

From What I've Tasted of Desire

by lady_rhian

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Desire

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Written for the SSHG Gift Exchange at Ashwinder. Inspired by Zoe's plot bunny, which asked for sexual tension and an open ending.

Some say the world will end in fire.

Some say in ice.

From what I've tasted of desire, I hold with those who favor fire ...

Hermione brushed a hair aside as she set the leather-bound book down on the oak coffee table. She reached her arms behind her, stretching, tilting her head either way, cracking her neck. She'd been reading in the same position the entire afternoon. Robert Frost's collected works were certainly deserving of hours-long perusals.

She pushed her long, curly hair behind her ears as she got up out of the chair and walked over to her large kitchen. Her spacious apartment in the middle of SoHo London, courtesy of her inheritance, provided the perfect backdrop for her consultant work. A celebrated war veteran and published expert in the fields of Potions and Arithmancy, Hermione Granger had become one of the most sought-after consultants in the world. There were, of course, masters and professors in her respective specialties whose knowledge and experience exceeded hers. However, she had many things that they did not. Not only did her fame exceed her rivals in the consulting profession, but her combined knowledge in two of the most complicated specialties made for an explosively effective package. Hermione's ingenuity and ability to combine various facets of her specialties made her the go-to girl for many international magical corporations. While she was beloved by England for her role in the Second War, she was revered globally as the future of magical advancement.

That was why today, at the age of twenty-four, six years after Voldemort's defeat, Hermione Granger sat in one of her many apartments strewn across the wizarding world, taking a well-deserved week-long holiday. For her, of course, a week's holiday meant piling through two weeks' worth of books. She had just finished a lecture on the effects of mixed-blood ancestry in determining Arithmantic probability at Vienna's International Conference for Cooperation Between Magical Races. She chuckled in amusement - in spite of the conference's foundation in racial unity and equality, Hermione had required multiple letters of recommendation to secure a speaking engagement. She suspected that while magical races like Veela and Centaurs were readily accepted by the conference in spite of non-human status, witches and wizards coming from Muggle ancestry had to prove their worth.

Minerva's recommendation had been the icing on the cake in Hermione's opinion. While complimentary letters from Bill Weasley, Fleur Delacour, and even Minister Scrimgeour had been nice, Minerva's scathing rebuke to the organization had sparked a fire in its chairman Hermione had not thought possible. *That an organization so entrenched in the Utopian ideals of racial equality should cast doubt upon the credentials of one of the most brilliant witches of our time purely because of Muggle ancestry should disgust any rational individual. The idealism in which you were so entrenched has obviously turned into the most odorous brand of self-serving hypocrisy ...*

A mere hour after receiving Minerva's letter, the convention's chairman, Lee Kong Vang-Smith, had personally extended an invitation to Hermione to lecture on her latest Arithmantic research.

Hermione had seen several familiar faces in the crowd in Venice. Gabrielle Delacour, now twenty, had been part of the Veela delegation to the convention's Senate on Racial Issues. Bill and Fleur had allowed their children to take part in a study on children of mixed magical blood. Hermione had been fascinated by the presentation, given by Angelina Johnson. Bill and Fleur's six-year-old twins - Liette and Elise - were the part-Veela children of a French pureblood-Veela mixed ancestry and an English pure-blood-turned part-Werewolf. They were, undoubtedly, the highlight of the presentation.

Hermione pulled a jar of peanut butter down from one of the top cupboards in the kitchen. She grabbed a spoon and dipped it into the jar. Nothing could beat the taste of fresh peanut butter straight out of the jar.

Yes, a well deserved holiday.

Just as she bent over the counter to look at her new rug, she heard the tell-tale *crack* of someone Apparating in.

"You must be joking," a deep voice intoned.

Ahh, yes. She knew that voice.

"Severus." She hopped off the counter and walked over to greet the Potions master who was standing in her sitting room.

"Please tell me that there are wards ..."

"Yes, there are," she chuckled. "Very elaborate ones, at that. But they let certain people in." A smile twitched at her mouth, wanting to be released.

"And I am a safe person?" he asked in a low tone.

Hermione bit her lip. Damn the man, arriving here in his black and white resplendent glory. The long eyelashes that framed those piercing eyes were cast low, gazing at her petite form. He was so much taller than she was, not that that made a difference. He was imposing and his frame was powerful. And he, the sanctimonious bastard, knew it.

"Yes, you are," she summoned words. "Are you here to chide me over going to speak at that blasted conference?"

"Yes," he said. "It was a foolish conference to attend. The Arithmantic Conference in Lisbon would have been a far better venue for your work ..."

"Well, I considered that, but Vienna, Severus!"

"I could curse that chairman for refusing your request; you would have gone to Lisbon if not for the challenge that Vienna posed for you."

"Didn't you read Minerva's letter? It was worth speaking at a lesser conference just to see the look on Lee Kong's face when he Flood'd me to ..."

"It's a fine conference, Hermione, but your research was far too specialized to be presented there."

"I presented it. Successfully, too. And you said it couldn't be done."

"Well." He crossed his arms. "It couldn't. You required much assistance to speak there."

"Don't start with me, you bastard," she said playfully.

"Out of retorts, Miss Granger? Must you resort to calling me childish names?" his voice intoned, eyes piercing but dancing with a familiar light. Hermione's eyes locked with his, the fireplace crackling behind him.

"Would you like some coffee, Severus?" she asked, not listening for his reply as she turned and walked back over to the kitchen. Damn how attractive he was when they argued. Damn his appeal ...

"Dark roast, but you already knew that."

He had been her professor for seven years, and she had always respected him, had never resorted to the name-calling and foolish insults that her classmates hurled behind his back. She had always doubted his supposed loyalty to Voldemort, even after Dumbledore's death. A year had passed before the Final Battle in which she had prayed to God every night that He would protect Severus. She had prayed for his innocence preceding the Final Battle. She could never have fought against him.

An exhilaration she had never known had filled her when Severus stood in between Remus and Minerva on that hilltop in June of 1998. Harry had still looked murderous, but had acquiesced to Severus' piercing gaze. Ron had embraced Hermione, glad for the assistance, oblivious to Hermione's internal jubilee.

2004. Hermione's mind immediately focused into the present - the here and now, six years after the battle. Severus Snape, tall, dark, and imposing, was standing merely four feet away from her. *Breathe, Hermione, breathe*, she told herself. She had admired her professor for years - had been attracted to him since her fifth year, in fact. However, that premature lust had never before strayed into anything resembling love.

Love. Ron. She and Ron had been engaged for several years after the War. They'd had a long engagement, a passionate one. They'd shared an apartment, shared pets, shared lives. It had been too much ... shared. They'd been inseparable since the age of eleven, and everyone knew that people change between the ages of eleven and twenty-two - especially when war and tragedy are involved. Their mutual decision to part ways had devastated Arthur and Molly, but they had come 'round to the idea. Molly's treatment of her had not been unlike the treatment Hermione had received in her fourth year after reports of her breaking Harry's heart had circulated. Once again, it had taken Harry's (and Ron's) intervention to help Molly see that this, too, was not Hermione's fault. Hermione supposed that Molly's heartbreak had been because of her long-held dream that the two would marry. It could not be because of grandmother-syndrome - Bill and Fleur had children, as did Fred and Katie.

That was two years ago. Ron was single and loving it - a Keeper for the Chudley Canons, he certainly had his fair share of female admirers. And Hermione...

Hermione had met up with Severus at a conference in New Orleans soon after her breakup with Ron. Years of living with Ron had not prepared her for the world of living alone ... she had frequented conferences during those months, staying with contacts and friends, trying to flood her life with as much social interaction as possible. She had had to reacclimate to the world of singleness.

That had been one of her first non-European conferences. The speaker, a black woman who specialized in Caribbean potions and their roles in Voodoo culture, had captivated the audience. Hermione had not looked away from her until the end of the lecture, at which point she had been stunned with the realization that Severus Snape was sitting directly across from her. They had gone to a small coffee shop in the French Quarter (or "franch qwata," as it was) to catch up. Severus had left England after the war, coming back for infrequent visits. Hermione had been shocked at how his demeanor had lightened in four years. With no masters to serve, he had changed. He retained the reserved, private, intense, brooding demeanor that characterized him so well, but the anger and bitterness were all but gone from his countenance.

In the two years since New Orleans, Severus and Hermione had continued to meet at various conferences. He visited her whenever he was near one of her European apartments, and they corresponded frequently. His Potions work often overlapped with hers, and soon enough they had realized that they had a bona fide friendship.

Hermione, of course, knew that she had long since surpassed the stages of friendship. Her friendship with this man, coupled with her long-held desire for him, had ultimately combusted into a passionate love such as she had never known. Severus didn't feel the same way, she knew. Severus acted when he felt convicted of something. Love was certainly convicting, and he wasn't acting.

She poured the dark roast into a crimson mug. The pine-white counter stood in stark contrast to the richly-toned coffee mugs.

"So ..." his voice purred in her ear.

"Something on your mind?" she asked, trying to sound casual.

His voice is so ...

"Not particularly. I'm still trying to reason the benefits of Vienna over Lisbon."

He must be close to me; I can smell that indescribable ...

"Hermione? I asked you a question."

"Oh, did you?"

Cover, damn it!

"Yes. I asked you the benefits of Vienna over Lisbon. It certainly can't be the beauty of the language."

"Portuguese isn't your typical romance language."

"And the Austrian dialect of German is the ugliest language known to man."

Oh. God. He's right behind me.

She spun around. Severus stood barely a foot away from her, hands in the pockets of his black pants, hair hanging in waves around his face, eyes blazing, betraying his rapid thoughts ... *Oh my God, he's right there!*

"Here's your coffee," she barely rasped, handing him the mug.

"Thank you," he whispered, moving next to her to lean against the countertop. He held her eyes briefly before returning to his thoughts.

He's brooding again. Oh, I love it when he broods ... and he hasn't been flirting with me tonight. He absolutely does not want me.

If anyone held to a Code of Ethics, it was Severus. His vow to never enter into relations with a student had never been tempted, and he vigilantly maintained his stance that he would never enter into relations with an ex-student. He was a world traveler, after all, and had plenty of women to choose from who were not graduates of the Hogwarts curricula.

"Hermione," he said simply. "Remind me why I'm here."

She laughed nervously. She hoped she wasn't being obvious - she was desperately in love with him, but she would never allow him to find out ... he would certainly end their friendship immediately ...

"You're here because you're upset that I went to Vienna instead of Lisbon."

"Not upset. Just ... disappointed."

"Why did you ask me why you were here if you knew why?"

"I was lost in the rapture of this glorious cup of coffee. My compliments."

"All I do is brew." She cast her eyes to the floor. His voice was low again, as it tended to be when he was involved in one-on-one conversation. He did not intentionally make it sound so lush and ... seductive. It was just one of the many gifts bestowed on him by the gods.

"Well, mistress of Potions and Arithmancy, if all you do is brew, I am quite disappointed ..."

"You know what I meant, Severus."

"Of course." He chuckled. "It's just entertaining to bait you."

"You call *that* baiting me into argument?"

"Moderate baiting."

"Weak baiting."

"Weak is all you can come up with?"

"Losing your snarky streak, Professor?"

"I haven't lost anything."

"Some things weaken with age."

"Not in this man," he said firmly, glaring down at her, eyes searching hers.

"Maybe not weakened ... maybe you've just ... lost your edge?"

He stared at her boldly, briefly leaning in, the cuffs of his white shirt just touching her wrists, before resuming his normal posture.

"I assure you, Hermione, all my edges are in tact. And everything is functioning at the highest level."

Their eyes locked for a moment. Hermione looked away, losing the battle.

"So why should I have gone to Lisbon?" she asked, changing the subject abruptly.

He stared at her. "If you haven't guessed by now ... " He set his cup of coffee down, placing his hands near hers on the table.

"Severus ..." she said weakly as he caught her hand in his.

"Hermione." His eyes bore into hers.

"Why should I have gone to Lisbon?" she whispered.

"I was there," he murmured, taking her by the waist, drawing her closer to him. "How I've missed you these past weeks." His lips brushed against her chin, and down, down, down to her collarbone, lightly sucking, slightly nipping.

Her heart was racing and she could barely breathe. She had wanted this man for so long...

"Why?" she asked, catching her breath. His lips left her neck but lingered nearby, his breath hot on her skin. He drew himself up to full height, staring down at her.

"You're an attractive woman, Hermione. A man would be blind not to see it," he said simply.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"Fishing for compliments, are we?" He gave a low chuckle, and returned to his work at her neck. "You're intelligent." He kissed her neck. "Beautiful." Collarbone. "Witty." He brushed the straps of her top aside, sucking at her shoulder. "Brave." Arm. "Intense." Wrist. He pulled her close to him, pinning her against the counter. "And I've wanted you for years." He moved so quickly Hermione didn't notice the time between the sucking on her wrist and the insistent press of his lips to hers. After a moment, he broke away.

"I am sorry, Hermione. It is obvious you don't want this ..." He began to walk away.

"No!" she exclaimed, walking towards him as he turned to face her. "No," she said, breathless. "I do want you. I have for just as long as you, I just never thought you could ... "

He put a finger to her lips. "I understand. It seems we both have been trapped by our fears. I ..." He looked away, and turned back to her.

"Please don't say you'll leave me again," she said softly. "I don't like it when you go away for weeks at a time, in Australia or Japan or ..."

"I have to," he said. "We both travel for a living, Hermione. We're both consultants, both researchers, we speak, we ..."

"Are alike," she finished. She noticed that his hands rested on her shoulders. She brought her hands up to his, and rubbed over them warmly. "I need you."

"I know."

They stood like that, close to each other, with admission yet so much unsaid.

"I'll be back in a few days," he started. "We'll talk then."

She looked up at him as he brushed a hair from her eye. "Until then," she whispered.

He bent down to kiss her forehead, black eyes staring into her brown ones, and Apparated.

Hermione stepped forward, as if to capture his essence that had just been there. She was hot. Her skin burned where he had touched her - her shoulders were hot, her neck tingling, her mouth swollen from the pressure of his lips. It was as if he hadn't been there a moment before ... he was like a phantom, visiting her sporadically, taking what he needed of her, be it conversation, argument, comfort, and now ... this ...

She slapped at her hands, trying to focus herself. She put her hands behind her head and walked back into the kitchen, where the mugs of dark roast sat, still steaming. God, she was hot. On fire. And not because of the temperature in the room. She was practically static ...

Get yourself under control, Hermione.

He said he wanted you.

He wants you.

He wants you!

Oh. Thank. God.

A wide smile spread across her face as she picked up a cup of dark roast and walked back into the sitting room. She sat in the leather chair, trying to control the feelings raging within her. How could he come and stir her and leave her there, boiling?

Next time would be different.

She swung her legs over the arm of the chair, trying to relax, as she picked up her book again, and started reading the last line where she'd left off...

From what I've tasted of desire, I hold with those who favor fire.

A/N: I claim no credit for the poetry! Robert Frost was a brilliant poet, and the particularly eloquent "Fire and Ice" is one of my favorites:

Some say the world will end in fire,

Some say in ice

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire.

But if it had to perish twice,

I think I know enough of hate

To know that for destruction ice

Is also great

And would suffice.