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Discovery Prologue

Harry looked at the letter that a Hogwarts owl had just delivered. *Has that man learned nothing?* he thought in his fury.

Harry,

The Dementors are free of Ministry controls, and the remainder of Voldemort's Death Eaters are still loose. It is vital that you limit your time outside. Preferably, you will leave the house only for the chores that your aunt and uncle assign you. By all means, keep your exits from the property to emergency purposes only! This means no walks to the nearby park.

By necessity, we must limit owl contact as well. It is far too likely that someone will attempt to send you something dangerous. All owls are being diverted to Hogwarts, save Hedwig, who is simply immune to the diversion charm due to her connection to you.

I am sorry for the necessity of this, but you are far too valuable and important to lose.

I look forward to seeing you in September at Hogwarts.

Albus Dumbledore

He orders me to stay here. He tells me that I won't be seeing anyone this summer. Again. And he apparently expects me to simply roll over and do it! He stalked away from the letter which sat on what passed for a desk.

He stomped around the room for a while quietly - living with the Dursleys had taught him that - before sitting down and pulling out some parchment.

Hermione,

Forgive this letter, please. I ask this because I need to ask you to keep an eye on Hedwig for me until I contact you next. I need you to read this letter all the way through before contacting Dumbledore, as I'm sure you'll want to when you read my thoughts.

I'm leaving. I'm sending the letter from Dumbledore that made this decision for me. I'm stupid and childish and attention seeking and Merlin knows how many other ways of calling me stupid, if you listen to Snape. I need to leave, though. I need to understand life and making my own decisions.

I have something very important to do before I die - and secret enough that I can't tell you via Hedwig. It had something to do with how you got that horrific scar across your beautiful form.

Yeah, I called you beautiful. Now that I know I'll likely never see you again (I'm not keen on returning to Hogwarts and getting more of the Bumblebee's loving care wherein he tells me nothing and expects me to be an adult while he treats me like a child), I'm willing to tell you that you're probably the prettiest girl at school. (What can I say? I have a thing for smart girls.)

Back to the issue at hand, though. When does DD expect me to learn what he knows I have to learn? How will I learn it if I'm always locked into this home where all I ever see is a hollow mockery of love, and even that is never aimed at me?

Did you know that Voldemort and I have had similar childhoods?

Did that last sentence scare you? It should any sane person, but our friendly meddling Bumblebee insists that my strength of heart will win the day, or some such tripe. I'm certain that he doesn't realise just what these "people" that are my jailers are like.

Yes, jailers. Ask Ron while you're at the Burrow, or HQ, or wherever DD puts you - ask him about my second year, and ripping bars off my windows.

At least you'll be able to explore the romance you and Ron have. I don't think Ron will ever know just how damned jealous I am of him. He's jealous of my fame and my money. I'm jealous of his having a life filled with love - his parents, his sister and brothers (even if they do torment him occasionally), and you. Somehow, the prat managed to snag the best girl at Hogwarts, and I never realised that until it was simply too late.

Well, I'm going to end this letter and be on my way. Please take care of my girl for me - I don't know when I'll be settled enough to be able to call for her again.

Until we meet again one day,

Harry

P.S. - sorry for leaving the job of telling everyone else to you, but I need to get moving before you can tell Dumbledore. I don't trust him as easily as once I did, but you still do.

He closed his letter after enclosing the one the headmaster had sent, and walked over to Hedwig, who was looking at him with curiosity. "Hey girl," he said softly. "I need you to fly this letter to Hermione, and then stay there with her until I have a chance to call for you, okay? I'm going to be doing a lot of travelling soon, and you'd not only be uncomfortable, but I wouldn't be writing many people. I've explained to Hermione why I'm asking you to stay." She hopped onto his arm. "I'm gonna miss you," he said thickly. "I wish I could bring you along, but it just isn't feasible right now. Love you, girl." He pulled her closer and gently put his arm around her in a sort of hug. "Go on, girl. Be free for now. Enjoy yourself." She gently nipped his fingers and then flew to the sill, where she turned to face him for a long moment before turning and gracefully taking to the air.

Discovery London

Hermione was sitting quietly reading when she heard a quiet tapping at the window. She looked up to see a familiar white owl in the window, waiting patiently. She let the snowy owl in, and was surprised at the gentle nip from her, but even more surprised when Hedwig did something she'd only ever seen cats do - she gave Hermione an affectionate head bump before giving Hermione the letter.

"You're a beautiful owl, Hedwig," she said as she claimed the letter from Hedwig. She read Harry's letter, her face going white as she reached the part about her and Ron. She quickly read the letter that was the headmaster's demands to Harry. *No matter how politely phrased they were, they're still demands. Doesn't the man realise that's part of what killed Sirius? He was in jail again, and he had to escape.*

She put the letters down and began to pack a travelling bag with walking clothes and the like. *The first place he'll have to go is Gringott's, she thought. He'll need money to move with. I want to get to the bank before they open, so I can wait for him.*

Once she'd packed her gear, she sat and wrote a note to her parents.

Mum and Dad,

Knowing your schedules, it may be a day or two before you see this. In a way, I'm glad. Harry is leaving, and he needs someone to help him and watch his back. I've elected myself for the job.

I expect that you'll contact Professor Dumbledore or someone when you finally read this. With luck the two of us are out of his clutches for a time, and maybe Harry will have a chance to heal somewhat. (You remember that I told you about him losing his godfather so recently.)

I'm leaving the letter that Harry sent, and the one that the Professor sent to Harry that set this off. Please don't lose them - I'm sure they'll be important again someday.

I will come back and explain when I can - it's just too important right now that I not let Harry be alone when he most needs someone.

I love you.

Hermione

She left her own letter to her parents atop the two that Harry had sent. She then walked to Hedwig and said, "Girl, I'm leaving to find your boyfriend." She chuckled as she said it, and laughed when Hedwig bobbed her head excitedly. "You sleep in, and then when it gets dark, find Harry. We'll have camped wherever we are, and we can all be reunited, okay?" Hedwig bounced from foot to foot for a moment before nipping Hermione's finger. "I love you too, Hedwig. See you tonight, okay?" After another head bob from Hedwig, Hermione headed out the door and down the road a distance.

A short, harrowing ride on the Knight Bus later, Hermione stepped shakily up to the door of the Leaky Cauldron and stepped inside. Almost no one was inside except Tom, who seemed to be at the bar no matter what time of day. "Miss Granger, what a surprise!"

"Hello, Tom," she said sweetly. "When does Gringott's open?"

"Eight a.m. sharp, miss. Need some emergency shopping?" he asked with a smile.

"Need to see someone before they leave the area for the summer, and I know they're going to hit Gringott's first thing. Couldn't hurt to get some money of my own as well." She smiled back at him.

"Well, if you want to have a lie down in one of the rooms upstairs for a few hours, I can make sure you're awake in time to meet your Mister Potter. Want me to tell him you're looking for him?"

"Is he here?" she asked excitedly.

"Room thirteen. Shall I knock for you?"

"Please. May I be with you when you do?"

"Certainly. Nob! Keep an eye for a minute!" As soon as his assistant came up, he led Hermione upstairs. They walked to the end of a hall, where it met up with another at an extremely acute angle. The door was numbered thirteen, and Muggle physics stated that the door should barely open, if at all.

Tom knocked on the door. "Mr. Potter? May I speak with you for a moment?"

"Sure, Tom," came the tired voice from inside. "Be there in a second."

They heard shuffling inside, and then the door opened. Harry's tired eyes widened the second he saw Hermione, and he looked warily down the hall. "I'm alone!" she said quickly. "No one has been told. My parents won't see the note I left them for a day or two." At his narrowed eyes, she added, "I'll swear an oath to that effect, if necessary, Harry. I promise you."

Harry nodded almost immediately. "C'mon in then," he said. Smiling at Tom, he said, "I take it she's the reason you needed to see me?" At Tom's grin, he said, "Thanks." Tom nodded and headed back downstairs.

Hermione stepped inside and dropped her bag on the floor. "Let's get some sleep, Harry. We'll wake up about seven a.m. and get ready to go to Gringott's." She walked over to the bed and straightened out the bedclothes. "Turn around for a moment, please," she said. He did so and heard clothing rustle. His eyes looked around the room, and he suddenly realised that he could see her in the mirror. She was just opening her shirt, and he saw the simple white cotton brassiere she wore underneath. His eyes went wide for a moment, and he slammed his eyes shut, but not before she'd looked up and met his eyes for a moment. He heard her snicker quietly, and felt himself go red.

"I'm really sorry, Hermione," he stuttered, and sidled toward the combination water closet and bath room - not the easiest thing to do with his eyes closed. When he felt safe opening his eyes, he bolted for the room, her laughter following him.

Once in there, he looked at the bath tub and shrugged. *I doubt it will be any less comfortable than the cupboard I grew up in.* He climbed in and lay down carefully after grabbing a couple towels to use as pillows.

He had begun to settle in to drift away to sleep when he heard Hermione knock on the door to the bathroom. He pulled the curtain closed and said, "Safe to come in now, Hermione, if you need to use it. I promise not to look."

He heard the door open, and then the curtain slid back. "What do you think you're doing?" She was wearing a simple white t-shirt that hung halfway to her knees that hinted at gentle and pleasant curves beneath.

"Going to sleep. I thought that much was obvious," he said.

"There's a bed out there."

"Which you will be in. Therefore, it's either the floor or the tub, and oddly enough, the tub is more comfortable."

"Wouldn't the bed be more comfortable?" she asked archly.

He sighed as if trying to explain something to a child who simply was not quite grasping simple arithmetic. "You'll be in the bed."

"And this precludes you being in it why?" she asked.

He looked at her, stunned, and prayed that she did not notice the reaction her suggestion had just begun. No such luck. Her eyes caught the growing response and widened. "That's why, Hermione. You've read my letter to you, so you know I'm attracted to you, no matter how futile that is. I might take advantage of you in the night, and even if I didn't, I somehow think sleeping that close to you is likely to make it difficult for me to sleep."

"We'll talk about relationships tomorrow when we're on the road, but right now you're climbing out of that tub and climbing into bed with me and spooning up against me for comfort." It was now his turn to have his eyes go wide. "So what if you've reacted to my figure? We're both tired, and I'm betting you'll sleep better than you think."

"I'm betting otherwise," he said quietly. "You have no idea how you affect me."

She chuckled and her eyes dropped to his waist again. "I'm betting otherwise as well," she said with a naughty grin. Her face became serious. "You lay down and face the wall. I'll spoon against you, and you won't be worried about pressing anything against me you think you shouldn't, okay?" He nodded lightly and waited for her to move away from the tub. Instead she reached a hand out to help him. He sighed and climbed from the tub with her help. "Thank you for the compliment, by the way," she said once he was standing on his feet.

He blushed again and followed her out of the room, trying very hard not to let his eyes fall below her waist. When they reached the bed, she turned and smiled at him. "It's okay to look, Harry. I won't break."

"I'm thinking things about you that I shouldn't, Hermione. Very inappropriate things." He scowled deeply, and then barked a soft, unhappy laugh. "Save time and money. Murderer and pervert - now in one friend! Call today - supplies are limited," he said in a radio announcer style voice. "Thank God for small favours," he finished in a whisper.

"What, you're a pervert because you'd like to get your girlfriend naked and do interesting things to her? Guess that makes anyone who gets horny a pervert," she said with more than a little heat in her voice. "I won't even get into the murderer aspect of things," she said. She visibly calmed herself and said, "You're not a murderer, and I wouldn't dream of climbing into bed with a man I thought was a pervert. Now get in there."

He blinked at her and simply climbed into the bed, feeling her climb in behind him. Faster than he would have thought possible, he felt sleep claiming him.

He awoke the next morning to a gentle rhythmic murmur; a very comforting sound. He was lying on his left side, so he stretched out his right arm to

unkink a few of the muscles, feeling his hand slide across skin and then fabric. His eyes opened as he processed this information. Hermione's arms tightened slightly, and he realised that she was holding him.

"We ended up this way, Harry," she said softly, "and if you think I'm going to complain about you waking up with your head between my breasts, you've got another think coming to you." He realised that the rhythmic sound was her heart beating. He looked around to see that her t-shirt had ridden up in the night, and his hand had been on her stomach, but now rested squarely on her -

He yanked his hand away. "I'm sorry, Hermione," he said. "I told you this was a bad idea. Even in my sleep I knew I would do something to you and I can see that I was right." He tried to pull away from her, but her grip was tighter than he expected.

"Harry, if I'd had a problem with your hand on my knickers, I'd have said something when it came to rest there. Maybe next time I won't wear them under my nightshirt." She paused, fairly obviously giving him a moment to understand her words. "Yes, I meant that. I trust you, Harry, and I certainly am not going to complain if I find your hands or your head somewhere *you* think is inappropriate." He heard her heart rate pick up. "I'd just prefer it be when I'm wearing as little as possible." She let go of him then and giggled. "Now, it's time for a shower if we're going to hit Gringott's when it opens." She climbed from the bed as soon as he sat up. "You first. I might use up the hot water."

"I'm used to cold showers," he said softly.

"I'm sorry," was her simple reply.

He looked at her and saw the direction her own mood was taking, so he forced happy thoughts into his head, and got mischievous. "Besides, the way you're dressed right now, I think I'll *need* the cold shower."

She blinked in surprise and then laughed. "You say the sweetest things, Harry!" She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek, and then stood back up and peeled the nightshirt over her head.

Harry's breath caught. She stood before him in nothing but her simple cotton knickers. "Hermione," he strangled out.

"Get used to it, Harry. We're going to be together this summer, and I'd like it to be as more than merely friends."

"But I thought ..."

"You thought wrong," she answered perhaps a little sharper than she would have liked. "I like Ron - he's a good friend, when he's not being jealous. But he's never jump-started my heart rate, unless it's by making me angry. You do it by smiling that lopsided smile of yours. Harry, I want you to take a good look at me right now as I stand before you. I want you to take the whole day to realise that I'm willing to stand in front of you wearing as little as I am, and I intend to ask you to join me in the shower."

"Bad idea," he choked out.

"So we're late making it to Gringott's," she said. "Trust me on this, Harry. If you do what you're afraid of in there, it will most definitely not be rape." She gave him a sultry look. "Can't rape the willing, after all."

He was stunned, to say the very least. "Hermione, this isn't like you," he finally managed to get out.

"I know. I decided that I was tired of being the overlooked girl at school; the bookworm that no one ever pays any attention to. I wanted to be noticed this year, especially by the one I fell in love with." She gave him a knowing look.

He smiled a wan smile. "Decided to practice on me first, huh?" he said with a weak laugh.

Her reaction was not what he expected. Tears came to her eyes, and she spun and ran into the bath room, closing the door hard behind her.

He blinked and looked at the door for a moment, and then set about getting dressed quickly, not bothering to wait for the shower. As soon as he had his clothes on, he grabbed his things and left the room. *I'll shower later, when I'm on the road. I need to get away from her before I can hurt her even more.*

He got to the bottom and saw Tom there. "Don't you ever get any sleep?" Harry asked with a forced laugh.

"Gave it up years ago," Tom laughed back at him. "So where's ..."

"She'll be down shortly," Harry interrupted. "I'm heading out for my errands, and I can meet up with her afterwards."

Tom nodded. "I'll tell her." Harry nodded and left, rolling his trunk behind him.

He was pleased by how quiet the streets seemed at this hour, so he made good time to the bank. It was just opening as he reached it, so he slipped inside and was quickly at the counter. Showing his key, he was met with the raised eyebrow of the goblin serving him. "Mister Potter, our solicitor would like to speak with you. Follow me." He followed the goblin to an office where he was ushered inside.

"Mister Potter. I am Rackspit. Please have a seat." When Harry was seated, Rackspit continued. "We were going to send you a letter today, but you have negated the necessity. You are the most important heir listed in Sirius Black's last will and testament. There are but four others listed, and they will be notified. You receive sixty percent of the estate, with the remaining forty being split between Mister Lupin, Miss and Mrs Tonks, and Mrs Malfoy, that last being under a condition that affects your holdings if she does not accept."

"Have I a right to know the condition?" he asked. "I won't be offended if I don't."

"Yes. She receives her share if she divorces Lucius Malfoy, with the proviso in the divorce decree being a witch's oath that she will not remarry or support Lucius in any way for a period of not less than ten years. If she refuses, the money in her share reverts to you." Harry nodded. "Also, as the stated heir to the Black fortune, you are hereby granted emancipation immediately to allow you to properly look after these holdings. Amusingly enough, this activates one of the provisos of the Potter trust, which means that you come into full control of those as well, since you were to gain full control upon reaching adulthood."

"What kind of cash do I have access to?"

"You would be hard pressed to spend it all, Mister Potter. I would hazard a guess that it might well be impossible for you to. You could buy every business in Diagon Alley, as well as Hogsmeade, and still have money left over."

"A-heh. I have no idea on how to deal with that much money. Do you have some suggestions? I'd be willing to let Gringott's deal with the investing, since you already do that to make money for yourselves. I'd want to figure out how to at least understand what you're doing."

"You would trust us with your money?" Rackspit asked with some surprise.

"Well, you haven't robbed me blind before I had access to it, so why would you now?" He snorted. "Besides, I intend on leaving England for about a month or so. Need to get away from the people trying to control my life."

"Are you going to the continent, or America?"

"Well, the continent is closer, and easier to get back from if something really important comes up."

"Let us get a passport together for you, then. It will make travel much easier."

"Is there ..." he began to say, but another goblin entered the room. "Rackspit, there is a young witch out here asking for Mister Potter. She is keeping calm, but I believe that she is close to a panic attack."

"Brown hair, sort of bushy? Sexy as all get out?" Harry asked. The goblin nodded, grinning at Harry's sudden blush over the last comment. "Sounds like Hermione. Better let her in here." A moment later she came in and ran over to Harry.

"Tom told me you'd come here. I was hoping I'd catch you before you could get away. I am so sorry for my reaction. Please don't head anywhere without me, Harry."

"Even after I insulted you, you're willing to hang around with me?"

"I was being overly sensitive. You were making a joke, and I should have realised that. Please don't leave without me?"

He stood and pulled her into a hug. "Here I was thinking I would be doing you a favour by leaving. I promise I won't leave without you." He looked up at Rackspit, who smiled at him.

"I believe we can supply her with a passport, if necessary," the goblin said. She reached into her bag and pulled hers out.

"I thought I might need it, so I grabbed it."

"Brilliant," Harry said admiringly, making her blush. "Oh, while I'm thinking about it - is there a way of getting at my money easier than taking out a huge amount?"

"We'll supply you with a wallet and a pouch that will connect to your vaults."

"Make it two. She'll need one as well."

"Harry!" she squeaked. "I could rob you blind and you'd never know it!"

"You're my best friend. If you want it for some reason, take it. But you're right. You should have your own money. Sir, could you have a vault set up for Miss Granger with a million Galleons placed in it, set up fees and wallet and pouch fees to come from my money?"

"Certainly. We'll bring that in with your passport."

He looked at her with a smile. "There. Now you have your own money to spend, and you're not robbing me blind."

She gasped. "Harry, you ... that's ... that's a huge amount of money! You just gave me something like five million pounds, without thinking! Can you afford to do that?"

"I assume so, since before doing that I had the money to purchase every business in Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade and still have money available."

"While not pocket change, Miss Granger, it is not a drain on his finances to have given you that gift. He could still perform the purchases mentioned; he would simply have less afterwards."

She got a wicked gleam in her eyes. "So I'm to be your kept woman, am I?" she asked with a grin. "I think I can live with that." She hugged him again. "It means you'll keep me around."

"Who wouldn't?" he asked her honestly. "Why wouldn't anyone want you around?"

"Oh, Harry," she breathed at him, and he shivered as a feeling of ... something ... passed through him.

"I'm serious! You're probably the smartest person to ever grace the Hogwarts halls. As far as I'm concerned you're the prettiest - don't argue with me; it's my opinion and you can't argue an opinion. You care, even if you don't always know the right way to show it. You're just overall a joy to be around, in my book."

There were tears in her eyes as he finished speaking. He looked at her for a moment, but before he could misunderstand the reason she was tearing up, she lunged forward and hugged him tightly. "I love you, too," she whispered in his ear.

He was saved from responding, not that he could, by a goblin entering with a small package that proved to be the passport, wallets and pouches. There were also several keys.

"This is your key, Miss Granger," Rackspit said, handing her a small but ornate key. He handed the rest to Harry. "These are for the Black family vault, the Potter family vault, and the storage vaults for the Potters and the Blacks."

"What's the difference between the storage and Family vaults?" Hermione asked, and then blushed as she realised that she really didn't have the right to ask. Harry grinned quickly at her.

"Storage is for the larger and seldom used items, such as furniture and portraits. Display weapons belong in those vaults. Weapons that are likely to see use, and money, as well as books and other items will be in the family vaults."

"I think I need to see some of that before I leave, just to see what I might want to carry with me."

Rackspit smiled again. "I can supply you with a ... well, a catalogue might be the best description. It will have a description that can be tapped with a wand to picture the item, and a description of any special properties that it might have. If you wish to take them from the vault, they may be pulled from the bag, which will enlarge enough to permit exit of such items."

"In other words, I could yank an armoire from the bag if I chose to, assuming it's in the vault?"

"Yes, and you can return items to the vault that way as well. Simply place the mouth of the bag on the item and act as if you are placing it in the bag. The item will appear in your vault."

"Thank you." Harry paused. "Damn. I wanted to pick up some things, such as a tent. Diagon Alley is going to get to a point very soon where people will recognise me, and I just don't know who's in the Order anymore. Dumbledore gets his hands on me and it's right back to the Dursley home."

Hermione scowled. "Is he really that bad, Harry?"

"What grief counselling did I get at the school, Hermione? Sirius died, and as soon as he gets back from the Ministry, he proceeds to tell me what he should have told me five fu ... five years ago! He knew I was angry and hurting, and knowingly sent me back to a home where I'm treated like sh ... like what I spread on the flower beds."

Rackspit spoke up. "Muggle tent or wizard?"

"Well, I wouldn't exactly complain about the extra room in a wizard tent, but Muggle would likely be a better thought." He looked at his wrist as if to check the time. "Damn, a watch too."

"You are in luck," the goblin said. "There is a jeweller's two doors down from Magda's Magical Mobiles. Magda's sell all types of mobile items - carts, conveyances, and tents of all sorts. You could conceivably buy a tent that would contain space equivalent to Hogwarts and all its grounds."

"Bit big for my tastes - I don't exactly need a Quidditch pitch in my tent. Just enough for two people to sleep comfortably in." He squinted his eyes, defocusing as if reading the fine print of a document that only he could see. "Make that three or four, if it's anything like Muggle two person tents."

Hermione's eyes sparkled. "I think I'd prefer small enough for two," she said, taking his hand gently.

Harry looked gobsmacked. "Um, Hermione, you know that ... uh ..."

"That we'll end up so close together in a two person tent that we might as well share a sleeping bag? Of course I do, Harry. I told you this morning, and I mean it. I want to be with you for as long as you'll have me."

Several somewhat rude and highly suggestive comments went through his mind, but never reached his mouth. Hermione simply chuckled and said, "Thank you, Harry. Your face changed to a smirk, so I knew you were thinking something - maybe something you'd like me to do?"

He turned red and looked at Rackspit. "Yes, well - I think we've taken up enough of Mr. Rackspit's time with our flirting. I think we need to be on the road."

"Very well," said the amused goblin. He gave them directions to Magda's, and they headed down the street, finding the place quite easily. Hermione immediately took control.

"We'll be camping, walking amongst the Muggles, so we need something that looks like a Muggle tent, but we need to know what we can get inside one of them."

"Any number of things," the sales lady replied. "Our most common model involves a small kitchen dining room combination, a small family room

area, and up to three bedroom."

"That sounds good. One bedroom, though. We won't need more than one. Where can we go to furnish it, though?"

Magda grinned and pulled out a catalogue. In short order, Hermione (with Harry's shell-shocked help) had chosen the entirety of the furnishings for the tent. "This will be ready for you in about thirty minutes," Magda said after Hermione had paid for the tent.

"Good. Gives us time to get you a new watch, Harry." She dragged him from the shop and pulled him into the jewelry store.

"Tell you what, Hermione - I trust you on what I might need from a watch. You find it and I'll buy it." As she looked at the watches, he looked at rings and such, including a display of wristbands. He was drawn to what seemed to be matching sets for men and women, with intricate Celtic crosses on them.

"You have an excellent eye, sir," said the man behind the counter. "These are both attractive and functional. They emit a low level shield at all times - a very minor drain from your own magic. It won't stop a medium power *Stupefy*, but it will lessen it to a point where you would be merely slowed rather than stunned. Muggles will not notice it, if you have reason to be in Muggle territory - all they will see is the beautiful knot-work. They also have the standard effects that such runic devices would - in this specific case, long life, love and virility." Harry blushed slightly at that, and Hermione spoke up just loud enough to be heard.

"If that's too effective on that last one, I might not survive." The grin in her voice was evident, and the almost silent giggle proved that she was trying to gently embarrass him.

She was quite effective, because Harry got even redder than before, and began to resemble a fish with the way his mouth repeatedly opened and closed. He finally whispered to himself, or so he thought, "Would that I *had* been that lucky."

He felt her arms come around him and she kissed his ear gently. "You will be someday," she whispered gently in his ear. She finally looked into the case. "Oh my, those *are* exquisite! Are those real sapphires?"

"Perfect sapphires," the shopkeeper said proudly. "None finer anywhere that I know of."

"We'll take them," Harry said. "A matching set as a gift for the beautiful lady." He looked at her, hopeful that his words hadn't gone too far, and was rewarded with a rather sound kiss of thanks that left him reeling.

When he had recovered, the proprietor said, "Would you like the matching rings that go with these? No added ... ahem ... 'power' other than improving the shielding slightly." Before Hermione could say anything, Harry nodded, and they were soon the owners of matching wristbands and rings.

"Now, about that watch, Hermione," Harry said. She led him over to the case and pointed out the ones she was contemplating for him. They finally settled on a fairly solid timepiece that automatically set itself for the time zone the wearer was in and that was visible at all times to the wearer, even in darkest night. Hermione marvelled that it could be seen only by the wearer unless he specifically keyed another person into it. She paid for it before he could, and he immediately had her keyed into the watch as a valid user. They then headed back to Magda's and picked up their tent.

Once they had picked up the tent, they were quick to exit the Alley and enter London. Hermione immediately flagged down a taxi and got them to the nearest train station, where she proceeded to tell him what she was planning. "Will you trust me as to destinations, Harry? I was thinking of getting us to France fairly quickly. We can be there before the day is out, and that will make it that much harder for the Order to locate us easily." She grinned. "Besides, French laws on when you can do magic are different. We won't set off the English sensors, being on foreign soil, and the French allow for people sixteen and older to do magic. Since I'm sixteen, and you will be soon -" she said, smiling widely as he obviously grasped the implications.

"You're thinking of using the Channel Tunnel, right?" he asked her. "Well, everyone in the Order will be expecting us to go to France, likely to look up someone like the Delacours or something. I know that we can get a ticket to Brussels. Let's head to Belgium instead. Make sense?" He posed and said in a deeper voice, intentionally trying to make fun of Lockheart, "Besides, it gives me more time to be alone with you."

"You're right, on all counts," she replied after a minute or two of thought. "The Tunnel ends in France, but it's not likely that they'll notice you gone until we've made it all the way into Brussels. Actually, they're very likely not to have noticed you gone until after your next letter is supposed to have reached them, and since Dumbledore sent you his letter yesterday, we're likely to have about twenty-four to forty-eight hours to get away."

In short order, they were on their way to the Waterloo station and exit from English soil. Once on the Eurostar train taking them to Brussels, she cuddled up against Harry in the compartment. "Harry?" she asked softly, once they were moving. "Am I pretty?"

He looked at her for a long moment. Blushing, he replied, "Do you remember my reaction last night, when I was in the bath tub?"

"That doesn't mean that you think I'm pretty," she answered him.

"It doesn't?" he asked, perplexed. "But I thought that ... " He blushed furiously. "Wanting to see you naked, and having ... having *those* kinds of dreams about you ... doesn't that mean that I think you're pretty? How can someone have that reaction to someone that they don't find attractive?"

"Others can," she said with a smile, "but apparently you're wired differently, thank you very much." She looked up at him with an odd look on her face, and Harry suddenly understood something he had read before - you *can* tell when a woman wants to be kissed. He leaned down gently and met her lips with his own.

He wasn't sure how it happened, but a few minutes later found them stretched out on the seats, him atop her, and she was breathing fairly heavily.

"Wow!" she panted. "I need to thank Cho the next time I see her."

"Why?" asked Harry curiously.

"If it wasn't her, then who taught you to kiss like that?"

He looked at her as seriously as he could and said, "A very sweet and beautiful woman named Hermione Granger. You're the first girl I've ever kissed on my own. The kiss with Cho was ... well, I think I described it as 'wet'."

She blushed beneath him. "After a kiss like that, I'm pretty wet too, but not the way that Cho was." She pressed upwards against him to make sure he understood.

His eyes went wide, and he froze, not sure what to do next. He carefully rolled off her, falling to the floor of the compartment to sound of her giggles. He jumped to his feet and sat across the way from her, pinching himself hard enough that he actually caused a small bruise. "Who are you? Hermione would never act this way!"

She looked at him sadly. "Do you not ... do you think I'm cheap and tawdry if I act this way? I want to change the way that you look at me, but ... I don't ... I don't know how to act to make you see me as a girl, rather than one of the guys."

"Trust me, after last night, I will never think of you as one of the guys ever again, Hermione," he strangled out. He developed a pained look on his face. "I don't know what to tell you. I think you need to act differently to get my attention, but ... at what point are you being 'cheap and tawdry', as you said, and what point is simply you acting differently to make me remember just how attractive and ... and sexy you are?" He blushed at the last comment. "Merlin knows I want ... I've had thoughts of -" He faded out, ashamed to say anything further.

"Images of me under you the way I was before, but without these pesky clothes in the way?" she asked with a smile. He nodded sharply, afraid to look in her eyes. "We'll explore the boundaries together, it seems. If you'd like, we can explore *that* fantasy tonight once we get our camp set up." She climbed off her seat and knelt in front of him. "Or we could explore one of my fantasies while clothed." He looked at her with curiosity, and she blushed. "The Americans did this film called 'Risky Business', and it had this scene of making love on a train. I've wanted to do that ever since. It ranks just below making love in the Hogwarts library."

He couldn't hide the reaction that her admission caused. "Which one? Or both?" He simply nodded jerkily to the last choice. She stood up in front of him, swaying gently with the train. "Then please reach up under my skirt and pull off my knickers, Harry. I want you to have my virginity." She blushed. "And I'd love to be able to tell girls that you fucked me all the way from England to France."

He was sure that his eyes should have fallen out of his head at that comment. "Hermione?"

"Please, Harry?" she asked.

Something in her tone broke his reluctance. It was the sound of long months of unsated desire; of crying herself to sleep because the man she wanted hadn't noticed her; of finding interesting ways to keeping herself from simply stripping naked in the Great Hall to get his attention. He reached over and slid his hands up her legs until he reached the cloth of her knickers, and then gently peeled them down her body, drawing a sigh of desire out of her. His eyes widened again when he realised that she was wearing a thong. "Keep them, Harry, as a reminder of our very first time." She quickly undid his trousers, and soon was fulfilling her fantasy.

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As they exited the train in Brussels, she chuckled deep within her throat. "What had you so inspired, Harry? Three times? *Not* that I'm complaining, mind you," she added quickly at the end.

"I was inspired by a beautiful woman who chose to give me the greatest gifts she could - her love, and her body." He pulled her to the side and kissed her deeply.

"'Arry? 'Ermione?" came a familiar female voice from behind them.

Discovery Brussels

Harry and Hermione turned to face two very beautiful ladies, one quite familiar to them and the other less so. Fleur was as beautiful and curvaceous as ever, and her companion appeared to be about to surpass Fleur in beauty. Her figure was something worth writing home about as well, the silken sun dress she wore showing her own curves to great effect. "Fleur!" Harry said with a smile he had to plaster onto his face. "I wouldn't have expected to run into you here."

"I can tell," she replied with a smile. "You are good, but I saw ze look of dismay."

"I'm running from Dumbledore," he said, deciding that the truth was best. "I was ordered by him not to leave my house. At all. For the entire summer. He looked at her. "Please, just let me have one summer to myself, without his interference."

"It does not look as if you 'ave it *all* to yourself," she said with a sly smile. "Nor do you wish it to be zat way."

"Very true," he said with a smile. "I was rather forcefully reminded that what Hermione wants, Hermione gets. Luckily, despite my not thinking I was worthy of her, she decided that she wanted me." He looked at his new girlfriend. "And I have never been happier about it." He kissed her cheek.

"I would imagine ze lovemaking might 'ave somezing to do wiz your mood as well," Fleur answered with a twinkle in her eyes. When both looked at her in shock, she said, "I am Veela. Our abilities are geared toward love and sex. Ze two of you are glowing wiz boz love and satiation."

Hermione blushed as she said in a low voice, "Well, if the conversation ever comes up, I can say that my boyfriend kept me orgasming from England to Belgium without ever telling a lie to anyone."

Fleur's face broke into an open grin. "I shall 'ave to talk to Bill. Zat sounds like fun!"

"It was," Hermione said in a purr that drove the blood in Harry's body southward.

"Changing the subject, he said conversationally," interjected Harry with a laugh, "would you be willing to introduce me to your lovely cousin?"

Both girls were smiling at this point, and he was surprised that Hermione *wasn't* scowling. "'Arry, I'm 'urt zat you do not recognise me," the girl said. "After all, it was your strong arms zat saved me from ze depths of ze 'Ogwarts lake."

His eyes widened to the point where he wondered if they would fall out of his head. He looked her up and down once more, and then closed his eyes with a scowl. "Hermione, feel free to hit me later," he said.

"Harry, are you planning on leaving me for her?" Hermione asked.

He went white and actually staggered a few steps away from Hermione. "Oh my God," he gasped. "I never meant to ... I am so sorry, Hermione!" He gripped his wand in his pocket and said, "I swear by my magic that I will never loo ..."

"Don't you dare finish that!" Hermione hissed, stopping him in shock. Her look softened then. "Your reaction tells me everything that I need to know. If I know you, you were about to swear to never look at another woman in your life, weren't you?" He nodded. "Do you really want to leave the wizarding world that much, Harry? You can't help but look, just like I look at cute guys. I might think that Terry Boot is really attractive, but he's *never* set my hormones boiling the way that you do, Harry. You can look at Gabrielle if you want to."

"Hermione, I was ... she's ten years old," he whispered. "She's ten, and I'm imagining her naked!" He shook his head. "Maybe Vernon is right and I am a freak."

"I 'ave a few zings to say," Gabrielle interrupted, "and zey may 'aver a bearing on your feelings. First, whezzer or not I am ze ten years old zat you zink zat I am or ze sixteen zat I actually am, finding me sexy when I look like zis does not make you a freak. 'Ermione would not love a freak. My second point was already made. I am sixteen. Veela puberty, she is slow. It tends to strike suddenly, and we can literally grow overnight."

"Zis is true, 'Arry. At ze start of June, she still looked much as you saw 'er during ze Tournament. She went to sleep one night in a nightshirt zat fell six inches below 'er ... well, where 'er legs meet, to avoid furzer embarrassment for you. Ze next morning, zat same area was uncovered,, and she was zreatening to tear apart ze shirt in ze chest region."

"Christ, the tit fairy loves her!" Hermione whispered.

"Exactly," Gabrielle said. "I 'ave only recently begun to look like zis."

Hermione scowled, but did not seem angry at either girl. "Lucky bitch," she grumbled.

"I zink 'Arry is pleased wiz our shape," Gabrielle said with a smile. Harry nodded, although a ghost of a smile appeared on his face. "Zere are ozzer zings you need to know, but we should escape zis area and find elsewhere to talk."

"As long as we are staying in Brussels and not contacting anyone from the Order? Sure," Harry said.

"Agreed," Hermione said. "If Dumbledore gets his hands on Harry, he'll lock him up tighter than before."

"Zat is your job," Fleur said with a grin. "I will even give you ze fur-lined 'andcuffs."

Harry thought about that for a moment, and then hid behind Hermione when he felt himself reacting. Her reaction was one of surprise, and apparently happiness, because she pressed back gently against his burgeoning response. "I think I'll take you up on that offer, Fleur," she said a little breathlessly.

They eventually made their way to a café where they took a corner table and carefully cast some privacy charms. "Zere are ozzer zings to tell you before ze summer is out," Fleur said, but ze most important is zat my family wishes to keep Gabrielle secure for ze next two years of 'er schooling. She will be at 'Ogwarts for zose years."

"Things have gotten that dangerous in France?" Hermione asked. A nod was her only answer.

"Ze ozzer ... well, when we are at 'Ogwarts, ze zree of us shall need to talk. I will say no more about it at zis time," Gabrielle said. "It deals wiz Veela. It will not harm you, 'Arry. Nor you, 'Ermione."

"Why not tell us now?" Hermione asked.

"It is not 'armful, but it could affect your relationship if you knew it. It is minor, but could still 'arm your new romance were you to be told it." Gabrielle looked them both in the eyes and said, "I will swear an oath zat zis secret means you no ill will. I will do so at ze cost of my own life."

"No!" Hermione cried out. "If you swear that you mean us no harm, and that it is minor, then I will accept that." Harry simply nodded his agreement, too shocked to even contemplate speaking, and his demeanour screamed that fact to the two Veela.

Gabrielle smiled, and the visit continued with general pleasantries until shortly after noon. "Well, Gabrielle and I should be on our way. We will be at ze Burrow for a time, and I shall be sure to tell zem zat we ran into you in Paris," she said, eyes twinkling. "Dumbledore will certainly try to read me, but we Veela 'ave a natural resistance. He is canny, 'owever, so if we admit 'aving seen you, zen anyzing else we 'ave to say on ze matter will be trusted." She shrugged, and Harry admitted to himself that it was pleasant to watch as she jiggled beneath her blouse. She giggled. "Anozer zing zat we are 'ated for. No Veela ever needs ze torture device known as ze brassiere. We remain naturally firm until ze day we die."

Hermione laughed. "Please take this as the envy that it is, and not as an actual curse." Fleur looked at her with her head cocked in amusement. Hermione simply said with a grin, "Bitch." Fleur's laughter filled the booth with happiness, and several nearby customers looked on with amusement as well, not understanding the laughter's cause.

"I can teach you several charms zat do ze same zing," Fleur said. "You can place zem in a necklace or ring and never need a brassiere again."

"Admit it, Fleur," Harry said with a smile. "You're really trying to kill me. I have a beautiful girlfriend with a body that drives me to distraction now that I'm letting myself notice her, and you're going to teach her how to distract me even more?"

Hermione's face was flickering between surprise at the open flattery and interest at the potential fun she could have. Finally, she settled to a neutral expression and asked, "Harry, would you prefer I not learn this spell?"

He smiled at her. "If I were to be sexist and completely ignore the fact that you are your own person, I'd ask that you never wear clothing again in your lifetime, just so could gaze at your perfect body. So make your own decision on learning the spell."

"Harry, I don't have a perfect body," Hermione said, blushing.

"I think you do," he said softly.

She blinked away tears for a moment before asking him again, "Would you prefer I not learn the spell, Harry?"

"May I be embarrassingly honest?" he asked, his own blush appearing. When she nodded, he said, "Hermione, if I had my way, we'd be finished with classes and Voldemort and all the rest, just so I could keep you naked and learn all the ways there are to pleasure you. I understand that the nipples are rather sensitive." He was blushing so hard at this point that he likely could have lit the booth they were in himself. "I'd like to find out first hand, or mouth, or whatever. But you're the one who has to wear a bra. If yours bother you, then by all means learn a way to do without." He leaned over and kissed her cheek.

Fleur and Hermione disappeared into the ladies room, leaving Harry with a suddenly nervous Gabrielle. "There's no need to be nervous," he said with a smile. "I'm not going to bite you." He thought he heard her murmur, "Pity."

She shook her head and said, "I know zat I shouldn't be nervous, but ... well, you are my 'ero. You risked everyzing to save me, so far as you knew." She chose to join the group that seemed to think that blushing was a form of punctuation. "I will admit zat I entertained a fantasy of you seeing me and deciding zat I simply 'ad to be your girlfriend." She laughed. "Silly, no?"

"Not really. Your reason for being interested in me is certainly better than the one I had for being interested in Cho Chang. I wanted her simply because she was pretty. You at least know me a little." He paused. "To be honest, Gabrielle? If it weren't for Hermione, I might have considered it. You're very pretty, and what little I knew of you back during the Tournament seemed like a very nice person - one worth getting to know better. With

luck, we can at least be friends when we get to Hogwarts."

"I would like zat," she replied. After a pause, she asked, "Do you zink zat 'Ermione would mind if I kissed your cheek, as a zank you?"

"As long as it's just the cheek, I don't think it would cause problems," Harry said with a smile.

Gabrielle stood to walk to Harry's side, but stopped, a shocked look on her face. Before he turned to see what had surprised her, he found himself quite aware that *neither* Veela had chosen to wear a bra. He turned in his seat to look at what had caused such a reaction and was suddenly *very* glad he was sitting down.

Hermione and Fleur were walking toward them, but Harry only had eyes for Hermione. He knew that she had only removed her brassiere, but she was now exuding ... something. His eyes kept slipping to her chest, and he unconsciously licked his lips as he looked at the dark circles evident under the thin blouse. He was somewhat embarrassed by the rather insistent throbbing that had begun in his trousers. When she was close enough he croaked out to her, "Admit it - you're part Veela, aren't you?"

She blinked at him and then blushed. "You're biased Harry," she said with a soft smile. "All I did was take off my brassiere."

He looked around the café and saw a number of men looking appreciatively at her. "Take a look around, Hermione. You must have the prettiest breasts in all of Europe, then."

She looked around and her eyes went wide, and she sat down next to Harry. "Does that spell have any side effects, Fleur?" she asked, biting her lower lip.

"Non. You are simply carrying yourself proudly. You are a beautiful woman and you know it, and are carrying yourself zat way. Men appreciate zat."

"And some women," Gabrielle whispered loudly enough that they all heard it. She looked up in surprise when Hermione put her hand on Gabrielle's arm and said, "Thank you."

"I am so embarrassed," Gabrielle said through a deep reddening of her face. "I did not want you to hear zat."

"We'll talk when we see each other later in the summer, or September first, if it takes that long for us to meet up again," Hermione said with a smile. "I don't hate you, and I'm not disgusted." She leaned over and whispered something in Gabrielle's ear, and Harry was amused to note that guys were apparently not the only ones who liked to sneak peeks down a girl's blouse. He, other the other hand, was enjoying the way that Hermione's skirt smoothed across her shapely rear.

Finally, they all decided to leave the café and part company on the street. "I must be the luckiest man in existence right now," Harry said with a grin. "Three incredibly beautiful, and dare I say sexy women, and I haven't managed to get my face slapped by any of them yet!"

They laughed, and Hermione said, "I figured that I'd try to smother you later on." She punctuated the comment by thrusting her chest forward slightly.

He laughed as he answered with, "We who are about to die - are looking forward to it!"

Fleur and Gabrielle promised to tell Dumbledore only if he asked them, and then say that they had run into him in Paris. "Zat way, if you choose to go to Paris later on, he will likely have pulled his people from ze city by zen." At their slightly confused looks, she explained. "If you are running away, 'Arry, zen you are not likely to return to a city you 'ave already been to, for fear of being caught. I will make sure zat ze Order is told zat, in whatever way I can. Probably zrough Bill."

"Thank you, Fleur. Please ask Bill to give you an extra-special kiss from me," Harry said with a smile.

"Any specific placement on my body?" she asked with an amused smile.

"I leave that to Bill's imagination," he replied. "Depends on how familiar he wants me being with his fiancé." That last was said with an impudent grin.

Fleur's laugh was musical. "You are definitely not a 'leettle boy', 'Arry. I like ze man you have become."

"So do I," Hermione said. "And he's definitely *not* little," she finished with a purr that made Harry's blood threaten another vacation in the south.

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They spent the day walking Brussels, with Harry managing to buy Hermione some Godiva chocolate without her knowledge. They spent time just being together and enjoying their new relationship, and finally found a hotel for the night before heading out for some dinner.

At the restaurant, Harry asked softly, "Were you aware that Gabrielle was enjoying your beautiful breasts as much as I do?"

She blushed. "Yes, I was." She bit her lower lip in worry. "Would it bother you to know that I was aroused by that?"

He smiled and brushed his hand along her cheek, which she leaned her face into slightly. "No, it just shows that you're so sexy that you can even make Veela horny." He paused before finishing with, "If you're sexy enough to affect Veela, then I don't stand a chance. Thank Merlin."

His own face took on a scowl almost immediately thereafter, though. "I'm just angry at myself for thinking what I am."

"If it's what I think ... *hope* it is, we are of the same mind, Harry. But I want the summer for just us. I want you all to myself for just a little while before I

have to share you with Gabrielle."

He snorted. "If anything, it's going to be me who has to share you. She wants you as much as I do." He opened his eyes wide as he realised what he had just said.

Hermione whimpered very quietly at him. "Harry, we need to get back to the hotel, because I really need you to deal with what the image that just came to mind is doing to me."

The check was paid, and the walk back was punctuated with the occasional stop for smouldering kisses. Hermione was so aroused that by the time they had reached their floor at the hotel, only one button, just below her breasts, was holding her thin blouse closed. As soon as the door to their room clicked shut, her blouse was on the floor, and she was practically tearing Harry's trousers off his body. They did not manage to make it to the bed before she had Harry making love to her.

"Good heavens," he breathed at her when he came to his senses again, "what brought that on?"

She looked suddenly worried; almost on the verge of tears. "Was I too slutty?"

"Hell no! I want to have that happen again!" His relationship with Hermione was new enough that the sudden realisation that he had said something that he felt was so crass to her made his face fall. "I'm sorry, Hermione. There I go, treating you like a piece of meat again. Forgive me?"

She smiled up at him and kissed him. "You make me feel sexy. I've never really felt that way before. I've always been this nerdy bookworm that no one will look twice at. And now I've got a boyfriend who looks at me and ... Harry, I'm used to seeing that bulge form in a fellow's trousers when he looks at Cho Chang or Parvati or Lavender. To know that *I'm* the one causing you the blood flow problems? That you'd rather make love to me than to a *Veela*? That's part of the reason we didn't make it to the bed." She blushed. "Sorry about that, by the way."

"You're apologising for mind-blowing sex?" he asked incredulously. "No apologies needed." His expression changed suddenly. "You're up to date on contraception, right?" he asked. "I forget if we talked about that."

"We did forget, but I'm completely up to date on contraception." She bit her lower lip. "I intended to seduce you this summer, if it was at all possible. My helping you escape the Headmaster's attempts to imprison you just allowed me to move up the timetable. Can you forgive me?"

"Hmm, forgive you for letting me know that someone out there refuses to let me get all depressed and pitying myself, and remind me that people love me. Forgive a beautiful, sexy, vivacious and brilliant woman for gifting me something that no mortal man deserves?" He kissed her gently. "No, I won't forgive you for making me feel worthwhile and loved."

He stood and helped her to her feet, and then surprised her by sweeping her off her feet and carrying her to the bed. "I love you, Hermione. I love making love to you, and I just love being around you." He placed her gently on the bed. "Now, you'd said a picture in your head made you act that way. What was it?"

She blushed deeply, and Harry reacted as he watched the blush slide clear to her breasts. "I was imagining you, me and Gabrielle in two different configurations. You were doing the same thing in both of them, but to whom was the question."

"I don't know," he scowled. "Wouldn't that do damage to our relationship, me making love to another woman?"

"If I'm in the room with you, being made love to at the same time? I seriously doubt it," she said. "Wouldn't my making love to Gabrielle harm our relationship?"

"Would it make you happy?" Harry asked simply.

Hermione smirked. "That shoots down your other logic, though. What if I find that I like to watch - that watching my boyfriend make other girls happy sexually arouses me? I've seen a few adult films - my parents have a few, and I don't think that they're aware that I know where they hide them - and I'm their preferred type of audience. I know it's fairly well faked, but watching two people, whether two women or a man and a woman, makes me so aroused that it almost hurts. My breasts get sensitive, especially the nipples, and down between my legs, where you were stretching me so divinely, I'd swear that I can feel my pulse down there at those times. So I honestly believe that I'm going to *need* Gabrielle having sex with me to help me through knowing that you're having sex with her." She paused to breathe. "All I ask is that I be permitted to choose your partners."

He snorted. "Choose them? If it happens at all, it'll be because you told me that you wanted to see me make love to whomever you chose. Of course, that requires that you also ask them in advance. I don't want to find out that you chose, oh, let's say Gabrielle since she's the one we're talking about right now - I don't want Gabrielle to be surprised by the fact that you're staying in the room and participating."

"Agreed," Hermione said. "And I think you'll be amazed at the number of girls who would agree."

"Not really, but how many of them want Harry Potter and not the Boy Who Lived? Lavender would have sex with every Quidditch team in the league if she thought it would let her sleep with the Boy Who Lived."

Hermione was the one to snort this time. "From the sounds I hear from her and Parvati, I think she'd be quite happy with Gwenog Jones. I understand your point, though. Ginny is more in line with who I was thinking. Yes, she once crushed on the Boy Who Lived, but ..." Hermione stopped and bit her lip. "I did something once you may not be happy with. Polyjuice Potion lasts for a *very* long time once brewed - years, in fact. I kept what was left when we made it in Second Year - and Ginny asked me one night if I could make love to her as you. Getting your hair was easy, and it was interesting to discover that she tastes different to your taste buds than to mine. I did *not* penetrate her, but she showed me *why* boys like fellatio so much." She was blushing profusely as she described the situation as clinically as she could, but her face also told Harry that she was terrified that their romance was over before it really started.

"Did we do a good job pleasing her?" he asked with a grin. At Hermione's confused look, he added, "Well, it was you as me, so it was us. Did we make her come a few times?"

Hermione's relief was so great that she actually cried for a few moments, and Harry held her close and patted her back. "Yes, we did," she finally responded. "She begged me to take her virginity, but I insisted that it was your job to do that, and that I'd do what I could to ensure that it would happen." She looked worried. "Did I make her an empty promise?"

"I will admit that it would have been either you or her," he answered her honestly. "I don't count Gabrielle because I don't really know her, although it seems that I'll be learning about her."

"I have the feeling that you'll develop an ... *intimate* knowledge of her," Hermione chuckled.

Harry moved in closer to her and kissed her neck, using his teeth to lightly brush the tender skin, drawing a delighted moan from her. "Right now," he said, "I'd rather get intimate knowledge of *you*," he said before he started trailing kisses down her body.

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It was some time later that a thoroughly sated Hermione nudged Harry and said, "You've an owl tapping at the window, Harry. Hedwig wants to say hello." He looked up and smiled at the snowy white owl looking in at them. He would swear that she looked amused.

"Hello girl," he said fondly, gently ruffling her feathers as she hopped onto his arm. He winced slightly, and smiled when a perch appeared next to him, which she transferred to quickly. "Looks like my girlfriend knew you'd find me. Actually, she likely said that you'd find *us*," he said. "All the females in my life are so beautiful," he said with a smile. "How did I get so lucky as to get them to care about me?"

"By being a wonderful man," Hermione said simply.

"I still wonder how we're going to deal with relationships, though," he said. "I've got you until you come to your senses, Ginny still wants me it seems, and Gabrielle certainly seems to be interested in me, although she was certainly reacting favourably to your bra-less state earlier. To be honest, I want to spend the summer getting to know you as my girlfriend, rather than worrying about whether or not I'm going to scuttle this relationship by shagging another girl."

"And that's why you won't scuttle it," she said. "But you're right. I-" She stopped as Harry staggered away from the bed in an over-the-top manner. "What?"

"I'm right?" he asked with a grin. "I actually said the right thing in a relationship kind of scenario?"

"Prat," she replied with a laugh. Acting equally as comedic as him, she said, "It must be because the girl in question is so terribly important." She lay her hand across her brow in a three-penny opera sort of way.

"Actually, yes," he answered back, no trace of humour in his voice. "I honestly think that I would lay down and die if I lost you from my life. I couldn't ... when you ... at the Ministry ..." His words faded away as the emotion became too much for him. She rose and held him as the emotion tore through him.

"I'm here, and I'm alive, and I love you," she said. "We leave in the morning to walk Europe for a time, and maybe, just maybe, have a summer to ourselves."

Discovery Travels

Harry awoke to the same gentle murmuring he'd heard the night before and smiled. He hugged her softly, and heard her say, "Good morning, Harry. Quite a difference twenty-four hours makes, wouldn't you say?"

"Quite," he replied softly. "Yesterday at this time, I was hopelessly in love with a girl who I knew would never deign to look down from her lofty place in the heavens and notice me. Now I'm waking next to her after having spent a wonderful day with her, and apparently writing dodgy romance novel dialogue in my mind." He smiled and moved slightly, letting his tongue flick across the nearest nipple. The noise she made was somewhere between a gasp and a giggle.

"I like this new Harry," she said a little breathlessly.

"So do I," he said honestly. Taking a deep breath, he said, "As much as the idea of making love to you again is a really good one, if we start, we'll never leave Brussels." He disengaged from her and stood, turning to admire the woman on the bed. "My God, are you beautiful," he breathed.

"You make me believe that it just might be true," she said with a smile. "I'm going in for a shower." When he reacted to that thought, she said, "Might as well join me, or else you'll be thinking about it all day."

They were on the road by ten that morning, magically lightened travelling packs on their shoulders. "Where do we go from here?" Hermione asked. "This is your time away, after all."

"Where would you suggest?" he asked honestly.

"I'd choose somewhere they wouldn't think of. Perhaps Luxembourg? I understand that it's supposed to be pretty around there, and I can't really see anyone from the Order thinking of it." She snorted, but somehow it was rather ladylike all the same. "Half of them probably can't even spell it."

"Now dear, it's not nice to say something like that." He paused and added with a little laugh, "Especially if it's true." He stopped when he realised that he'd walked on ahead of her for a short distance. "What?" he asked turned to face the girl rushing to catch up with him.

Her eyes were suspiciously bright. "It's stupid and girlish, I know, but ... it just hit me when you called me 'dear' without even thinking about it."

"Would you prefer another name?" he asked, worried that he'd possibly offended her.

"Call me dear or honey or any pet name you want, as long as it's not insulting," she answered with a smile.

"Why would I give you an insulting nickname? That's sort of like calling you Hermie or Mione or Herms. You're none of those - you're definitely Hermione. Calling you 'bookworm' or something like that would be like the names that the Dursleys had for me."

She nodded in understanding. "Just don't rush it, Harry. Not every couple has pet names for each other." He nodded, and they began walking, following the roads only slightly.

Albus Dumbledore paced the Great Hall in nervous anticipation of the upcoming meeting of the Order of the Phoenix, although his pacing was the only thing that gave evidence to his state of mind. He had news to impart, and he was not looking forward to Molly Weasley's reaction to it. For that matter, it was quite likely that at least half of the Order would complain about it in terms similar to Molly's. Severus, on the other hand, could be relied upon to make a disparaging comment, and that would set off arguments as well.

I shall have to get Severus under control. I had thought that facing the child whom his actions orphaned might help him to lose his anger and hatred, but it appears to have done precisely the opposite. He will be reigned in.

The first of the members arrived and sat down at the table that he had conjured, and in short order, the group was ready for the meeting to begin. He stopped moving and cleared his throat. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have news that I do not wish to impart, but must nonetheless. I visited Harry Potter's home today, wishing to speak to him after having sent him a letter two days ago. I had expected a response from him, either ranting and railing at me for the conditions that I felt I must lay upon him, or to have him ask me why it must be the way that I stated in my letter." He sighed. "I found the house contained only the Dursleys. Harry has left the Dursley home before it is safe for him to do so."

The reaction was what he expected, with everyone talking at once - Molly yelling "The poor dear! We need to find him!" at the same time that others commented on other things. Severus waited until a lull in the conversation to state, "Typical of the child. Taking us away from important tasks simply to find him and coddle him as he has been all his life." Remus snarled at the Potions Master, who simply replied, "Down boy, or must I retrieve a rolled up newspaper?"

"Enough, Severus," Dumbledore said wearily. "You may have your fun attempting to entice the other Order members to kill you at a later time. We

have *important* things to do here." He nearly smiled at the looks on everyone's faces, especially Severus's. "Now that we have the entertainment portion of the meeting out of the way, let me explain what I do know." He handed out copies of the letters that he had retrieved from Hermione parents. "When I noticed his disappearance, I immediately went to the Granger household, since it would be likely that he would go to her, given her connections to the Muggle world, and his likely desire to not be found for a time. I was immediately given copies of the letters - mine to Harry, Harry's to Miss Granger, and Miss Granger's to her parents. Her parents were less than pleased with me."

"You haven't learned a damn thing, have you Albus?" Remus asked scathingly. "Do you remember how he was reacting after we retrieved him last year, when you attempted the exact same thing? Or are you trying to ensure that he has such rage that he simply blows up the Dark Lord's brain the next time that he attempts a connection?"

"Quiet, werewolf," Snape interjected. "Don't speak of things you know nothing of."

"Severus," Remus began quietly - *too quietly*, Albus thought - "if you don't wish a repeat of what happened in Hogwarts, only without James and Sirius around to prevent it, by all means keep speaking. Otherwise shut up."

"Are you threatening me?" Snape asked, working himself into high dudgeon.

"Proof you were never meant for Ravenclaw," Remus replied. "That much should have been obvious to anyone of *intelligence*. Now shut up and scheme silently while the rest of us do some real work on this."

Severus was now vibrating, and Albus stepped in. "If you do not have anything to contribute to the conversation, Severus, it would be best to remain silent. I think everyone grows tired of your constant baiting of those you dislike."

The silence in the room was palpable. Albus had never given Severus a public reprimand of this type before. "Now, let us continue. He is no longer in any of the places that we would expect him to be, so we shall need to widen the net if we are to locate him and return him to safety."

"Do you have any idea where to begin?" Molly asked, worry evident in her voice.

Fleur cleared her throat, looking abashed. "We, my sister and I, saw 'im in Paris. We zought zat it was known zat 'e was zere, and zat 'e 'ad Order protections. Zat is why I said nozing. I am sorry for zat."

"Perfectly all right, Miss Delacour," Albus said, a bit happier now. "Was Miss Granger with him?"

"I did not see 'er at ze time, but since we met in passing, I can only assume now zat she was nearby. We spoke for only a minute or so. 'E seemed in an 'urry, and now I know why. I 'ad zought zat 'e 'ad a time limit before 'e 'ad to return to 'is relatives."

"Excellent. Would you be willing to lead a team to the spot where you met? Perhaps we can find a trace of him that we can use to find him."

"I will do it," she said sincerely.

"Again, excellent. I will likely have Remus head the team, since, of those who know Harry best, he is best suited to function in the Muggle world. Remus will choose the rest of his team. I believe that is all that we need for the time being, but feel free to remain around and talk amongst yourselves for possible ideas."

He rose to his feet and headed away from the group, knowing that Severus would follow to complain, and he was not proven wrong in his assumption. "Albus, how could you undermine me in such a public manner? I was humiliated in front of them!"

"Much like the way you continually humiliate Harry in front of *his* peers, Severus? There is little to be gained in attempting revenge upon a dead man, which is what you have been doing. Or so it seems to me." He sighed, and the weight of his years visited him once again. "I have seen in his mind the results of your Occlumency training, Severus. Did you truly think it wise to open him so widely to Voldemort? Did Tom tell you of his plans, and you thought it a way to rid yourself of at least one reminder of the humiliations of your student years?" Dumbledore sighed. "You have damaged any possibility for either of us to teach him the discipline. You for obvious reasons, myself because I trusted you to teach him properly, which was apparently a vain hope. If he will have me after the school year begins, I shall take a direct hand in his training, even with such things as Potions. Remember, after all, that I am an Alchemist, while you are 'merely' a Potions Master."

Severus Snape rocked back as if he had been struck a physical blow. "Albus, I -"

"Please do not attempt a lie, Severus. Whoever is hired to pick up the task will be forced to teach Harry that Occlumency is a gentle art, not the brutal rape that you performed upon him. Now please begone and think strongly about which side you are truly on. You are as culpable in Sirius Black's death as Bellatrix is, for Harry would not have gone had you not weakened his shields so much."

Remus watched as Dumbledore gave Snape a tongue-lashing that no one else was supposed to be able to hear, and let his eyebrows rise as the Potions Master walked off in obvious defeat. He then turned to Fleur and raised Silenced the area. "So, Miss Delacour, care to tell me where you really saw Harry?"

"Non," was her simple response. "'E is not ze little boy zat I once called 'im, alzough your 'Eadmaster cannot see zat. I trust zat 'e will be able to care for 'imself." Her eyes sparkled. "And if 'e cannot, I am certain zat 'Ermione will take great pleasure ... taking care of 'im." There was an undercurrent of humour in her words.

"I take it that she has been ... taking care of him already?" he asked with a slight smile.

Oui, and 'e seemed capable of 'andling 'er as well. She seemed to 'ave no complaints."

His own eyes sparkled at the implications. "Well, I suppose that when I find him, I should have The Talk with him, although he seems to have learned where everything goes."

Fleur leaned in closely to Remus and said softly. "She knows ze contraception spells, and I can guarantee zat 'e is aware where everyzing goes - apparently zey made love from England to zair end destination."

His eyes unfocused for a moment and he smiled softly. "So, did you have a specific place in Paris in mind that you wanted us to begin our search?" he finally asked.

"Oui. I shall take you zair when you are ready."

"I think I'll bring the twins along as well. Hang on a moment." A few moments later, the irrepressible redheads were waiting to head to Paris. "Let's head out."

After Fleur gave them the coordinates for the Parisian Apparation point, they all met in the City of Lights. George turned to Remus and said, "So, how long should we stay here to make it look like we think Harry was here?"

Remus laughed immediately. "How did you know?"

"Our incredible intellect ..." George started.

"... not to mention the sheer brilliance in puzzle solving we possess..." Fred added.

"... our good looks even play a part ..."

"... but mostly we pretended not to hear Gabrielle talk to Fleur at one point at the Burrow."

"She will be 'eartbroken if she zinks zat she caused 'Arry trouble."

"Which is why we need to help this little ruse of his," Fred replied.

"If he left those Muggles he's forced to live with, then there's a good reason," George added.

"I'd say that being told that his treatment was to be the same as last year is a good reason." Fred finished.

"And if he's got Hermione with him ..."

"... then he's safer than if he has Dumbledore watching him."

"If only the two ..."

"... would admit how they feel about each other ..."

"... to their faces."

"I zink zat you 'ave no worries, George," Fleur said. "Zey apparently got to know each ozzer quite well on ze trip from London to Brussels." Her eyes sparkled with mirth as she spoke.

"Intimately, you might say?" Fred asked, eyes wide with humour.

"Let me simply say zat I zink zat you 'ad best be careful wiz pranks aimed at zem, because 'Arry will defend 'is 'Ermione, and ze reverse is also true. You might not enjoy 'aving a third arm sprouting from your derriere." After a slight pause, she added, "If you must prank zem, be gentle. Zey are both wounded emotionally."

The twins nodded sagely.

Cornelius Fudge smiled. His idea was wonderful. It would clear up so many problems, help him get that Potter brat under control, and possibly even shut up some of those nagging problems of his in ... other quarters.

"Weasley!" he called, and the tall redhead came into the room, prepared for dictation or whatever else might be needed.

"I am going to enact an Executive Order. We need it to go before the Wizengamot as soon as possible, but I seriously doubt that it will be overturned. Plus, it has the added bonus of showing the public that I am doing something in the war on Lord ... uh, Thingy. You-Know-Who."

"Excellent, sir! What is your plan?" Weasley asked him.

"I am going to see to it that we enact a law that allows the Ministry to claim the monies of all convicted Death Eaters. We'll set up a special fund to place the money into, doling out to deserving parties."

"Perfect, sir!" Percy replied. "Shall I draft a memo to announce this?"

Fudge thought for a moment. "No, I will announce it at a press conference. That should help the Wizengamot in their decision to help me, because if they turn down the law, then *they* look like they're hindering the effort, rather than some of those treasonous comments I've heard on the streets."

"When would you like the conference to be set, sir?"

"I think that noon would be a good time, don't you?" Cornelius Fudge chuckled to himself. "I know the perfect Death Eater to start with, as well."

"Who, sir?"

"Sirius Black. It has the added bonus of no one being alive to contest it."

Severus Snape strode toward the room that Voldemort had taken to using as a throne room of sorts. He entered the room and stood waiting for permission to approach, which was quickly given.

"You have news for me, Severus?" the sibilant voice asked.

"Yes, my lord. It involves the Potter brat. He has apparently grown tired of Dumbledore's machinations and escaped the prison the old man set for him."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Apparently only the mudblood Granger knows, because she is with him. The Veela within the Order states that she saw him in Paris, but that is as far as they spoke to the situation in my hearing."

Voldemort stared at Severus for a very long time, to the point that it began to make Severus quite uncomfortable. "Tell me, Severus. Whose side are you truly on?"

Severus blinked at him, and then answered him the only way that he could. "To be honest, my lord, I am a true Slytherin - not by birthright," he added quickly upon seeing the red eyes narrow at him, "but by attitude. The side I am on is my own. I tell the Order only that which makes them believe that I am on their side, and I tell you enough to not make it obvious that I tell you more than they would like."

"And why do you do this?"

"Because I know that neither side is foolish enough to rely on a single source of information. Any lies that I have told you that came from the Order were believed by me to be correct at the time, and were likely attempts to throw you. I also do not disabuse them of certain assumptions."

"Such as?"

"They are under the impression, I believe, that I do not know where I am at this moment. They believe that you supply Portkeys to bring us to you. I do not, as I say, disabuse them of the notion."

"Why do you not help them to overthrow me?" was the next question, and Severus knew that he lived or died by his answer.

"I would be thrown to the side, or worse, finally tossed into Azkaban for this mark upon my arm. They would far rather have their golden boy to hold up and heap accolades and abuse upon than myself. As for the question I am certain that you are to ask next, I hold no illusions that I would be a casualty of the war were I to help you obviously. While it would not necessarily be you that had me killed, it would happen, likely at the hands of someone in our organisation. Bellatrix has no love for me. Lucius and Rudolphus are, to my chagrin, better duellers than I. Plus there is the entire Order that would take special pleasure in removing me. While I will not *impede* either side, neither will I actively support one side over the other. It is in my best interests to do as I have been doing - being indispensable to the very people who wish me dead."

Voldemort looked at Severus for a long moment before laughing. "Severus, you have impressed me. You are the first in many years to tell me the truth as you see it. I know of your work on both sides, and I will not impede you, nor will I put you in an untenable position at this time."

"But note my words," he said dangerously. "I say 'at this time'. There will come a day when you will be forced to choose sides, because I will not permit a stalemate forever. On that day, you *will* choose."

Severus Snape nodded. "On that day, my lord, I shall."