

Water -- Leaves -- Ice

by Amita

Two icy souls thaw.

Chapter 1 of 1

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"Water leaves ice," said Luna.

They were standing at a window in Ravenclaw Tower and watching the dark puddles turn shiny as a late afternoon cold front blew in. Padma breathed against the window glass – breath, mist, frost – and thought that steam left a frozen wasteland.

"Pretty," said Luna.

But it was time for Padma to join the steamy cauldrons and her icy companion.

As innocent as the beginning of an avalanche: a determined character formed a crystal flake; the external authority of a prefect amongst intellectuals whose internal code was more demanding than they could bear rifted her from her fellows; two particles heading the same direction randomly became partners; inertia took them to a steep slope neither knew was there. Maybe. Padma shook off poetic sentiments best left to Luna. Padma was practical, rational, and in control of her destiny.

She smiled as she picked up her textbook, her notes, and the special document she had found in an old volume. Wouldn't he be surprised. And pleased. No, she didn't care about that. The document she found would merely help them brew a better potion. When the professor gave his grudging respect, wouldn't her partner be grateful. And admiring. No, this was all for achieving full marks. The rest was fantasy.

She thought it strange that she had looked for the old manuscript because she had adopted the attitude of the non-wizards that the more powerful magic was in the past. She supposed that since everyone knew about magic but it was weak in their world, the natural conclusion was that it must have been stronger in the past. Hence, strong magic could return only if they could find the ancient sources. The hope and danger of such quests comprised most the literature she had read as a youngster.

At the polar opposite of the castle, he braced himself as he left the snug warren to face the heat of the lab and the icy blast from the tower. Last summer, his mum had casually mentioned that she had almost been placed in Ravenclaw. He hadn't thought about it then, and he had always thought his father lucky, but now he wondered. In his cooler moments, he blamed himself for his current predicament. An inheritance of Ravenclaw self-criticism from his mum? In his better moments, he knew it was the perversity of his fellow man, not to mention cruel fate striking down the worthy. He remembered the beginning.

"Very good," he had said, admiring the potion of a witch who had finished almost as quickly as he had.

"Thank you," she had said.

There was no reason for such a simple response to affect him, especially since his watery praise was indirect criticism of others' bumbling efforts, but a leaf had fallen upon ice to dance across its surface.

The next potion had been arduous, and she had been working alone when he had suggested that he could prepare half the long list of ingredients.

"That would be great," she had said.

And how much warmth does it take to melt enough ice to let a leaf sink beneath the surface?

He reminded himself it was a business arrangement between two masters of the art who had been working alone. Now, in the halls, there was no reason for him to feel a jolt every time he saw a head of rich, glossy, raven hair.

When he entered the lab, her smile struck from across the room. He bumped into a pair of the lionhearted, who would use this as an excuse for their dismal performance, not that he worried since their incompetence was known to all.

"Look what I found, Draco," she said, handing him the parchment and placing a hand on his shoulder.

Only icy steel could save him. "Hmm," he said, noncommittally.

Her insides crumpled like a leaf. Water leaves ice. Steam leaves a frozen wasteland.

Later, back in his room, the Furies tore at him. He had not known that disappointing her would be devastating. At dinner, his fellows watched as he walked part way up the Ravenclaw table to a girl who seemed determined to ignore him. Cursing himself thoroughly, he tapped her on the shoulder, and when she turned, he said, "That manuscript you found was a great help." He walked away certain that all eyes were on the pathetic fool. Error compounded upon error. Once a chance was missed, nothing could bring it back.

"What was that about?" asked a girl next to Padma.

"Just an old Potion manuscript I found that helped us through class," said Padma.

"Figures," said the girl.

"She's partners with Draco, and all she thinks about is getting a better grade," said another girl.

They all had a giggle at their prefect's expense.

Padma felt calmer. She felt warmer. The room lost its focus, and she had no appetite for the rest of her meal.

"You know, by studying separately, we're duplicating our efforts," suggested Padma after the next class.

"You're right," he agreed, surprised that she was still willing to talk to him and surprised by how much he liked the suggestion. "We have a number of classes together," he added. A small part of him noted that he was being sucked into the Ravenclaw thing of studying together. A large part of him was whooping with glee.

"You boys are all so restless," she said a few weeks later.

"A brisk walk down to the lake and back gets the blood pumping to the brain," he replied.

She reluctantly closed her books and ran to her dorm room to get her heavy cloak. This was wasting valuable study time. On the way to the lake, she noticed that the leaves that had floated gracefully across the puddles of water were now trapped in the ice.

Her hand reached for his. He took it. Ice left her, and she hurtled like a leaf down the stream of life.

From the three word prompt by Stefdarlin: water -- leaves -- ice.