

Fireworks

by *anoesis*

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Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 1

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The visiting fun fair has transformed the scrubby grass of the Common into a mess of bright lights, raucous crowds and spinning, twisting rides. The warm air is heavy with the scent of diesel and frying onions, and the constant sound is deafening. Each step seems to carry them within earshot of another ride or stall, all competing to drown out the surrounding cacophony blasting from crackling speakers at every turn.

When his companion had confessed that she had never been allowed to attend the fair as a child, Severus had not been surprised. Her parents, recognising her for the precious thing that she was, had cosseted her unobtrusively all her life. Both they and she had been far too sensible to allow her to become spoiled, but she had never been exposed to anything that might interfere with her *being Hermione*. He can't complain. It has left her utterly untouched and apparently impervious to whatever the world might throw at her. She had lived through war, betrayal and torture, but though her skin might bear their marks, her soul is untainted. This is what first caught his eye and marked her out as special: even clothed in heavy layers, Severus' scars are visible for all to see, clear in his gaunt frame and still occasionally hostile stare. With her serene countenance and large, laughing eyes, it would be possible to believe Hermione had never once stepped outside the ivory tower that had been Dumbledore's Hogwarts.

It makes it rather special that he is the one to bring her here. He has little time for fairs these days, but when he was younger he used to save up all his pennies for the one week in August when the painted wagons arrived at Cokeworth Rec and the children would flock to the stalls and shies. It's one of the few pleasant experiences of his youth that he can share with her.

She's always telling him things. About the time this happened with so-and-so, or when such-and-such said that. There isn't much he can bring himself to tell her. Not much of it matters anymore, not now that he has almost has her. Much of it is forgotten, or should be forgotten. The few things he can't forget only surface in silent nightmares, and what power have dreams when one such as she is nestled by your side?

But, yes, it's special.

They've donned their Muggle clothes and headed to the wasteland at the edge of town that plays host to car boot sales every second Sunday, and joined the idle crowds and shrieking children that mill around the rides.

It amuses him no end that she can feel such scandalised delight over such things. She, who has seen things that most Muggles could never even comprehend, giggling like a school girl at the prospect of purchasing their dinner from a burger van. They visit every stall in turn, queue for every ride. He spends a small fortune in keeping her entertained, much to her mingled consternation and glee.

Severus watches her constantly. Her gleeful laugh as the Teacups threaten to empty her stomach, the way her graceful neck stretches each time the ferris wheel crests and she peers out in delight at the fast vanishing view. He feeds her treats that would cause her sensible parents to shudder. Hot donuts, candy floss, iced slush made entirely of colouring, sugar and additives. Hermione accepts each like some precious gift, savouring each mouthful.

If he were to kiss her now, she would doubtless taste of onions and sugar, her lips butterscotch-sticky and sweet.

She holds his hand tightly, unused to the crowds, and secretly he is glad. Losing her, even for a moment, amid the tight-packed bodies and flashing lights would hurt him. Her safety her happiness are sacrosanct to him. She has placed her trust in him and, in turn, he has found his salvation in her.

It can still surprise him, even now, how he yearns for her. There is an ache in the back of his throat when he watches her.

He tried to tell her once. Tried to tell her how he longed for her. Tried to explain how she always seemed just beyond his reach. The Restorative Draughts had made him loquacious in those early days. Now that he is able to brew for himself, that type of outburst is rare.

She hadn't understood, just smiled up at him in confusion. "But you have me," she had murmured.

Later he realised that it was *he* who hadn't understood. She was *never* just out of his reach; she was so far above his touch that he might as well have wished for the stars. Even with his fingers curled inside her and his tongue pressed against her cunt. Even as she cries out his name, her fingers tangled in his hair. Even when she sleeps, curled up against his chest, her breath huffing against his skin.

Still, no one can deny that he is a man of ambition.

Severus wonders how long he will have to wait before he can ask her to marry him. He does not believe in the sanctity of marriage, but suspects that she does. He's already tied himself to her in ways that defy the laws of court and of the church; promises made in front of God won't bind him more tightly than that.

It's the answer he needs. If it is a no *and he knows it must be a no* then at least the awful waiting will be over, and he will be able to stop wondering when she will decide to leave.

If it is a yes though it cannot be a yes then maybe he will learn to relax, maybe this awful tension will leave. Maybe...

He had thought that wanting love, waiting for it, never knowing it, was the worst wretchedness a man could know, but he acknowledges now that he was wrong. Having love, knowing what it is to possess someone so completely, even if only for a moment, and wondering when that moment will end...

That is the greater torment.

He finds himself wondering uneasily sometimes just what she sees in him. Not in his unprepossessing face or tired body or his uncertain temper although God knows that's a mystery in itself. No, he wonders what it is she wants. How much of it is just about the sex? How much is linked with his past, his role as a Death Eater and a murderer? If it was a war hero she wanted, she could have had her choice of younger, less tattered men. Is it something to do with her absent father, still missing along with his wife despite months of searching? If it is, would he even mind? Whatever truth he uncovers will hurt him, but he will bear it gladly if it will keep her close.

If he knew what it was that she wanted then he would know the secret to keeping her. He's already made careful catalogue of what seems to please her; every time he somehow makes that soft smile steal across her face, each careful touch that causes her pulse to race, any action that has ever left her trembling in his arms.

He knows what she *likes* well enough, but what she *wants*...

When she sleeps, he can watch her without bothering to hide the greed filling his face. Severus is no stranger to longing; since he was a boy there has always been something that he couldn't have.

When she sleeps, he can let the ridiculous, puppyish devotion show on his face. When she wakes, he will be the masterful man she seems to adore. When she sleeps, he can acknowledge that it is really he who is slave to her.

"Hermione," he whispers, savouring the graceful curve of her name upon his tongue. It tastes sweetly of her.

"Hermione." If he were romantic, he might consider how closely her name resembles, "her, my only." He might whisper that, too, like some lovelorn fool, if his pride would allow it. If he was certain she was asleep. "My only. My own."

Eventually, the shadows lengthen and the rides began to slow. The music, once so deafening, has softened to a quiet murmur. Slowly, the lights flicker out, leaving only the twinkle of the carousel, the warm glow of the food stalls and the pulsing neon pink and blue of the big wheel, bright against the deepening sky.

Hands still caught fast, they follow the rest of the crowds towards the trees, away from the rides. Vendors moved amongst them, selling flags and toys and lights. As hush of expectancy settles over the throng.

This late in the summer, the nights are beginning to lengthen and the evenings are growing cool. A light, barely perceptible drizzle begins to fill the air. Hermione pulls her cardigan about her as they take their place on the slight incline above the Common, and Severus wraps his arms securely about her waist.

"Are you certain about this?"

Hermione nods, watching the preparations below, lip caught firmly between her teeth. Men carrying torches move back and forth in the clearing below, the soft rain catching in the flickering beams of light. She nods again, and Severus wonders if perhaps she is afraid to voice her affirmation aloud, lest it ring false.

The first fireworks are just bright, low-lying bursts of silver and gold. The crowd murmur in appreciation, and he feels her relax a little. There's still a tension in her shoulders, an anticipation of more to come.

She shivers, growing colder as night begins to claim them. Her legs are bare beneath her floaty skirt. Severus unzips his jacket, pulling her back into the warmth of his chest. Sliding his hands up and down her arms, he is suddenly aware of the shallowness of each breath that she draws into her precious form.

He wonders then if perhaps this isn't a little too soon. The night is dark, the crowds oppressive and the flashes of light manage to unnerve even him, just a little. "Are you scared?"

"A little," she admits, leaning back against him, "but excited too." She tilts her head back and her gaze flickers towards him for the briefest moment, before returning to the display ahead. "Does that make sense?"

For Severus, fear is fear. It's a leaden weight in your legs and a gnawing dread in your gut. Fear slows you down, makes you second guess each decision. Fear is what gets you killed.

For Hermione, fear has become something else.

He saw it in her face the first time she approached him, although it wasn't until later that he realised what it was. He wonders occasionally if he would have accepted her advances had he known what it was. It's a ridiculous question: he's never been choosy before, has never been able to afford to be. He'll take what he's given and be grateful for it.

Besides, by the time he understood, it was too late and he was already hooked.

For Hermione, fear is something to be hunted down and wrestled to the ground, its pale, vulnerable belly exposed to the sun. It's about finding pleasure in the things that would try to make her shiver.

He supposes that *this* is the real reason she turned to him. Once he was the thing that went bump in the night. Now she finds her release from fear with him.

Severus tries to imagine of a time in his life before when it would have seemed possible that he might stand comfortably within a crowd, holding a girl in his arms. He tries to see himself, as he had been before his brush with death, opening his jacket to share the heat of his body with a former student, rather than simply being irritated that she has failed to bring a coat of her own. She had known they were to be out late, after all, unless she had somehow chosen not to believe that the heat of the day would ever fade and give way to darkness? Is not being prepared for the evening part of the enjoyment? She hasn't even bought her handbag the non-enchanted one that holds little more than lip balm and keys.

He has the sneaking suspicion that she hasn't even brought her wand.

The thought that she trusts him so completely with her safety pulls at something inside his chest. The idea that his chart-making, colour-coding girl is willing to surrender control to him is heady indeed.

Trust, fear, excitement and acceptance are all so mixed up together where the two of them are concerned.

Testing his theory, Severus adjusts his hold on her, freeing one hand to slip quietly inside the light material of her top, awkwardly palming her breast under the fabric and trusting the preoccupation of the crowd to keep them from being noticed. In answer to his silent question, Hermione sighs and lets her weight rest slightly more heavily against his chest, trusting and sweet.

He pinches a nipple, straining his ears to catch her quiet gasp above the enthusiastic noise of the crowd. She won't see this as a display of affection, although for him the sentiment rings true. His beautiful, lovely girl, so still and pliant within his arms.

He rarely touches her in public and then never intimately. The gentle quest of his fingers over such familiar territory is rendered new and thrilling by the proximity of so many others. Hermione rolls her hips slowly against his crotch, and Severus knows that she is caught up in the uncertain excitement of it all.

Tightening his hold on her, Severus settles back to enjoy the show.

At first, the pops and fizzles of Muggle fireworks seem so tame compared to anything Hermione might have seen at school. The grounds of Hogwarts had been lit up with bangs and cracks loud enough to shatter eardrums, but each bang is still enough to cause her to tense in his arms, her chest rising and falling swiftly as her breathing becomes strained.

Then the display starts to climb towards the climax and fireworks fill the sky like curse work. Reds and greens, violent flashes and vivid sparks that promise destruction and death. Hermione's breathing speeds up further, masked by the noise surrounding them, but obvious to the touch. She leans further back, straining against him, chest pushed forwards against his hand.

He can understand it a little. These Muggles, with their abiding fascination with gunpowder, magnesium and phosphorous have rendered the cracks, bangs and flashes of the fiercest battle both distant and benign. His precious girl can shake and thrill yet never need fear. Perhaps it's cathartic. Perhaps something else.

His free hand toys with the waistband of her skirt.

If he forgets the Notice-Me-Not, will she be angry? Will she even notice? Or will it be like the time he forgot to cast a Contraception Charm and she had cried his name with such abandon as she came?

After all, what is one more forbidden?

It's a subtle charm. Anyone determined to look will be able to see as his hand slips within her skirt, but the constant distractions all around mean there's little chance of that.

Her cry of welcome blends with the noise of the spectators. Severus strokes her through the cotton of her underwear, just two gentle fingers against her clit, but it's enough to send a deep shiver right through her.

Severus supposes that he, like the distant explosions, represents something dangerous yet tame, her pet snake. Despite what the world likes to believe, he still has his fangs. Hermione knows that he is dangerous, but she also knows that he will never hurt her. That he will protect her, even from himself. Perhaps he should resent what is essentially another pull upon his overtired soul, this responsibility to another, yet the rewards outweigh the burden. She places herself physically in his hands and denies him nothing in return. Her implicit trust both scares and mesmerises him still. He is strong for her, in control, infallible.

It's all an illusion of course. He was broken after the war; still is. She just refuses to see it.

He's still learning to become what she needs just as surely as she is learning to relax into his touch and follow his commands blindly, willingly, perfectly. In these moments her fear and excitement, her trust and her vulnerability become hopelessly tangled. Her shivers and whimpers deepen, becoming unabashed moans as she shudders in ecstasy beneath him.

She's greedy in these moments, always wanting more. Wanting him. His mouth, his cock, his tongue.

"More," she commands, forgetting that he is meant to be the one in charge. "More!"

He can't find it in himself to mind.

Bright, lurid green fills the sky, illuminating the gathering clouds into twisting, towering shapes, increasing in tempo and volume. Hermione has been on edge the whole evening, breathless, waiting for this.

Hidden beneath her cardigan, inside the waistband of her summer skirt, Severus pulls her knickers aside and finds her hot, wet and needy.

In the press of the crowds, with all attention turned to the skies, they are anonymous, invisible. He explores further, dipping his fingers into the slickness he finds. Fear and arousal are so closely entwined for her that sometimes he wonders at the sanity of their actions, but there is no denying that each day she grows a little stronger. She seldom suffers nightmares these days, and it is rare indeed to find her lost within her thoughts, her pretty face pinched and drawn.

Eyes fixed on the sky, heart racing, her small, high breasts rising and falling rapidly beneath the loose confines of her vest top, her nipples pushing against the fabric. He pinches one, drawing a shuddering sigh from her. He feels, rather than hears it. Her body starts to tremble and soon she is bucking against him. Her eyes are fixed on the sky, following each swoop and burst, but he can feel her entire being focused on the clever play of his fingers.

He wonders if she believes he is in control of the situation, but she must feel his straining erection pressing back against her, caught uncomfortably within the heavy material of his jeans. She must be able to hear his deep, unsteady breaths. His nose is all but buried in her hair, the apricot scent of her shampoo mingling with the gunpowder now misting the air.

He touches her carefully, timing each stroke and flick to match each burst of light and noise, refusing to sink into the rhythm she craves. By the time her weight slumps completely against him, he knows she is close. She doesn't seem aware of him or the crowds; her whole focus is on the deafening, terrifying display in the sky and the feel of his fingers upon her and within her.

Then the show reaches its deafening, overwhelming climax. Severus can feel the reverberations rumbling through the ground beneath his feet and in the wet pulse upon his fingers. The final volley of explosions drowns out her cries and she twists in his arms and buries her face against his chest, like a child afraid of the noise.

Severus is on fire for her. He always burns for her, but for the moment he holds her closely while the unsteady rush of emotion works its way out of her system. His prick is caught between them, as needy as she, but neglected by them both.

Now, with the show over and the crowd beginning to stretch and refocus upon the world around them, it would be impossible for her to return the gesture. Their little bubble has burst. People are already starting to blink and glance around, each with the same guilty look on their face at having been caught enraptured in something as childish as a firework display.

He can be this for her, be whatever she needs him to be.

She was generous in other ways. She brings him cups of tea as he sits reading. She holds his hand in public. She invites him, shyly, each time she leaves to meet with her school friends, as if he would be willing to attend such an insipid event.

Eventually, if her strange fascination with him continues, he will, just to please her.

He shifts his weight against her, stilling the urge to grind his hips against her. There will be time for his needs later.

Perhaps, when they arrive home, he will order her to strip and to kneel before him, repaying him with hands and mouth for his generosity tonight. Maybe he will tell her to retrieve the silk scarves he bought last year for her birthday. Or perhaps, he realises, watching her overwrought face shutter with tiredness and completion, perhaps he will draw her a bath to soothe the cold and tension from her limbs. Sit next to her in bed and read to her until she falls asleep, taking the mug from her hands lest she spill cocoa upon the sheets.

They join the slow procession back through the fair to the gate and the street-lit road beyond. Catching his hand in hers, she brings it to her lips, pressing a careful kiss to his damp fingers.

"Yes," she tells him.

"Yes?" They've not spoken since the first rockets were launched, filling the sky with sparks.

"Yes," she agrees. "To anything. Everything. The answer is always yes."