

A Kiss from a Rose

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A gift for Lorraine Bluestar in the hp_smutfree fic exchange.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I own nothing you recognise. Unfortunately.

"Didn't you say that this was a rather quiet place?" Hermione had to shout in order to make herself understood. Flabbergasted, she stood in the door of the supposedly quiet tavern and looked around in search for a spot big enough for the three of them.

Charlie, taller than Hermione, was obviously in a position to make out a free table and guided her and his girlfriend through the crowd. In the back corner of the dimly lit room, a few seats at an enormous table seemed unoccupied. At Charlie's inquiry whether the places indeed were free, the men carousing there only motioned for them to settle down.

"I had totally forgotten tomorrow is the qualifying game for the next Quidditch World Cup; it's Bulgaria vs. Romania. That's why so many people are here!" Charlie slapped his forehead with his hand. "The date had totally slipped my mind."

"You aren't going then?" Hermione couldn't believe it. Like all Weasleys, Charlie was a Quidditch fanatic; it was unthinkable that he wouldn't want to watch a match with the runners up to the last World Cup.

"We weren't able to get tickets. Most of the tickets were reserved for Romanians and Bulgarians; the contingency for foreigners was very short and sold out in a minute." Charlie's girlfriend, Jenna, was as crazy for the sport as Charlie that much Hermione had learned during her short stay in Romania so far and obviously regretted missing the match very much.

Hermione let her gaze wander through the room. Everywhere people were laughing, discussing, singing and waving scarves matching their nation's flag, obviously enjoying themselves. And no wonder, for the innkeeper seemed to be serving out the national beverage hard liquor made from plums, called Tuica for free. When he put down the little, long necked flask, in which it traditionally was served, in front of her, she tried to motion to him that she'd rather prefer to drink something else, but it was to no avail.

"Try it, one won't harm you," Charlie said and laughed at the face she pulled upon drinking. She shuddered; the liquid burned down her throat like fire, but soon comfortable warmth began to spread in her belly.

Now people were not only singing, but some people had pulled out their flutes and jew's harps and were playing a stirring, spirited tune, which caused several men in colourful clothing to unceremoniously push some tables aside to make room for them to dance. Soon a competition between two groups of dancers commenced, obviously Romanians against Bulgarians. The men were jumping like fleas, and Hermione only could salute to the endurance they showed during the dance. To have a better look, she climbed on her chair, where she clapped to the rhythm of the music, in order to egg the dancers on. The alcohol had helped to loosen her up a bit, and she started to have fun. The heat, combined with the alcohol, caused a blush to spread upon her face; her hair was escaping the braid she had tried to tame it with and surrounded her head like a halo; her eyes were sparkling all in all, she was a vision of delight, and many a man in the room directed his gaze at her. Hermione was oblivious to their admiration; used to only being considered The Brain, she rarely paid any attention to her looks and had never really learned to play her charms.

The music changed; the dancers took in partners for this dance and were spinning them merrily around. Suddenly, Hermione felt a pair of hands grabbing her around the waist and lifting her down from her outlook on the chair. Shocked, she looked up, ready to reach for her wand, only to see the smiling face of Viktor Krum. He didn't give her any time to protest, but pulled her among the dancers and spun her round. The steps were easy enough, just little hops from one foot to the other in time with the tune, but the constant spinning made Hermione's head swim. When the music ended, Hermione was quite surprised to feel Viktor's lips brush against hers.

"Don't be angry, Herm-own-ninny, it's a tradition. That was the Kiss Dance," Viktor said apologetically and cautiously let her go only to hold her close again when Hermione staggered, still dizzy from the dance.

"All right there, Hermione?" Charlie, feeling responsible for the well-being of his guest, had come near them, ready to intervene.

"Oh, yes, thank you, Charlie. This is an old friend of mine. Viktor Krum Charlie Weasley." Hermione emphasised the introduction with gestures pointing from Viktor to Charlie, who was visibly awed to meet the star of the Bulgarian team.

"It's an honour to meet you!" Charlie said, while offering his hand.

"You seem to be familiar have you met before?" Viktor frowned. "You couldn't have been attending Hogwarts during the Triwizard Tournament, could you?"

"No, but I was caring for the dragons during your first task. Maybe you saw me there."

Viktor was still shaking Charlie's hand. "It is a pleasure to meet a friend of Herm-own-ninny." An unspoken question hung between the two men.

"Initially, she was more friends with my brother, but during the war we got to know each other better. She's visiting us for a short vacation. Would you like to join us at the table over there? My girlfriend would be delighted to be introduced to you as well." Charlie's words were the answer Viktor had obviously desired to hear; he nodded, offered Hermione his arm and followed Charlie to their seats.

When Viktor pulled her a chair out at the table, Hermione was completely flattered; she wasn't used to being treated in such a chivalrous manner. Ron's courtesy, so far, had been limited to holding a door open for her, but to expect him to help her out of her cloak would have been too much. She had accepted that, and at first, she had thought that that sort of behaviour towards women wasn't customary in Britain's Wizarding society. But soon, she had learned that it just wasn't customary for Ron to treat her like that. Maybe it would have been different if they ever had been truly involved. In the summer after their sixth year at Hogwarts, they had come to the agreement that they would postpone any relationship until Harry had finished Voldemort off. Harry needed them to be there for him, to support him in any given way, and the two of them didn't want to burden him any further with problems arising out of their budding relationship. Despite Ron's promises to just 'wait until this bloody war is over,' he never showed any behaviour to indicate he really had the feelings he claimed to have. By now, Hermione had witnessed him picking up some random girl once too often to be bothered to believe him anymore. To finally close that chapter of her life had been one of the reasons for her decision to spend some time travelling and visiting friends in various parts of the world now that peace had been established once again. Romania had been the last stop on her journey, and in a couple of days, she would be heading back to Britain.

The cheering of Charlie and his girlfriend pulled her out of her reverie.

"... be my guests. I will send an owl with the tickets early tomorrow." Hermione heard Viktor say. "I hope you will be coming, too, Herm-own-ninny?" he addressed her. Hermione's mind was reeling; she hated to admit that she hadn't been listening and desperately tried to deduce the meaning of the conversation from the few sentences she had heard. The beaming faces of her friends together with what she had heard could only mean that Viktor had invited them to the match tomorrow.

"But of course! I wouldn't want to miss the opportunity to see you flying again," she answered.

"Again?" Viktor asked, slightly inclining his head.

"I saw you at the last World Cup, didn't I tell you? I still remember you doing that Wron... that diving thing as a feint, and the other Seeker crashing."

Viktor didn't laugh or mock her because she couldn't remember the name of a Quidditch manoeuvre, like Harry or Ron used to do; his attention was focused solely on her, his dark eyes under his thick eyebrows giving her a most intense look, which left Hermione flustered. Nobody ever had given her his undivided attention the way Viktor did now; he managed to make her feel special.

"Viktor!" somebody shouted through the room and added something in a language Hermione didn't understand. Viktor, who had been looking in the direction of the speaker, turned back to Hermione and took her hand in his. "I have to go now. I have to be fit for the game tomorrow. I really hope I will see you there." He stood up and bowed over her hand before he bid his goodbyes to Charlie and Jenna and left. Hermione needed a few moments to compose herself after Viktor had left, and so she didn't notice the significant looks Charlie and Jenna exchanged.

Early the next morning, an owl delivered a letter, which said they should show the enclosed notice at the entrance of the stadium. The three of them weren't really expecting to be led to a VIP box, which was reserved for high ranking Ministry employees from both countries and for family members of the players. They were seated in the first row of the box, so they had a really good view of the pitch and provided the press, which already was taking interest in the unknown arrivals, with a good view of them.

Hermione enjoyed the atmosphere in the stadium. She hadn't had many opportunities to attend big events lately. During Voldemort's second uprising, it had been much too dangerous for witches and wizards to gather, and after Voldemort's defeat, she had been emotionally too drained to attend any celebrations. Too many deaths were to be mourned; too many wounds physical as well as mental ones needed to be tended to. St. Mungo's had done a wonderful job on healing her physically, but the injuries left on her soul needed longer to heal. Now, after having been away for some time, the wounds were closed; they still were a bit sensitive when pressed upon, but they didn't hinder her from enjoying herself anymore.

Hermione had never been fond of Quidditch; she only ever had attended games for the boys' sakes, but today she let herself be swept along by the excitement present in the stadium. She clapped her hands in delight when the Romanian Quidditch players entered the stadium and flew in formation, leaving a cloud of smoke, coloured like their national flag, behind them. She screamed in delight when the Bulgarian players broke through that cloud, and she joined the chant of 'Krum! Krum!' after the players were introduced, relishing the shivers that the deep notes of the chorus caused on her skin.

From the moment he appeared on the pitch, Hermione's eyes never left the figure of Viktor Krum, who was circling high above the other players. Up in the air, he moved with elegance and grace, much like he did while dancing, Hermione mused. He appeared fully concentrated, entirely focused on his task of spotting the Snitch, not like his opponent from the Romanian team, who regularly cheered when his team scored or shook his fists when he thought a member of his team had been fouled. Focused that was how every action Viktor took could be described. When he talked to her, his attention was directed solely at her, the look in his eyes intense. At fifteen, this intensity of his had scared her away, but now she craved being the focus of his attention. The way Viktor had tended to her the evening before had made her aware of that need. But somehow Hermione didn't think that he would be interested in her anymore. *But it had been he who had sought her out, hadn't he?* whispered a very persistent part of her heart that refused to let the small flame of hope extinguish.

After an hour, Bulgaria was a comfortable 100 points ahead, and Krum obviously hadn't seen the need to divert his counterpart with feints so far, the way the other Seeker was flitting around, involved in the banter between the teams. On the whole, it was an unspectacular game, although Hermione had the distinct feeling that Viktor had let a few opportunities to catch the Snitch pass on purpose. At a certain point, she got the impression that the captain gave Viktor a sign, and not long after this, he accelerated, not unlike a raptor after spotting its prey. The Romanian Seeker was only starting to realise what was going on when Krum held his right hand high above his head and started to fly slowly around the pitch, level with the highest seats, accompanied by the cheering of his mostly Bulgarian fans. When he reached the VIP box on his flight, he stopped in midair and his eyes sought out Hermione's, who had sprung to her feet and was cheering along with the other supporters of the Bulgarian team. He lowered his hand as if he wanted to offer the Snitch to her and remained in that position time seemed to stand still for the both of them as long as their gazes remained locked but with all the rejoicing going on around her, Hermione got pushed around and nearly lost her balance. Their eye contact was broken, and she became aware of her surroundings once more. With weak knees, she sank back onto her seat, her hand pressed against her breast as if she wanted to appease her fluttering heart with it.

What she didn't notice were the flashes from pictures being taken of her while Viktor continued his triumphal procession down to the ground.

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"Snitch Caught for English Rose!"

Harry held the *Daily Prophet* with outstretched hands for her to read, one foot tapping on the floor, an expectant look on his face as if he wanted to say: "Now get on with the story, already!" If he had been able to raise one eyebrow in that legendary Snape-like style, he would have done that as well.

"And a good day to you too, Harry! May I come in?" Hermione ducked under the newspaper and stepped into the hall of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. "Did you have a nice journey, Hermione?" she said in a deep voice and continued in her normal voice, "Yes, very! Many a stranger has given me a warmer welcome than you..."

At this point, she found herself being swept into a bone-crushing bear hug. "Gods, I missed you!" Harry exclaimed, before he held her at arm's length to have a better look at her.

"You look much better than when you left."

"Was it that bad? Well, I feel better, that's for sure," Hermione said. "Where's Ron?"

"He'll be here any minute. He had to run a few errands."

"Such as?"

"Purchasing your favourite blend of tea, for example." Harry laughed at her dumbstruck face. "Don't worry, I've written it down for him, so chances are high he will get it right this time. But now, down to business: what's this English rose thing about?"

Hermione motioned for Harry to give her the paper, so she could read the article.

"Dear me, how far have we come if an unsuspecting tourist isn't able to attend a Quidditch match anymore without being mentioned in the paper? Gods, this picture of me is awful!"

"Not at all, I like that slightly confused look you wear. It's hard to catch you with that expression; I think I will have to put the article aside for future use..." Harry winced at the playful slap he earned for that comment. "But, you being at a Quidditch match of your own free will is never unsuspecting, so fill me in on the details, please."

"There's nothing much to tell. I visited Charlie, as you know, and we went out one evening to a supposedly quiet pub which wasn't quiet at all on the evening before the match and met Viktor there. Charlie and Jenna engaged Viktor in a conversation about Quidditch, let slip that they haven't been able to get tickets for the game, which caused Viktor to invite us. That's all there was to it," Hermione told Harry in a purposefully bored voice.

"And...?" Harry drawled.

"And nothing. You've read what happened."

"Sure!" Harry nodded and smiled. "But this time you won't quit writing him, will you? Because as far as I know Viktor, he's interested very much when he did half the things described in that article. And your blush is telling me that you are interested as well. Just ask, if you need Hedwig's services."

Hermione just opened her mouth to retort when the fire in the kitchen spluttered and Ron stumbled out of the fireplace. "Harry? I've got some! I really was able to get some!" Ron shouted as he hastily freed his clothes from soot.

"You were able to get what?" Hermione asked, lazily leaning against the doorframe of the kitchen.

"Tickets for the qualification game, England against Bulgaria in three weeks. I was really lucky to get some," Ron explained. "Welcome back! I missed you!"

Hermione looked at Ron and contemplated her reactions to seeing him. She didn't feel any different than she had felt upon seeing Harry again, so she obviously was over the feelings she had had for him. What was affecting her far more was the thought of Viktor coming to England. What if he didn't want to see her again?

"Look, Harry, I managed to get four cards. You and Ginny, me and..." Ron's voice trailed off; his eyes fell on Hermione, and he started to look somewhat embarrassed. Hermione could hardly hide the laugh that was bubbling up inside of her. She tried to look hurt and crossed her arms in front of her breast.

"Um, as you never cared for Quidditch, I invited someone else." Ron said. "You always complained about us and our thing for the sport, so don't be in a snit when we do as you've always told us." Ron was clearly getting worked up while talking; Hermione finally couldn't hold back anymore and laughed out loud.

"Ouch!"

They turned to see a large owl pecking Harry's finger as he tried to reach for the message it was carrying. Neither Ron nor Hermione had noticed the tapping on the window. Harry obviously was not the recipient of the message it was carrying, for the owl looked decidedly in Hermione's direction; she went to unburden the bird of its message and reward it for its service with a few of the owl-treats Harry kept in a bowl on a shelf near the window.

Holding the letter in her hands, she looked somewhat perplexed at the two men. Harry shrugged his shoulders and asked Ron how much he had paid for the tickets. Hermione turned the letter around, but nothing indicated who the sender was, so she slowly opened the envelope and pulled the letter out. It was from Viktor; he wrote that he was sorry he wouldn't be able to meet her prior to the upcoming match he had to play in England, but that he hoped she would come to see the match tickets for her and her friends were enclosed and accompany him to the festivities that were bound to take place afterwards.

He wanted to see her again! She sank onto a chair, closed her eyes, pressed the letter against her breast, a smile playing around her lips. He not only wanted to see her again, but he wanted her to accompany him to some sort of official event.

"Are you all right?" Ron's concerned voice caused her to look up.

She smiled mischievously. "Too bad you already have tickets for the game."

"And why would that be bad?" Ron asked cautiously.

"Because now I have to ask someone else to accompany me to the game and sit in one of the top boxes together with the players' family and friends. Do you reckon the Creevey brothers would..."

With a few strides, Harry was at her side, took her in his arms and said, "See, I told you he's interested!"

"Who's interested?" Ron asked, looking from Hermione to Harry, clearly confused.

"Viktor, of course. Haven't you read the Prophet?" Ron shook his head, so Harry pointed to the abandoned newspaper lying on the table. Ron grabbed it and started to read. His jaw went slack, and he had to sit when he was finished reading the article.

"Holy shit!" was all he managed to say.

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It seemed that the Ministry wanted to show the whole world that the war was over.

The stadium definitely had the feeling of a funfair to it: music was playing; streamers resembling the flags of the two countries whose Quidditch teams were to play against each other were beckoning from everywhere; elderly ladies were selling sweets from their trolleys; everyone was waving at or hugging old acquaintances; cheerful shouts of "Oi!" or "Wotcher!" were heard from all directions; and most important people were laughing again. It was hard not to be infected with cheerfulness upon entering the site.

That is, if your name wasn't Ron Weasley. Despite the fact that he had quite an attractive blonde in tow and was heading to an exciting Quidditch match, he was trudging grumpily behind his two best friends and his sister. Why he displayed such grumpiness, he couldn't quite place his finger on, but somehow the fact that Hermione had never looked as excited in his vicinity as she was looking now in anticipation of a date with Viktor Krum following the game, had a big part in it.

Hermione, on the other hand, thought she knew what was the matter with Ron, but it would have been too late, even if he had chosen to finally act on his old promises, which he hadn't. A new chapter had been opened for her, and she hoped that Viktor would want to be a part of it.

'It definitely looks as if he wanted to,' Hermione thought when she found a single long-stemmed red rose on her seat in the top box. Her heart actually skipped a beat and butterflies started to dance in her belly when she picked it up and lifted it to her face to inhale its scent.

She turned to show her friends how thoughtful and romantic Viktor could be, only to notice why Harry had tried to get cards for the game anonymously, instead of taking the seats the Ministry had offered him. A crowd of people had gathered around him, trying to shake his hands, clap him on the shoulder or just happen to be in his vicinity while Rita Skeeter attempted to get a few words out of him and photos were being taken. The only reason Harry had agreed to accompany Hermione and sit with her in the top box had been that the seats Ron had managed to get had been behind a column.

After some time, Rita Skeeter took notice of Hermione and the rose she was holding in her hand. Before Hermione knew what was going on, lights flashed and Rita was at her side.

"Well, well! What have we got here? A token after a passionate night? No, don't blush your country will thank you for it if Mr. Krum will be too tired to catch the Snitch today!"

Hermione had not been able to gather her wits quickly enough. Before she was able to come up with an angry retort, Rufus Scrimgeour had directed the Sonorus Charm at himself and was welcoming everyone, causing that awful Skeeter woman to rush out of the box. Harry only rolled his eyes when he let himself fall down on the seat next to her, and the Minister attempted a joke in expressing his hopes that Mr. Krum's personal connections to England would cause him to turn a blind eye on the Snitch today.

"Honestly, don't people have better things to talk about?" Hermione muttered under her breath, while Harry commented dryly, "Welcome to the spotlight!"

And then the game commenced. The speed of the game was incredible the Quaffle was being shot from player to player in rapid succession and every score was followed by a mostly successful counterattack by the opponent team. As the game progressed, neither team was able to actually outscore the other, and the game became more brutal as the Beaters tended to use the Bludgers to split up the formations of the antagonistic Chasers.

This time Hermione had brought her Omniculars with her, which made it far easier for her to watch Viktor closely as she was able to zoom in and actually see the expressions on his face. Lacking a smile and the tender look she remembered him having whenever he looked at her, he looked sullen. That grimness was the little extra that transformed him from merely an excellent flyer into the supposedly best Seeker in the world. Hermione remembered people calling Viktor ugly; well, he surely couldn't be described as handsome, but Hermione knew that smiles could soften his angular features. Besides, Hermione never had cared for looks. What had drawn her to Viktor had been his stubbornness in pursuing her; what kept her near him had been his intellect and his manners. And what had finally driven the girl Hermione away his intensity was drawing the woman back to him now.

Suddenly Hermione leapt to her feet. Viktor and the other Seeker were plummeting through the centre of the other players toward the ground.

"Hoick up!" Hermione cried. "Oh my God, they are going to crash!" She turned and pressed her face against Harry's shoulder, unable to watch any longer. She was shaking, and her stomach had tightened to a knot.

"No, they are not. Look! Viktor was feinting, and England's Seeker couldn't take a chance. But neither of them crashed," Harry reassured her.

Her head still on Harry's shoulder, Hermione slowly turned so she was able to see the players again, and right there he was, circling above the other players. Still, Hermione was unsettled. She couldn't count the times she had seen Harry fall from his broom through the years and, although lasting harm had never been inflicted, her Muggle heritage suggested that falling full speed from such heights could only mean severe injuries or even death. Thus she was quite shaken and no longer able to enjoy the ongoing game.

Viktor caught the Snitch, and although their team lost, the British wizards were polite enough to applaud and cheer for him, while the Bulgarians flew their honour lap through the stadium.

When everyone started to get up and leave, Hermione remained seated, only motioning to her companions that she wanted to stay, and that they should go without her. Her gaze was directed at the rose she had found on the seat, her fingers caressing its petals, totally lost in thought and oblivious to the passing of time.

Twilight was already settling in, when she realized that she wasn't alone anymore. Viktor was standing at the end of the row of seats, watching her. She rose from her seat and went to him, her eyes never leaving his face anymore. The last steps she ran and threw herself into his arms, her hands, balled to fists, pummelled against his chest.

"Never do that again when I'm watching! I thought you were going to crash and die! I..."

Viktor pulled her close, bent down and whispered into her ear, "You will get used to it, my Rose."

He continued holding her, his head bent down, so she could feel his breath on her face, his eyes searching hers. Finally Hermione entwined her arms around his neck and closed the distance between their lips, fully sinking into him.

Neither of them heard the triumphant clucking sounds Rita Skeeter made or noticed the flash that bathed them in light. And if they had, they wouldn't have cared.

