

Lis du Feu

by darsynia

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He was *really* nervous. Cedric Diggory liked to do things right the first time...and it wasn't as if there would be a second time if he screwed this up. The thing was, he really did like her a lot, and not many students in the school, male *or* female, would appreciate what he wanted to show her. He checked one last time to see that everything was in order and started back toward the castle.

On his way across the field past the slowly swaying Whomping Willow, he could see the altered Quidditch Pitch in the distance and felt a pang of regret. It didn't seem quite fair to the seventh year students to be denied a chance to play or watch their last year's worth of matches. If he admitted the truth to himself, he felt slightly guilty that he or Harry out of all of the school would have a chance to win some sort of Cup this year. He supposed it would have been more balanced if Harry...Cedric pushed this thought from his mind, knowing that he didn't truly resent the other boy's participation in the Tournament. He was unwilling to let himself follow along that particular train of thought. Hogwarts had two Champions, and that couldn't fail to be a good thing.

Just before he walked into the huge entryway, Cedric took one last look at the sun to judge the approximate time of day. His father had taught him how to do that when he'd been very young, along with how to gauge where he was based on the stars. He felt reasonably certain that the sun would be setting in a little less than an hour. *Right*, he said to himself with a little nod of self-encouragement. *Time to find Hermione.*

Even if they hadn't agreed to meet in the evening that night, Cedric knew he'd have been able to find her. He set off toward the library, thinking about his first conversation with the feisty Gryffindor.

He'd never really had occasion to notice her, as their classes were years apart, and their groups of friends quite different in personality and style. The moment that had changed all that had been the Sunday after Christmas, the day before quite a few of the students were scheduled to take the Hogwarts Express for an abbreviated Christmas holiday with their family (the Yule Ball having persuaded almost the entire student body to remain at the school during the actual holiday). Miss Hermione Granger had walked purposefully up to him after breakfast, a determined look on her face. Cedric knew who she was, of course...almost everyone did; she was the type of student to stand out whether or not she was best friends with a wizarding celebrity.

When she'd reached him, he'd gotten the strangest impression that she had mostly lost her nerve. This theory was confirmed when he saw that the hand holding her book bag was practically white from clutching it so hard. The fact that the girl hadn't feigned interest in something nearby or sought to exchange some sort of meaningless pleasantry with him had impressed him very much.

"Mr. Diggory?" she'd said...and he had almost *laughed* at her. 'Mr. Diggory' was his father...but it was also a sign of respect, and it would be very ungracious of him to respond to something like that by snickering at her.

"Miss Granger." Cedric's polite response had taken no thought.

"I..." She had faltered, her brows furrowing. Hermione had looked at him as though she really had expected someone very different. He had almost wanted to ask her if she were lost. "I wanted to talk to you about the badges."

Cedric had flushed a deep red. The anti-Potter badges had *really* upset him at first, particularly because he didn't feel (much) resentment toward Harry for being a wild card surprise addition to the Tri-Wizard Tournament. Nothing he could say would persuade his friends to stop making or displaying them, though, and finally he'd given up. He was more intent on his studies and the preparation for the mysterious tasks he would have to endure throughout the year anyway.

He had seen with even more dismay that she'd taken his embarrassed reaction in the worst possible way.

"Harry wouldn't tell you, but they're really upsetting!" she'd cried, giving up on the book bag and twisting her hands in front of her as though the strength of her emotions were too strong to express in mere words. "And now the Slytherins have gone and altered them...isn't there something you can do?"

"I've tried," he had told her truthfully. "Nothing I said did much good, but if you want, I'll be more severe with them about it."

Then it had been Hermione's turn to blush.

"I...Well. Thank you..." she'd said lamely, shaking her head as though she'd missed something important as she'd walked away.

On the train ride home and periodically during the holiday, Cedric had gone back over their brief conversation in his mind. His first impression had been that he was quite impressed with her...it would never have occurred to him to speak to a sixth year student as a fourth year one, much less scold them with censure about their behavior. Cedric had a photographic memory (something that made him feel almost as if he were cheating on tests, which his father had called a ridiculous reaction when he'd spoken to him about it his first year), and he'd found himself dwelling on the way her hands had twisted with nervousness and how her eyes had flashed when he'd first turned red, misunderstanding his discomfort.

It was just a part of his nature to analyze and mentally hover over inconsequential details, looking for patterns and signs in things beyond the initial interaction. He hadn't quite realized, however, that he'd never really focused on her face...not until the day of the second task. He'd made eye contact with Harry in the water, understanding for a split second an unspoken need to throw off the rules of the task and rescue all four of them...but then Viktor had shown up with his fearsome shark's head, and Cedric had refocused his efforts on freeing Cho.

That night, he'd felt guilty...not because he hadn't given in to the sudden compulsion to cut everyone loose and pull them to the surface, but because rather than seeing Cho's grateful and caring face when he shut his eyes, all he'd seen was Hermione's slightly frightened, frozen one.

He'd caught himself looking for her many times over the next few weeks, wanting to replace the twisting hands and underwater stasis with a happier image. Hermione was a smart, observant witch, however, and after a while, he found that she'd already be looking at him when he sought her out. After a week of this, Cedric had made a decision.

That next weekend, he had walked across the courtyard with a box in his hands, and when he had found Hermione with her friend Ronald Weasley, he'd asked politely to speak to her. Then, Cedric had handed her the box. It had contained every single 'The REAL Champion' button he'd been able to find.

"You didn't need to do *this*!" she'd said in wonderment.

"I think I did," Cedric had responded thoughtfully as he'd looked at her surprised but pleased expression, glad that he finally had a suitable photograph of Hermione for his internal scrapbook.

Their friendship had grown a lot since then, and he was reasonably sure she felt the same way about him as he did about her. Now all that remained was to find out for certain.

"Are you...going to go in?" Susan Bones asked him hesitantly, and Cedric realized he was standing directly in the doorway to the library. He looked down and shut his eyes for a moment and then shook his head slightly, his ears turning red.

"I was standing here for quite a while, wasn't I?" he queried his fellow Housemate.

"I wouldn't know," she answered him with a shy smile, her cheeks turning slightly pink when he smiled at her. "I just got here." He gestured for her to precede him into the room, nodding a friendly goodbye to her as they parted ways at the main desk.

He found Hermione in her regular corner by one of the thick windows, surprised to find that she had already packed up her books, quills, and parchment before he'd gotten there. The implications of this (he knew that it was a habit of hers to become so immersed in her work that she forgot nearly everything else) were *very* encouraging. When she caught sight of him, she waved and hopped up out of her chair.

"All done with your work?" he asked her as he reached down to pick up her heavy bag of books.

"Oh! Thank you," Hermione said, reaching out a hand as though to help support the weight. "It's awfully heavy," she apologized.

"I can manage." Cedric smiled down at her, and she smiled back, neither one realizing that they'd stopped walking when they'd made eye contact. Hermione seemed to realize this first, and she started walking again, speaking in a matter-of-fact tone that he suspected had a small measure of shyness to it.

"I'm not actually quite finished yet," she admitted, causing his eyebrows to shoot up in surprise. "There wasn't much sense in completing it today anyway, though...Harry and Ron won't have theirs done for days, and we usually study together." Cedric caught up with her and started leading the way across the grounds, heading for the lake. He realized she'd stopped talking and shifted the bag's weight a bit on his shoulder as he turned to look at her.

"Go on," he encouraged.

"Oh, there wasn't much else to say really," Hermione said with a nervous little laugh. "But...where are we going?"

"It's a surprise," he responded confidently as he glanced up at a sky that was starting to show the first signs of the sunset. "You'll like it, I promise," Cedric assured her. At that, she turned her head toward him to smile again, and the falling light fell directly across her face, illuminating her brown eyes in a way that reminded him of rich brown velvet. Something of his reaction to the sight must have shown on his face because she started to blush, but didn't break their eye contact.

"I trust you," she said softly.

By the time they reached the lake, the formerly blue sky was shot across with red, orange, and yellow as the first stages of sunset began to paint its way across the horizon. He paused, waiting for Hermione to realize that he'd done so rather than break the silence. She stopped not far away, turning to face him with a questioning expression.

"What now?" she asked.

"Now you prove that you trust me," Cedric replied, setting her bag down beside a familiar looking rock and casting a quick charm to make it inconspicuous. She moved to stand beside him, her eyes alight with a curiosity that was amplified when he reached into his pocket to remove a swath of cloth. He could feel her trembling slightly next to him and wasn't surprised when she sat on the rock rather than let him see that she was nervous.

"I want to show you something," Cedric explained, moving around behind her with the fabric in his hands.

"That's generally hard to do when one's blindfolded," Hermione pointed out, tipping her head back to look at him with a clever glint in her eyes.

"Let's just say that it's quite an experience, and I want you to appreciate it fully," he responded to her in a teasing tone of his own, explaining his intent at the same time, "something that's hard to do when you can see what's coming from a few yards away." He covered her eyes very gently with the soft linen, his confidence bolstered when her hand came up to touch his gently as he tied the blindfold behind her head.

"I trust you," she repeated.

"Good."

Cedric turned his hand slightly to clasp hers, feeling a little tingle of excitement as he realized it was the first time they'd held hands, even if this was just to facilitate his guiding her steps. Her cheeks had turned slightly rosy under the blindfold, and he wondered if her thoughts were similar to his own.

Her steps were hesitant, and so with a gentle squeeze, he laid a hand on her shoulder and transitioned to guiding her from behind. The fading gold light from the sun touched up a fiery glow to her hair, and the warmth of the day made it easy for him to catch the scent of it. Everything was going perfectly to plan; he could see the patch of lilies in their little alcove on the lake, one or two of which had already begun to open and release their glittering pollen.

He positioned Hermione safely about a half a yard from the water, not wishing for her to step forward to orient herself and end up in the lake when he removed the blindfold. Neither of them had spoken since he'd begun to lead her, each sensing that the moment to come would be exceptional and not wanting to ruin it with something mundane. Cedric couldn't resist kissing her shoulder as he stepped away from her... He was very glad he'd been able to see her reaction to this impulsive gesture; it had been as though someone had lit up her face in the same way that the sunset was lighting their surroundings.

Just as he'd known they would, the lily pads floating in front of them on the lake shook slightly as the remaining flowers opened their petals in response to the vibrant sunset and released thousands of their fiery pollen.

"You can remove the blindfold now, Hermione," he said in the barest of whispers, touched by the way she leaned unconsciously toward the sound of his voice. Her delicate hands released the loose knot at the back of her head...and then she gasped in absolute wonder.

The sky was ablaze with light, the vivid colors overlaying the water with a deep crimson gold glow...but that wasn't what made the girl in front of him draw a short breath in awe. Hovering and swirling around her were the twinkling, glowing bits of pollen set free by the gorgeous flowers that still floated in the lake at their feet. Cedric knew he would remember this moment forever...the lovely girl bathed in the light of a beautiful sunset, surrounded by the firefly-like pollen that even now were starting to drift away towards the water.

Hermione turned to him, holding her hands out as if to say that she couldn't bear to experience something so amazing alone. He went to her gladly, draping an arm around her shoulder as the two of them watched the rest of the sunset reflected on the lake, punctuated by some of the fiery pieces of pollen that drifted around them lazily. When at last the bright oranges and reds had faded to gentle pinks and purples, she spoke.

"That was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life," Hermione said, simply.

"Tonight, I'd have to agree with you," Cedric murmured, not explaining that seeing the beauty of her reaction coupled with the experience itself had been indelibly marked in his memory as a perfect moment in time. She turned her body to face him; their casual stance turned immediately into a close embrace...something he didn't mind at all, and neither, it seemed, did she.

"You know," she began with an odd note in her voice that he thought he recognized from their very first conversation, "I had thought you brought me out here to..." Hermione broke off quickly and ducked her head against his shoulder.

"To..." he prompted, finding the odd mix of bravery and shyness endearing. He could feel the movement as she shook her head. "What could be more intimidating than speaking to me about those badges?" he wondered aloud. *That* prompted a reaction, and Cedric decided that he was very glad that Hermione had been sorted to Gryffindor.

"To kiss me." She had lifted her head, but was staring determinedly at his chest as though she didn't want to see what his reaction would be if it were negative. Cedric felt a strong rush of confidence as well as a wave of excitement that made him feel a bit weak...the two feelings at once were very exhilarating.

"Would you like me to?" he asked, hoping for the right answer.

Hermione didn't speak, but rather lifted her eyes to his. There was a sparkling reflection in them that he was *reasonably* certain came from a bit of pollen from over his shoulder...

"Cedric," she said...and he could hear excitement, wonder, desire, and uncertainty all shining clearly from the way she spoke his name. He became determined at that moment to erase all signs of the latter. He wondered what his eyes were telling her as he looked intently into hers, lifting the hand that had been resting on her shoulder to brush one of her curly locks away from her lips where it had been blown by a sudden wind coming up across the lake.

Hermione leaned into him slightly when his fingers brushed across her mouth, her lashes drifting down over her eyes as his hand slid across her cheek and down, cupping her chin. The very last of the sun's light illuminated her hair, setting the stray hairs alight and reminding him of what he'd brought her here to see.

"Lis du feu," he whispered just before their lips met. The kiss was quite appropriate to the fire motif, for all that it was incredibly tender. They seemed to melt into each other's mouths. Her lips were so sweet and soft that Cedric couldn't resist sliding his fingers into her hair and drawing her closer to him. When they finally broke the kiss, his heart was in his throat from the sheer beauty of it...and the fact that Hermione met his eyes steadily and proudly afterwards sent him well on the way to falling in love with her.

"I..." she started to say and then stopped, blushing and burying her head into his shoulder. "I want to say 'thank you,' but that sounds like such a silly thing to say after a kiss!" Her voice was muffled against his shirt, and he stroked her hair gently.

"Thank you, Hermione," he said with pure honesty in his voice. She pressed back against his hand, leaning her head to the side to regard him warmly before stretching herself up on her very tiptoes to kiss him lightly on the lips again. Though she settled back down almost immediately, the contact had been just as electric as their first kiss had been.

"What does 'Lis du feu' mean?" Hermione asked him, turning in his arms to look at the beautiful flowers floating on the lake, the fading purple light from the last of the sunset causing the white petals to glow with a slight bluish cast. Cedric leaned his head against hers, his breath causing the hair near her ears to dance.

"Fire lily," he answered in a hushed voice. "They only release pollen twice a month." Hermione gently traced their twined fingers with her free hand as she asked her next question, the shyness still there but almost gone.

"Was tonight the first or second?" Cedric caught the implication in her voice, as well as a slight throbbing of excitement that he recognized as her desire to know everything she could about the lily. He was fairly certain he would know where to find her tomorrow.

"Second...but, I'm sure we could find something else to do..."

Cedric felt a moment's anxiety, wondering if he'd pushed a little too far, amazing kiss notwithstanding.

"Yes, I'd like that," Hermione said, resting her arms on the ones he'd encircled her with and squeezing them affectionately. "Should we start back?" she asked next, unmoving as though it were entirely his decision. His answer was to pull away regretfully, retaining hold of her hand with the deliberate purpose of holding it this time. When they reached the location of her stashed bag, he lifted it easily to his shoulder and then turned to her, a very playful thought having just occurred to him.

"So, I'll meet you in the library tomorrow?" he offered, allowing his voice to show how much he wanted her to say yes. She looked slightly surprised at first and then nodded.

"What would you like to do?" she asked, quickly blushing as one possibility seemed to occur to her. Cedric stepped forward to look down at her, wondering if his expression reflected all of the excitement and flutterings of desire that he felt when contemplating her unspoken suggestion.

"I thought that would be obvious," he said, kissing her lightly. Her cheeks flushed bright pink; clearly, he'd guessed correctly. When he spoke again, however, it was with a broad smile and a wink. "I thought you might want to look up the Lis du feu."

Without waiting for her response, he started toward the castle, resisting the urge to whistle cheerfully.