

This, From the Woman

by MajesticJester

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A gigantic, heartfelt thank you to my beta, Mystress, for without her my commas would attack you and eat your eyeballs.

Hermione stood in the middle of the parlor, her chest heaving. Her hands were shaking and balled tightly into fists, one of which was gripping the handle of her wand. Her honey-brown eyes gleamed as her naked lips pursed together – one could tell she was trying not to snarl by the pinched look of her cheeks. Her nostrils flared with each heavy breath. She glared, her sight never wavering, at the black-clad figure that was half-encased in darkness.

Severus, in turn, stood stoically behind the wing-backed chair, his hands gripping the back more than what was necessary. The leather crinkled beneath his fingers, and his knuckles were white with the strength of his hold. Small lines of irritation crinkled at the corners of his eyes as his lips formed a tight line across his face. He noted with grim satisfaction that, though she clutched her wand, she had yet to gain the confidence to raise it. She was quick – if she wasn't, she wouldn't be alive now – but he was so much quicker. He watched her with an apathetic gaze, his dark eyes never leaving her form. Neither of them dared speak a word, both knowing that one more sound would cause the proverbial avalanche to loose itself from the mountainside.

So far, the scene was a familiar one. With growing rapidity, they found themselves staring one another down, the tension wound so tightly that even a sigh would snap it, and all hell would break loose. Every time Hermione was the one to make the move. It always ended with her gloriously wide brown eyes shining with tears as her anger ebbed into despair. The roar of a lioness would die in her throat, and all of her ferocity would fade if he waited long enough. She would then turn, knowing it futile, in an attempt to hide her tears. On some occasions, she would walk quietly from the room, defeated. Other times she exited with the dignity of a queen. Only twice before had she ripped her gaze from his, an anguished sob cracking in her throat as she fled from the room. Despite the scenario of her exit, he was always the victor. To concede would be his undoing... she was never allowed to win.

Things can only repeat themselves so many times before they invariably start to change. On this night, for instance, it was taking longer than ever for her stance to shift. Her eyes glistened a little brighter than normal, but they did not shine with unshed tears. Her cheeks – had they always looked so hollow? – did not blush with the heat of her anger. The feeling that they were on the precipice of something dramatic was one they felt equally.

The fire within the grate snapped loudly and unexpectedly, causing Severus' insides to coil and Hermione to outwardly flinch. In doing so, her wrist flicked ominously, sending forth a jet of orange energy from her wand straight towards Severus. He was a dark man, a dangerous man, and every bit of that truth rang with sickening clarity as he responded in kind. Unaware of what spell she had cast, he flung himself from the chair an instant before it exploded, and the shield charm he immediately produced saved him from being skewered by a wooden projectile. Within the same moment, he fired back in retaliation, never ceasing fire as bits of fluff snowed down from the ceiling. The hunted look within Hermione's eyes grew haunted as she desperately shielded herself against his unyielding volley of attacks. She cried to him, her voice cracking as she screamed. Whether her cries were for mercy, in apology, or in hate, Severus did not know – he heard nothing but the sound of his magic clashing ferociously against her shields. He was far deadlier now than when he fought as a Death Eater or as an Order member. Then, he had fought as a soldier – cold,

calculating, and spying – with a mission and a purpose to fulfill. Now, with emotion behind his magic, his power swelled to magnificently horrible heights. This was the result of her using magic against him. Never had she stooped to such a level. This, from the woman he loved. This, from the woman he hated. This, from the woman he couldn't live without.

Hermione had stolen his heart like a thief in the night. There was no choice but to follow after her; whether he did it to beg her to return his devotion or to snatch his affection back from her, he hadn't been certain. His intentions, though, had never been to fall into a molten-hot affair with the bushy-haired know-it-all that he had begrudged so during the Voldemort years. Never had he anticipated a shotgun wedding, a house, and the promise of a future. Her temper commingled with his caustic personality as well as hippogriffs do with a Malfoy. It was insane to think that two people of such unbending ways could survive together for more than a few years. It was amazing they had made it to fifteen.

This, from the woman who wanted the one thing she couldn't have. He had had enough. This, from the woman who...

Hermione's hideously large eyes stared up from her supine position on the floor. Her body lay in a twisted, unnatural heap from where she had desperately tried to twist away from his angry retaliation. Severus stood motionless, his eyes unbelieving as he stared at her slack features. Her unruly curls fanned out beneath her like a halo: a halo made of honey-sweetness and sunshine. He knelt gingerly at her side, his knees cracking as he did so. He peered at her for a long time, thoughts and images and memories and accusations bouncing rapidly in his head. After what could have been ages, an uncharacteristically timid hand reached out to touch her hairline. Tenderly, he caressed her soft cheek, unmindful to her rapidly cooling temperature. He licked his lips, and his eyes gleamed as he barked a laugh and a sob simultaneously. Slowly, he rearranged her body into a more comfortable position in order to lie down beside her, resting his sallow face against her unmoving chest.

He had won again.

In the quiet of the room, he slept.

This, for the want of a child. All of this, for what he would never, ever give.

A/N: I have no idea where this came from, only that it demanded to be let out. Reviews are appreciated; flames will be used to make s'mores.