’m gonna miss all three of you gals. Please tell them that.”

“I will. We’ll miss you too, Sam. Goodbye.”

I walk her to the inner office door and open it for her. Effie – dependable, efficient, irreplaceable Effie – is already

holding the outer door open. As Harley passes her, Effie says, “Goodbye. Best of luck with your new clients.”

Harley touches her on the arm and says, “Thank you. But you know they broke the mold when they made Sam.”

Effie’s smile quirks sideways. “True, but we really don’t want any more versions of *him* running around loose, do we?”

Harley laughs softly. “No, I guess one is all we can handle. Goodbye.”

Effie closes the door behind her, then turns to me. “Anything else, Sam?”

“I guess not. You might as well go home to your mother. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

She smiles sadly and shakes her head. “No, you won’t. You’re closing the office and I won’t have this job tomorrow.”

“What? How did you—”

Her brows knit together. “Come on! You know how long I’ve been your secretary. I know you, Sam, probably better than any other woman besides your wife ever has. You can’t hide anything from me.”

“I – I’m sorry. I didn’t want to just spring it on you.”

“You didn’t. I’ve seen the signs for a while now, I knew this was coming. We’ve had a good long run together, but it’s time to call it quits.”

I sigh again and slump back against the side of her desk. “I’m sorry. Again.” I look up at her. “I’ll make sure you get all the back salary I owe you.”

“I know that too. My office key’s on my desk next to the Dictaphone. And the paperwork to terminate the lease is under the stapler.”

I try to smile. “Effie, you’re a wonder and I never deserved you.”

She takes a step closer and gently touches my cheek. “Yes, I am, and no, you never did. But I’ll get along just fine.” She turns, then takes her jacket off the coatrack and picks up her purse. “You make sure you do the same, okay?”

“Okay. Good night.”

“Good night, Sam. Pleasant dreams.”

She shuts the door gently as she walks out.

For the last time.

I look around. Lotta memories in this place. Lotta good times. Some tough times, too, sure, but still valuable memories. I want to keep them.

I’ll always have my case files. And who knows? I might do some freelancing in my twilight years.

I walk back into my office and put on my coat and hat. One more glance, one more pause, one more sharp memory, a small flinch, a big smile, and it’s time to go.

I really have had a great run. Been lots of fun, too. I’ve really enjoyed it.

Thanks. And goodbye.

THE END

Author’s Notes:

This is it, my final contribution to this wonderful sandbox in which I’ve been privileged to play for more years than I want to total up. And I wanted my swan song

for Lois and Clark to be memorable.

There are too many unfinished stories on the boards, stories with wonderful premises and gripping plots and compelling characters – but which just come to a screeching halt halfway through the tale. And there are too many FOLCs who have just vanished into the dwide ether without any public knowledge of how or why they're no longer active. I didn't want anyone to wonder what had happened to me, so please consider this my official retirement notice.

For the foreseeable future, this is it for me. My life is veering off into new and uncharted waters, largely due to my increasingly unstable health, and this wonderful and amazing fandom isn't part of that future. I will always cherish the time I've spent here, the responses (both positive and negative) to the stories I've written, and the intelligent and perceptive people with whom I have corresponded, both publicly and privately. I'll lurk back on occasion, but at this point I don't anticipate becoming active again. Of course, no one can accurately foresee the future, least of all me.

I will miss this. A lot. But it's time for me to make a change. Please understand and believe that I'm not departing because I'm angry about some imagined slight or that I'm disappointed in the people or the stories here – in fact, I firmly believe that this fandom has gathered some of the best writers in the world in one virtual place, whether anyone gets paid for putting these words in a row or not. I would put the overall quality of the stories on the archive up against those of any other fandom, irrespective of genre, and be confident that the gems in this fandom will end up shining like a laser show.

I applaud everyone's commitment to quality storytelling and positive values, and I hope you all keep up the great work in the future. There will always be room for Lois and Clark and Superman in my heart. There just aren't enough hours in the day for me to remain as active as I have been in the past.

Why am I leaving? In a nutshell, it's me, it's not you. And I really mean that.

Best wishes to everyone. Good night, and may the Lord guide and bless your steps.

# The Final End #