

Tutoring

by

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Chapter 1

"Well?" Ron said finally, looking up at Harry. "How was it?"

Harry considered for a moment. "Wet," he said truthfully.

"Well, that's good," Hermione said, interrupting. "It's not very pleasant when it's dry. Actually, it can be quite painf-" She stopped speaking, blinking rapidly as Ron doubled over, coughs erupting from his throat in great heaves. "Ron, are you all right?" She dropped to her knees next to him and placed a hand on his back, her eyes filled with concern. After a few seconds, Hermione looked up. "Harry, you should go get someone."

Before Harry could move, Ron waved to his friend. "I'm all right," he said between coughs. He took a few deep breaths before moving to sit back against the front of the chair again. "I couldn't breathe for a second there, but I'm fine now."

"You still need to find out why you began coughing that way," Hermione said. "You don't have any health conditions that we should know about, do you?"

"No, I-" Ron stopped, studying her expression in the firelight. "You have no idea, do you? Listening to what you were saying, I honestly thought you were talking about...sex." The last word came out in such a soft whisper, it sounded like a hiss. "It was my mistake. One that nearly killed me," he said, his gaze going back to Harry.

"Why wouldn't I have been talking about that?" Hermione asked. She settled next to Ron on the floor and pulled her skirt down around her knees. Her expression became thoughtful. "Oh, unless you were talking about something else." She motioned to the newspaper in her other hand. "I admit I wasn't quite paying attention to the whole story."

"I was talking about kissing Cho for the first time," Harry said at the same time Ron started coughing again.

"What-what do you mean, why wouldn't you have been-?" His question was cut off by a continued spate of coughing. This time, Hermione calmly pulled out her wand and conjured a glass. She filled it with water while Ron attempted to calm himself enough to speak. When his breathing was under control, she handed him the glass and held it to his lips until he drank. Ron's light blue eyes were wide on her as he forced the water down. Finally, it was empty. Hermione vanished the glass as quickly as she'd created it and relaxed in front of Ron again, her expression a slight self-satisfied smirk.

"Something to ask me, Ron?"

"I'm not sure I can," he said. "Not without ending up in the Hospital Wing."

"Fine," Hermione responded. "I'll answer the question, without forcing you to ask." She smiled and began to flush a bright red. "I am quite well-versed on that particular subject because I, for lack of a better way to describe it, was educated by someone with the proper experience. And no, I will not provide details," she said as Ron paled and Harry opened his mouth to speak. "Just know that if either of you ever has any questions about something other than homework, I am qualified to answer." She

turned to Harry and her smirk disappeared."As for Cho's kiss being rather wet-"

The rest of what she said was lost on Ron. He merely lay back against the chair, his mind swimming with the possibilities of what Hermione had meant. If he was being honest with himself, he really didn't want to know the details of what she'd been referring to and would probably ask Harry to Oblivate the entire conversation from his mind later. But for now, the only image Ron had in his mind was Hermione Granger explaining-and then demonstrating-why it was better wet.

Chapter 2

"It's huge, he's lucky it didn't cause more damage." Hermione licked her lips and then turned to Ron for confirmation. He was staring in her general direction, but it was clear he wasn't paying her words any attention. Considering that his father had been attacked and was currently in the hospital, that was understandable. Except that it had been /his/idea to be surrounded by his friends. The least he could do was keep up with the conversation.

Hermione waved her hand in front of Ron's eyes and then snapped her fingers, nodding when he blinked and focused on her.

"Yeah?"

"Do you want to talk about something else?" Hermione asked. She crossed her legs and Ron's eyes dropped there before returning to her face. His neck began to flush. "Look, Ron, if you're not up for company..."

"He'll be fine, Hermione." Harry hit their mutual friend in the head with a pillow before shoving the object onto Ron's lap. Ron squeezed the pillow with both hands.

"I'm fine, I'm just tired." Ron frowned. "I'm still surprised at finding out about Neville's parents."

"I know," Hermione said. "I feel so bad for him. I really wish you'd said something, Harry."

"Dumbledore made me promise I wouldn't. I couldn't even tell Neville I knew when Moody-Barty Crouch, Jr.-was demonstrating the Unforgivable Curses in class last year."

"I can't imagine how he felt at the end of the year when that horrifying man was unmasked. I wish I'd thought to ask him. Did either of you?" Hermione looked at Ron and pursed her lips. "Ron's looking a bit lost again. I think we need a lighter subject."

Hermione leaned back on the bed. "I don't want to spoil anything, but I'm kind of rethinking my Christmas gift to you, Ron. I got you and Harry the same thing, but considering that this Christmas is going to be a bit rougher for you than either us expected, I was thinking of changing your gift. Of course, it's too late to shop for something else now, but maybe I can get you something after we go back to school. Or when the shops open after Christmas." She smiled. "Can you think of anything you'd like me to give you?"

Ron clutched the pillow over his lap and jolted forward as if he'd been punched in the gut; his lips pursed into a wide 'O.'

"Are you all right?" Hermione sat up and started to move closer, but Harry waved her away.

"He's fine, he's just...not feeling well. Maybe you'd better go," Harry said.

"Me? What have I done?"

Harry frowned at her hurt expression. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I think it's something only two blokes can

talk about. Please," he added.

"Fine," she said after a moment. "I'll see you later." Hermione stood and walked across the room in a huff, sparing both boys one last glance before leaving and slamming the door behind herself.

"Thank Merlin she's gone!" Ron fell back onto the bed and let his hands relax at his sides.

"Don't tell me it's still there," Harry said. "Really, Ron. Hermione? That's just weird."

"Weird? After she-the way she was looking at me and the things she was saying-"

"She was talking about /a giant snake/," Harry stated. "The one that almost killed your dad. And you were thinking about-"

"It's not my fault!" Ron lifted the pillow on his lap and frowned at the distended front of his trousers. He dropped the pillow back down. "After what she said last week...wet things and all her experience..."

"She never said she was experienced," Harry corrected him. "She said she could answer questions."

"You know Hermione. She'd never say she knows about something unless she'd explored it from every angle." Ron groaned and picked up the pillow to put over his face. He mumbled something unintelligible.

"What?"

Ron lifted the pillow. "I said, I wonder if she's let someone explore her from every angle."

Harry sighed. "I was better off not asking. I know that now." He shook his head. "I don't even want to picture that."

"Me either. But I have. Lately, I've been having dreams about her that would make that foul-mouthed git Seamus blush."

"You're not helping my nightmares."

Ron continued as if Harry hadn't spoken. "And you know what the worst part is?" Ron asked. "She offered to answer questions. Like I would want to know what she's an expert on. Like I need her telling me what to do and how to do it. Like I want to imagine her hands or mouth or-or bare skin..." Ron licked his lips.

"It sounds like you have no problem imagining any of that," Harry said. "You ever thought of just asking?"

"Asking what? I don't want to ask her a question. Really," Ron assured him. "It's bad enough I know she knows stuff."

"I mean, ask for a...demonstration," Harry said slowly. He shrugged. "She did offer to give you something different for Christmas. And I'm quite sure she didn't get us both *that* as her original gift."

"I couldn't ask her to-

"You can. Well, maybe you can't without having a fit. But you should try. Maybe you won't wander in the middle of the night anymore."

"Look, I told you all, that was an accident."

"Right," Harry said. "Neville is still afraid he'll wake up next to you stroking his leg. Or something else. I think it would be best if you got it out of your system before the new term starts. At least we'll all feel better sleeping in the same room with you. Assuming you don't relive the experience in your sleep."

"I suppose you're right," Ron said. "I could just get it out of my system. And then I can go back to acting normal around her."

Hermione smirked and crossed her arms. She glanced at the locked door before raising her wand and performing an Imperturbable Charm on it. "What exactly do you mean, you'd like a /demonstration/of my skills?"

"I just meant, you know, that we could try...bugger." Ron's voice had descended into a whisper as Hermione studied him.

"I'm not quite ready to go that far with you," Hermione said. She laughed softly as Ron coughed.

"That's not what I meant!" Ron raised a sweaty hand to his now flushed face.

"I was kidding, Ron. Relax." She smiled again.

Ron began to notice how tight Hermione's sweater pulled across her breasts when she stood with her arms crossed beneath them. The fabric stretched and relaxed invitingly with each breath she took. Ron shoved his hands into his pockets and shuffled in place, hoping to ease the sudden tightness of his pants.

"You're serious about this, aren't you?"

Not trusting himself to speak, Ron nodded. His mouth went dry when Hermione took a few steps closer, stopping when she was a few inches away from him. His eyes shot up from her sweater to her lips, now one bold move away from his.

"What would you like me to do?" she whispered.

Ron put a hand over his mouth and cleared his throat twice. He couldn't choke. Not now. Not when Hermione was looking at him like she'd seriously consider just about anything he'd ask of her without a threat of slapping just for suggesting it.

"We could try something pretty basic. If that goes well, I might consider other things," Hermione said. "For your education, of course."

/This is madness/, Ron thought. "What do you consider basic?" Ron heard the thin voice ask the question as if it were far away. He supposed it was, in a way. This moment seemed like the furthest thing from reality.

One corner of Hermione's mouth pulled up slightly. "I was thinking we could start with a kiss. You seemed awfully interested in Harry's first kiss story and I don't remember ever hearing one from you." Hermione's lips pursed on the last word and Ron had to stop himself from bridging the gap between them. "Unless I missed something."

"I haven't kissed anyone."

"That's too bad, Ron. If you want, we can fix that now." Hermione placed a hand on each of his shoulders and leaned up to balance on her toes. "Would you like that?"

In answer, he bent over and placed his lips over hers. Seconds later, Ron let his hands drop below her waist to cup her butt. As he began squeezing enthusiastically and moving his mouth over her face in wide sweeps, Hermione slapped at his shoulders. Reluctantly, Ron released her. He smiled hopefully.

Hermione returned his grin before reaching for his hands and dislodging them. She took a step back. "While I appreciate your...enthusiasm, and your awfully big hands, I think we should go a bit slower."

"But I thought too slow would be boring."

Hermione laughed softly. "There are benefits to taking your time." She glanced at the bed behind him. "Let me show you."

Twenty minutes later, Hermione came up for air. Ron wasn't sure if he should be grateful or if he shouldn't pull her back towards him. He didn't really have a choice there. She'd already taken several steps away from the bed and was directing cool air towards her face from the end of her wand. He could use a bit of that himself. Ron's entire body felt so hot, he was surprised he hadn't melted through his clothes and the bedcovers beneath him.

He'd had no idea any person could do that with their tongue, much less maneuver their hands in such a complicated fashion at the same time. And then she'd stopped cold, just when it was getting interesting. Right after her own breathing had gone shallow and she'd forgotten to push his hands away again when he grabbed for her. Which was probably why she'd stopped. Trust Hermione to stop things from going further just when she was enjoying herself. Bloody control freak.

"When can we do that again?" Ron asked.

Hermione laughed and put her wand into her pocket. "My agreement was to give you *one* demonstration. I don't think it would be safe to do anything else. Happy Christmas, Ron." With asmirks in his direction, she walked towards the doorway of the bedroom, leaving her frustrated friend nearly shaking on the bed. She opened the door and then stopped, smiling over her shoulder. "By the way, Ron, you really should tell your trousers it's not polite to point." Grinning, she escaped from the room before Ron could make a retort.

Not that he had anything to say. Anything that wasn't wide-eyed begging accompanied by helpless pointing at the front of his trousers. At what she'd done to him. *Get her out of my system?* Ron thought. *I think she just made things ten times worse. And regardless of what she said, she's going to finish what she started.*

Chapter 3

They had been back at school a week and Ron was getting restless. Umbridge was acting like smiling was a crime punishable by a week's detention, Harry was only slightly less moody than usual and Hermione was acting like nothing out of the ordinary had happened between them Christmas Eve. If his dreams of the event weren't so vivid, Ron might have convinced himself he'd imagined it altogether. As it was, he could barely focus on class work with her sitting next to him. Not to mention that the one person who could explain what they'd gone over in class was his biggest distraction.

Unless Hermione changed her mind about putting him out of his misery, the rest of the term was going to spell disaster for his already so-so grades. And then his mother would kill him. It was official- Hermione Granger was going to be the death of him. Indirectly. Ron had suspected as much their first year of school, he had just never considered exactly how that sentiment would manifest itself. As she smiled at Ron and asked if he understood the material she'd gone over a second time, he wondered if it was possible to permanently lose brain function because all of his blood had drained elsewhere.

"You're not getting it, are you?" Hermione sighed and flipped back five pages in the Transfiguration book. "I suppose I can go over it again."

"No." Ron said. "We should get out of here."

"What? Why?"

Harry looked up from his homework and across the table, his expression echoing Hermione's questions.

"I...it's too loud. That's why I can't focus on what you're saying," Ron said.

Hermione glanced around the library. There were groups of students whispering at several tables, but none that carried to where they sat. In truth, the loudest noises were Madam Pince going around shushing students and Ron tapping his fingers along the table top. Overall, it was nothing compared to attempting to study in the common room.

"I don't really think it's that bad," she said, turning back to Ron. "But if you want to try someplace else..."

"Yes," he said. Ron cleared his throat and forcibly lowered his voice. "We-you and I-should definitely find a quiet classroom where you can tell me how all of this works."

"I'm not sure explaining it again is necessarily the answer. I don't really know any other way to say it and you obviously didn't get how I was describing the transformation the first time and-"

"Please, Hermione."

Her eyes widened. Ron knew why. He never said please. Especially to her. But she was making him desperate. His situation grew marginally worse when she pulled her bottom lip between her teeth as she contemplated leaving with him.

"I suppose explaining it one more time couldn't hurt," Hermione said slowly. "We'll go to a classroom with a blackboard." She motioned to her notes. "I copied Professor McGonagall's diagram. Maybe if I redraw it for you, it'll help you understand the concepts."

"Excellent," Ron said. He stood quickly and then wished he hadn't. While Hermione gathered her books, Ron tugged at his trousers beneath his school robes, vainly wishing he'd remembered the spell to make the fabric stretch a bit. If this kept up, he'd have to start wearing looser clothes.

"Aren't you coming with us, Harry?"

Harry looked up at his friends, his gaze going back and forth between a smiling Hermione and Ron who shook his head frantically until Hermione turned to look at him.

"No. I think Ron really needs this time alone with you," he said. "Teach him everything he needs to know in one session, Hermione. I have faith in you." Then Harry smiled. Ron was going to hit him later. Or thank him. Depending on what Hermione did once they were alone.

"All right." She pulled her heavy book bag onto her shoulder. "Ready?"

"I'm ready for anything," Ron said. "Come on, Hermione. Please?"

"I don't believe you!" She picked up her notebook and held it next to her head as if she were considering throwing it at Ron. Sighing, she placed it back onto the desk. "You dragged me out of the library for this? What is wrong with you?"

"I'm sorry," Ron said. Hermione was again surprised by the uncharacteristic statement. "Look, I would be fine if you weren't such a big distraction. Every time I see you now you're all flirty and wearing these little outfits. After the way you left me at Grimmauld Place, I think you're doing it on purpose."

"Ron, please. I'm nice to you because we're friends and my 'little outfits' are my school uniform. Something you've seen me in hundreds of times before."

But in his dreams, the way she'd put the plaid skirt and gold and red tie to use was quickly becoming his favorite fantasy. It hadn't been three days and Ron already knew the image of Hermione wearing only her tie, skirt and knee socks was going to be his favorite image every time he showered. And just before falling asleep. And when he woke up in the morning, wishing his pajamas weren't so restricting.

Hermione crossed her arms. "Stop smiling like that. This isn't funny."

Ron glanced down at the front of his robes. He started to unzip them. "You're right, it's not. It was downright criminal what you did to me the other week."

"It was...it couldn't have been that bad," Hermione said. "I didn't hear you complaining then."

Ron let his school robes fall to the floor and walked forward. "I didn't think you'd leave me like this," he said, motioning to the front of his trousers.

Hermione opened her mouth, but didn't speak. She stared at Ron and closed her mouth. He could practically see her thoughts whirring. She was probably debating which hex to use to get out of the room without being mauled. Though she had to know Ron wouldn't maul her. Not without permission. And she'd given him de facto permission right before she'd left him all hot and bothered Christmas Eve.

"I suppose I could show you something else," Hermione said slowly. "Something a little more satisfying than kissing."

"What's more satisfying than-oh!"

"No, not that," Hermione said. "We're not having sex. Why does your mind always go there?"

He motioned to his trousers again, eyebrows raised.

"Oh. Right. Well, I can't help that." She unfolded her arms and reached for the zipper on her school robes. "Don't you have a way to take care of that?"

"I'd rather have you do it." Now, where had that come from? Ron didn't give himself time to regret the statement as Hermione began blushing. Maybe he was having a stronger affect on her than she was willing to admit. If that was the case, he had to find out how to use it to his advantage. After she took care of him.

"I don't think I'll be doing that today."

"But another time?"

She smiled and her blush deepened. "We'll see, Ronald." Hermione reached up and loosened the knot on her tie. "For now, I want to teach you something else to do with those big hands of yours."

It had taken thirty minutes. Ten of well-detailed instructions, another ten of audible corrections and hand adjustments and ten of well-meaning practice. But, finally, Ron got Hermione to toss her head back and sigh his name, followed by a low moan as she clutched at his hand. He paused in his motions, savoring the sound on her lips.

"What are you-? Don't stop." She slapped at his wrist and jerked her hips on the desk. Her legs clamped together around his arm. "Just arch your fingers a bit and...ah." Hermione let her head fall back again as Ron moved his fingers the way she'd instructed. That answered one of his questions. She was definitely right about 'wet' being a very good thing.

"This is um..." She sighed and the lower half of her body jerked. Hermione moaned again and clutched at Ron's arm. Her nails sank into his skin. But the last thing he wanted to do was complain. As her hips began to buck off the desk and her moans grew louder, Ron moved his fingers faster, deeper. Hermione was whimpering now. She squeezed her eyes shut and began moving her hips in rhythm with his penetrating fingers.

Acting on instinct, Ron moved his lips to hers then dropped them to linger on her neck. He could feel her pulse racing at the base of her throat as his fingers continued the new trick he'd learned. Just as he'd moved up to recapture Hermione's mouth with his, she moaned into his mouth and her body began bucking uncontrollably. Ron held her around the shoulders with his other arm to keep her from sliding off the top of the desk. A couple of minutes later she was panting in his arms and trembling, her short breaths warming his neck as she clung to him.

Ron wiggled his fingers experimentally. Hermione sighed and wriggled on his lap. He braced one hip against the desk and planted one foot firmly on the floor, bracing himself in case she moved again. "What's next?" Ron whispered.

"Next?" Hermione asked. "I don't think I can handle anything else. You mastered that lesson faster than I expected."

Ron laughed softly. He moved his fingers again. "This is far more interesting than learning to turn an owl into a pair of opera glasses."

Suddenly noticing how close they still were, Hermione pushed Ron's hand from between her legs and stood. Her legs wobbled as she attempted to take a few steps. She stumbled back to the desk and clutched at the edge of it as she steadied herself.

"Maybe you should lay down somewhere," Ron said. At her frown, he added, "To rest, I mean. I didn't realize I could have that affect on you."

"Neither did I." Hermione sank into a chair. She looked down at herself, her brow furrowed in confusion. "How did half my shirt buttons get undone?"

"I may have gotten a few of them slipped through while you were distracted." Ron grinned. "It's too bad we didn't keep going. Another five minutes and we'd have gotten to what I wanted to see."

"It's bad enough we went this far," Hermione said. She reached up and buttoned her shirt with shaking fingers. "I really should've stuck with my original offer to just answer your questions."

"You have answered a few of them," Ron said. "You know I learn better with a demonstration."

"Yes, but this is hardly Charms, Ronald." Hermione frowned. "I don't know what's come over me, letting you..." She motioned to her crumpled skirt and gestured half-heartedly to the hand Ron was rubbing on his knee. "I have to admit, I may have gotten in over my head."

"You say that like it's a bad thing." Hermione frowned and Ron smiled. "Look, you don't have to plan every single thing that happens. Unless your plans include more of this," he said. "I want to know what else you're going to teach me."

"Nothing," Hermione stated. "Look, Ron, I'm sorry. This has gone far enough. Really."

"So you're not even going to help me out?" He gestured to his erection, on the verge of growing painful beneath the trousers she'd insisted he keep closed.

"I'm sorry, but-"

"No, that's fine," Ron said. He smiled as an idea occurred to him. She might not be willing to touch him now, but she definitely would the next time they were alone.

"It is?" Her eyes narrowed. "What's the catch?"

"Nothing," Ron responded, smirking. His fingers fell to his belt. "You don't have to do anything. Just watch. I'm going to make sure you know the proper way to do this so you'll be ready next time."

"Ron, there won't be a-" Hermione fell silent as Ron stood, unzipped his trousers and pushed his clothes down to his knees. As she watched him move his hand with the same quick precision he'd used on her, she knew denying she wanted anything else to happen between them was alie. And she chastised herself for getting this sequence of events started.

Chapter 4

"Studying? Again?" Harry glanced back and forth between his two friends, his expression skeptical.

Ron shrugged.

"You know he's been having trouble in Transfiguration, Harry," Hermione said. She glanced at their official textbook and the elementary transformation book she'd found on a back shelf in the library. Frowning, she shoved both books into her bag and looked back at her friend. "His last test scores were a slight improvement, but Ron has along way to go before I can be sure he has it."

"So you're only tutoring him?" Harry asked.

"Of course I'm only tutoring him," Hermione said. "What else would I be doing?" Hermione took a few seconds to congratulate herself on saying that with a straight face. Ron, on the other hand, couldn't be trusted to lie about what they were doing without his ears turning a bright shade of red and a silly grin splitting his face. When he'd approached her just after class, she'd agreed to state the lie for both of them as long as he agreed to actually let her tutor him in their class subject. After all, they'd hardly be able to keep up the lie if his grades didn't improve. And Hermione had a reputation to maintain on both fronts. She couldn't let anyone know just how friendly she and Ron had gotten, or let them think she wasn't a decent tutor.

"Ron, why aren't you saying anything?" Harry asked.

"What is there for him to say?" Hermione asked. She motioned to the book and notes in Ron's hand. "We're going to a classroom to study."

Harry smiled. "Will I be allowed to come with you?"

"Allowed?" Hermione looked at Harry quizzically. "I suppose so, but wouldn't Cho be disappointed you're not meeting her?"

"Oh, that's right. I'm supposed to meet her." Harry frowned. "I just think it's convenient that you're going off together now."

"You think it's convenient that we're studying outside of class while you're running off to meet your girlfriend and the rest of the DA is scattered about the castle?" Hermione asked. "Harry, I think the stress of everything is making you see conspiracies everywhere. The Ministry isn't making us study without you," she whispered.

"That's not what I meant, I-"

"You're going to be late," Hermione said, cutting him off. She grabbed the strap of her book bag and pulled it over her shoulder. "We'll see you in a few hours." Without another word, Hermione turned on one heel and stalked towards the portrait hole. Ron followed closely behind her, struggling to keep the grin from his face.

"I still don't see why I can't explain what we're doing to Harry," Ron said.

"Because Harry pays attention in class," Hermione said. She studied the drawing on the chalkboard again and then glanced back at the book she'd placed on the teacher's desk. "All right, you see the antennae here?" She looked over her shoulder. Ron was slouching in the desk chair; his arms were crossed over his chest and his long legs stretched out in front of him. "Something wrong?"

"I think we've more than covered the class work, Hermione. Can't we get to my learning more fun things now?"

Hermione sighed. "We still haven't gone over removing the antennae and legs."

"If you me want to practice maneuvering legs with my wand, I suggest-"

"Ron!" Hermione placed a hand at her throat. A bright blush colored her face. "I told you, we're not going to have sex."

"Yeah, you've said we're not going to do a few things." In one swift movement, Ron stood and shortened the distance between them. He leaned against the teacher's desk and pulled Hermione between his legs with one hand at her waist. The other went to the back of her head. Her lips parted on a sigh. "I seem to have a way of convincing you to change your mind."

"Not-not about that," she whispered.

Ron nodded and leaned down to capture her lips. It didn't take long before Hermione melted in his arms the same way she had three weeks previous, when his hands had performed a sort of sorcery on her he hadn't known was possible. This time, he didn't even have to get his fingers beneath her knickers to have her wiggling against him in invitation.

"We really shouldn't be doing this," Hermione whispered against his lips. Ron's mouth slipped to her neck and she leaned back to allow him access. "We're not even...a couple or anything. But we're not just friends anymore, either. We're not-we're not really anything definable."

"We're friends," Ron murmured. "With definite benefits." His tongue snaked out to tease the skin at the base of her throat; Hermione clutched at his hair.

"Your tongue," Hermione said. "Yes, that..." She broke off into a low moan. "That is definitely your next lesson."

"What can you teach me to do with my tongue?"

Hermione laughed softly as she pulled away from Ron. "Oh, you have no idea."

Ron had considered a Silencing Charm. Thought about it, then realized he rather liked the way Hermione screamed his name. He could do without her legs locking around his neck every time she cried out, but the sounds she was making as he demonstrated his most recent lesson made even that discomfort worth it. Especially since, not long after she'd started instructing him, Hermione seemed to have lost all physical control. She was reduced to squirming around on the desk, her hair spread out around her, digging into Ron's scalp with her nails while he teased her with his tongue and fingers.

And she thought he wouldn't be able to convince her to have sex. Ron smiled and ran his tongue along the inside of Hermione's thigh. She trembled at the contact. It's not a matter of if we will, but when, he thought. With the way she was carrying on, Ron wouldn't put money on Hermione being able to hold out another week.

With another short jerk of her hips, followed by several more, Hermione cried out again and pulled at Ron's hair, wrenching a few strands loose by the roots. Gradually, she relaxed, letting her legs fall to the side and her hands drift to either side of her hips on the desk. Stumbling backward, Ron rose from his kneeling position and eyed the red-faced girl spread-eagle on the desk. He grinned. The headache and permanent sprain in his neck were totally worth it.

He still had to work on getting her completely out of her clothes. As much as Ron enjoyed the sight of Hermione's wrinkled skirt bunched around her waist and her shirt half-buttoned, he wanted to see all of her. The next time, he wasn't going to give her the opportunity to deny what he could tell she wanted. For now, he would take what he could get.

Hermione sat up from the desk slowly, a lazy smile caressing her lips. "Did I ever tell you, you're probably the most brilliant boy I've ever met?"

Ron grinned and licked his lips. "If the lesson is worth learning, I want to learn how to do it to the best of my ability." He didn't know where this smooth-talking bloke had come from, but he didn't complain as Hermione blushed and scooted to the edge of the desk.

"Ready Hermione?" Ron reached for his belt buckle and began sliding the leather through the large metal hoop above his zipper.

"Ready?" Her eyes drifted to his, slightly out of focus. "For what?"

"To return the favor," Ron stated. He unbuttoned and unzipped his trousers, letting them drop to pool around his legs. Hermione's eyes widened and her lips gaped slightly. "Since we never got around to you helping me out last time, I figured we could speed along the payback and let you try this whole oral thing at the same time."

"What? No!" Hermione pursed her lips and shook her head. "I never agreed to...to..."

"You're seriously not going to...after everything I've done? I never knew you were so selfish." Ron frowned.

"What? I'm not..." Hermione stopped. She had to admit, this entire venture had been a bit one-sided, but she'd thought Ron was enjoying himself. He certainly appeared to be getting something out of their few meetings. Still, she never imagined having to touch, being able to put her mouth on... Okay, she had imagined it, but never thought she'd actually do anything. Theory was so very different from execution.

"I...don't know what to do," Hermione admitted. She poked her bottom lip out in a pout. Reaching a hand out to Ron, she pulled him closer by the bottom of his shirt. Her eyes traveled to the bit of stomach revealed by his shirt, then lower. She licked her lips slowly then looked back up at him. "Will you tell me if I do something wrong?"

Ron nodded. The second she'd pulled him closer, he'd stopped breathing, sure she was just teasing him again. As it was, the warmth of Hermione's breath against his skin was threatening to make him lose control before she'd really gotten started. And he really, really didn't want this to end too soon.

"Remember what you told me," he said, his voice cracking. Ron cleared his throat. "There are benefits to taking your time." He sighed as her soft fingers closed around him. "And using your tongue well."

That night, Hermione lay in her bed trembling. The curtains were pulled tightly closed and every sound muffling charm she could think of was placed around her as her fingers tried desperately to recreate how Ron had made her feel earlier that day. Tried and failed. And, she could swear the taste and warm, solid feel of him was still in her mouth. Against her lips. Still pulsating inside her, throbbing as she explored the texture and weight of him with her tongue.

This madness had to stop. Soon. No, immediately. She couldn't very well spend her days thinking about what they'd done and planning what to do with him next and trying to find a contraceptive charm that wasn't outdated. Especially not that last. They could not have sex. They shouldn't. Their friendship, or whatever they had now, couldn't handle it.

Truth be told, Hermione wasn't sure what their relationship could withstand anymore. Denying themselves had become an impossibility, especially since a mere look was enough to drive both of them to distraction. But would taking the last step be enough to ruin whatever tenuous hold they had on their sanity? Or would not succumbing to what they both wanted drive them both crazy?

She licked her lips and imagined the taste of him again as she took herself over the edge. Knowing what Ron could do to her body and state of mind, Hermione wasn't sure she was brave enough to find out how much further they could go before obsession overtook them both.

Chapter 5

Three weeks. Weeks during which the confrontation between Umbridge and Harry came to a head after his Quibbler interview was published. A time when tension around the castle was at an absolute high as the High Inquisitor did her level best to make everyone miserable. And a time when Ron and Hermione found themselves sneaking out to spend the few moments they could spare losing themselves in one another. It was a dangerous game and Hermione was sure she didn't want to play anymore, however much her body might disagree.

She remembered the exact moment she realized things were going very wrong. They'd been in Defense Against the Dark Arts, of all classes, and Umbridge had just threatened a detention with Filch to the next person who quoted Harry's interview. There were a few murmurs of protest, but as the room fell silent, Ron caught Hermione's eye. They shared a smile and then he whispered something about how wide and sturdy Umbridge's desk looked. After a few seconds of wide-eyed staring, Hermione had had to use her copy of Defensive Magical Theory to hide the warmth spreading over her face.

It wasn't any better in Charms the next day. Every chance he could get, Ron found ways to touch Hermione—playing with her hair, brushing his hand against hers, touching her leg through her robes. When he'd danced fingers across the back of her neck, she'd jumped and had to cover it up by asking Professor Flitwick a question about a charm he'd already discussed. Even Harry had begun giving her strange looks after that.

Now here they were, on Ron's birthday, and all Hermione could think was that she couldn't give him what he wanted, because she wanted it too, possibly more than he did. No, that was wrong. He wanted to have sex. She wanted to make love. Or, the closest equivalent she could have with Ron. Silly, right? She wanted him to do all the things he'd been whispering to her when they'd touched and actually feel something other than lust during and after.

At the heart of it, Hermione wanted Ron to want something she'd conditioned him out of since Christmas Eve. She'd repeatedly encouraged a series of detached physical interactions, never letting him know she could want more. And she hadn't. At first. She'd been content to tease, then enjoy, then forget who she was and all her boundaries when they were together. And who was she? She was, unfortunately, infatuated with Ron Weasley. Again. Again, as if she'd truly forgotten her feelings scarcely a year after she'd decided to ignore Ron and truly focus on Viktor. But that had been right for her then. For both of them. Now? Now she had to stop this whole situation before she made a fool of herself showing her frustration with Ron because he didn't feel the same things she did and she couldn't force him to do it any faster. If he ever would.

All of which created a dilemma. Hermione wanted what she couldn't have, at least not fully. She could imagine Ron's feelings ran deeper and try to use what power she had to tease him into saying he felt something more than friendship. But that would be false, forcing him to say his feelings were deeper in order to get what he wanted. Hermione couldn't live with that. She could let him go the best way magic allowed for her to do so and spare herself the embarrassment of having to break up with her non-boyfriend. But she could not let things continue this way. She would not lose control for him again.

"Hermione, you're not listening to a word I'm saying, are you?"

Hermione's eyes jerked up from the table. She'd been picking at the food on her plate for about twenty

minutes. Looking around, she saw that Ron and Harry hadn't done much better. Harry because he was headed into another Occlumency session with Snape and Ron because the pressure of Quidditch practice was making him anxious. Hermione had smiled when he said their time alone together was the only time he felt relaxed, like himself. It had only been hours later when she realized that was the closest she was going to get to what she wanted from him. She was still trying to make peace with that.

"Sorry," Hermione said. "I'm abit distracted." She cleared her throat and offered Ron a smile. "I thought you looked better at practice today."

"You mean because I didn't get anyone hurt?" Ron asked. "Yeah, that's an improvement. I'm really not looking forward to the next match. The last one was bad enough."

Hermione placed a hand over his on the table. "I'm sure you'll do fine."

"I wish I could give you guys some help," Harry said. "Umbridge actually threatened me if I go to practice. Can she even do that?"

"It's getting to the point where she can do anything she wants," Hermione remarked. "I've lost track of how many stupid rules there are now." Feeling Ron's hand move under hers, Hermione pulled her hand back and placed it in her lap.

"I was just saying that I don't want either of you waiting in the library for me tonight," Harry said. "Umbridge wants to see me after my 'remedial potions' lesson, probably so she can interrogate me. Considering how much Snape enjoys torturing me, I can't imagine being back at a decent hour, certainly not before the library closes."

"So we'll meet you in the common room then?" Hermione asked.

"I'm sure we can find something to do without him," Ron said. He smiled. "You and I can fill a few hours on our own."

Slapping him would be bad, she knew that. But Hermione felt the urge briefly before she glanced at Harry and realized he wasn't paying attention to the exchange. He was staring across the room at Cho.

"I'm sure we'll make do," Hermione said. Harry turned back to them and she smiled. Ron slipped his hand into hers under the table. They would certainly do something tonight, Ron would make sure of that. Hermione just had to figure out how she would live with herself the next day.

"Finally."

Hermione closed the door to the Room of Requirement behind her and turned, bumping into Ron.

"It took you long enough to get here. Where were you?" Ron asked. He placed his hands high against the door, blocking Hermione from moving further into the room. Without waiting for her response, he

dropped his head and captured her lips with his, frowning when she didn't respond. "What's wrong?"

"This has got to be the last time."

Ron smiled. "You've said that before." He bent to kiss her again, this time lingering until she moved to kiss him back. After a few seconds, he let his mouth drop to her neck. His hands traveled to her waist and he began fumbling with the catch on her skirt. "What have I told you? You're wearing too much clothing." Ron grinned as a thought occurred to him. "Unless, you want me to take it off. I'd be happy to help you with that."

"I'm serious this time," Hermione said. She pushed at Ron's shoulder until he leaned back. "We can't keep doing this. It's too distracting. For both of us."

"I like the way you distract me. It's the best part of every week." One hand slid to her neck and he pulled Hermione closer. "Tell me you don't like what we do together."

"You don't want me to lie," she whispered. Hermione sighed when Ron's hands fell to her shirt and he began popping off the buttons. She had to stop herself from jumping as the ping of each bit of plastic hitting the floor was punctuated by a kiss down the column of her throat and her chest. Ron kneeled in front of her and removed what was left of her shirt. He began kissing her stomach.

"I just, I think-"

"You think too much," he said. His tongue dipped into her navel. Hermione pushed away from the door and walked around Ron, just barely escaping his reaching hand.

He smiled. "I don't mind chasing you, if you won't mind what's going to happen when I catch you."

"I won't."

"Really?" He knew she heard the disbelief in his voice, but she didn't turn when he asked the question. Ron couldn't believe that was all it had taken. No begging, no hours of touching her until she was simultaneously begging for him to stop and clutching at him if he tried to move away. Just two small words indicating acceptance. He really had broken down her resistance.

Ron moved to stand behind Hermione and put his arms around her. She leaned her head to the side as he pushed her hair across one shoulder and kissed the side of her neck. His hands came up to sweep over her stomach before landing to cup her breasts.

"There's a catch," she said as Ron began to massage her through the thin lace.

"I know you won't let me put it there," he responded. "I promise I won't even try to surprise you. I value all of my parts."

"Not that. Not just that," Hermione said. "This is really it. I can't do this anymore."

Her knees wobbled when Ron dropped one of his hands and slid it beneath her skirt. He almost wished she'd worn knickers this time. He had gotten used to stealing and keeping them in his trunk.

"You sound like you could do this all night if you want to," Ron said. He dropped his mouth next to her ear. "And the next night. And every night after that."

Hermione moaned and then grabbed Ron's wrist. He thought she was going to push his hand away, but instead she held it. Her hips began moving against his hand, creating a slow, steady rhythm as his fingers flexed.

"See? You like this too much to stop," Ron said. He squeezed her breast and tugged her earlobe into his mouth, suckling until he heard her breath catch. "Tell me you want me."

"I want..." Hermione fell silent. The only sound in the room was her panting as he touched her. "Tell me," he repeated.

"Ron, stop."

He stopped moving his hand and smiled when Hermione continued moving without him. "Is that really what you want?"

"No," she whispered. "But it's what I need."

"No, you need this," he whispered. His hand slid to her waist and he pulled her against him, letting her feel what she did to him every time they were close. Hermione's hand slipped behind her to run along his leg. "You know what I can do to you. Why would you ever want to stop?"

"Because we have to." Hermione pushed away from him then and stumbled back a few steps. As she looked up at him, Ron caught a glimpse of something he couldn't place in her eyes before she looked away briefly. When she looked up again, the unnamed emotion was gone.

"I thought you wanted this," Ron said. "I admit, the teasing was great at first, but at some point you have to make up your mind."

"I have," Hermione said. "It's been fun and-and-"

"Fun? Is that the best word you could come up with?"

Hermione frowned. "You've been fantastic. You know that."

"So why are we stopping?"

"Because, we-the war." She threw her hands up and gestured around her. "Everything that's going on. There are so many horrible things happening around us and Voldemort is going to come after Harry and we have to be ready to help him. I have to...I can't focus on learning defense and deciphering whatever lies the Ministry wants everyone to believe and helping Harry and school and you. It's too much," Hermione finished.

"That's your reason? Harry's your reason?"

"Why do you say it like that?" Hermione asked. "We both knew this was never more than just...an experiment at first. A game."

"This has all been a game for you?" Ron asked quietly.

Hermione nodded. "It's been great, but I just can't have you touching me in class or anywhere else anymore and...it's not going anywhere. After tonight, we'll have gone as far as we can and we'll still be nothing more than friends."

"So, you want to be more than friends?"

Hermione frowned, opened her mouth and didn't speak. Ron held his breath, just knowing this was when she'd finally tell him she wanted more from him than a few hours of mindless pleasure. Not that he minded as much, but he felt there was something she was keeping from him. She might be able to lie to Harry with a straight face, but Hermione had never been able to keep a secret from him.

"No," Hermione said finally. "I think it's best if we remain friends from now on. Only friends."

"And how are we supposed to do that?" He gestured between them at her state of half-dress and his obvious arousal. "I am never going to act like none of this ever happened. I've hardly been able to keep from telling Harry what's going on all this time. I'm surprised he hasn't guessed."

"Harry has too much going on to even think about us, especially like this. And you should never let on," Hermione said. "Besides, I have a solution for that." She paused. "We're going to do just about anything you want tonight. Afterwards, I'm going to erase your memory."

"Of tonight?" Ron asked. He rolled his eyes. "Then I'll just go back to feeling frustrated."

"Of everything we've done together. Starting with that conversation last December." Hermione looked down, avoiding Ron's eyes. "I've been reading about it. I can erase the memories altogether or replace them with something else. And I'll get my property back as well," she said, blushing faintly. "As flattering as all this attention is, and as much as I've enjoyed it, I don't think we'll make it through sixth year without getting expelled if we keep this up. You can barely keep your hands to yourself in class as it is. And, like I said, I have to focus. The best way to do that is to erase your memory so you won't be tempted anymore."

"And you won't?" Ron asked.

"I'm certain I can control myself."

/Yeah, right/, Ron thought. You've been doing a stellar job of that so far. "So, I have until tonight to enjoy our time together and then it's all gone?"

Hermione nodded. "We'll finish the school year like we always have, as friends."

"And you'll be the only one who has memories of any of this. How is that fair to either of us?"

Hermione shrugged. "It's the only thing I'm offering, Ron. Take it or leave it." Before he could say anything, she added, "I'm going to erase your memory tonight, whether we do anything or not."

Ron sighed. He wasn't going to remember touching her or being touched back, the way she sighed his

name or anything remotely good about this entire wretched school year. He wasn't even going to be aware of the best part of his birthday the following morning. Some deal she was offering. As Hermione watched him for an answer, Ron thought of finally getting her to do what he'd been dreaming about for weeks. Never mind that he wouldn't remember anything after. He was going to enjoy every moment before then.

And he would still have his dreams. One day in the future, he might even be able to make them a reality again. As talented a witch as she was, Ron knew Hermione couldn't erase every trace of what they'd meant to each other these past few weeks. If he was being honest with himself, he didn't want her to. But Ron could hardly argue with her logic, especially given that he could see the strain this was putting on her. Better to let everything end on her terms than dissolve into the fighting they'd put behind them months ago. Besides, knowing Hermione as well as he did now, removing the temptation he provided by being the aggressor was the only way she could control herself around him. But it would only be a matter of time before she wanted to be with him again. And he could experience getting to know her this way a second time.

He moved closer to Hermione. She was staring at the floor between them and didn't look up when he stopped before her. Ron glanced past Hermione to the bed the room had materialized for them. His hands moved to her shoulders and he played with one bra strap until it fell to the side revealing a few more inches of skin. He began running his finger from her shoulder down the inside of her arm. "Is this really what you want?" Ron asked.

Hermione looked up, frowning. "Ron, if you don't want me-"
"You know better than that." Ron bent until his mouth was next to her ear. His hands ran along her arms. Her breath caught and she leaned towards him. "You know how I've been dreaming about having you." One hand slipped to the small of her back and up along her spine. "I know you've been thinking about me the same way. I just want to make sure you know what you're doing, ending things this way."

Hermione stood still in Ron's arms for a long moment, breathing heavily as he gently touched her. "I know what I'm giving up."

"Good," he said. "Because I won't after tonight. But I want you to have something to remember in case you change your mind."

"I won't," she whispered. Her words were sure, but her voice was shaking.

"You say that now..." Ron kissed Hermione. She didn't respond at first, letting his lips press against hers as his hand continued to stroke her bare back. Gradually, she relaxed in his embrace and shifted her mouth, welcoming his kiss as his fingers finally managed to undo the clasp of her skirt. Ron unzipped the garment and let it slide to the floor. A few seconds later, he made quick work of her bra, socks and shoes until Hermione was standing before him naked.

"Get on the bed."

Hermione moved backwards at his command, her eyes on Ron as he followed her. She sat and watched in anticipation as he removed his clothes. For the first time he could recall, Ron wanted to take his time. He felt her eyes on him as he pulled his shirt over his head, but resisted the urge to smile. Something about this night felt more serious than the other times they'd come together. Something about the way Hermione was staring at him, one hand on the inside of her thigh as he approached the

bed, made Ron wish suddenly that he could convince her to change her mind. This could be the first night rather than the last. Maybe, just maybe, he could convince her with something other than words.

He kneeled on the bed then moved to lay next to her.

"What are you doing? Why aren't you touching me?"

"Shh." Ron cradled Hermione's face between his hands. "I told you, I want this to be a night you won't want to forget. It's not going to be over that quickly."

"What are you talking about?" Hermione asked. "Just-"

He stopped her words with a kiss. Slowly, Ron kissed Hermione until she relaxed her body against him, until she had parted her legs and reached for his hand to caress her, until she was shaking in her eagerness to have him inside her.

He pulled their mouths apart. "Tell me what you want," Ron whispered. He ran a hand along the outside of her thigh.

"I want you," she breathed. "Now. Please." She moved her hips upward, silently protesting the gentle touch of his hands. Hermione squeezed her thighs together around his arm. Ron removed his hand and she closed her eyes. "Don't do this to me. You can't."

"I can't deny you what you want?" He lay his head next to hers on the pillow. His hand went back to the outside of her leg. "Aren't you doing the same thing?"

"It's not the same and you know it." Hermione pushed at Ron's shoulder and slid away from him on the bed. "Fine, you don't want to do this. I'm not going to force you."

He grabbed her arm before she could get off the bed. "I just want you to be honest about what you want."

Hermione stiffened. She sat for a few seconds before turning back to Ron. "I want you. Tonight. Don't make this any harder than it has to be."

"Fine," Ron said after a moment. "But never say I didn't ask."

Before Hermione could question what he meant, he pulled her towards him. Ron drew her body beneath his in one swift move, taking her mouth with his. It took only seconds for Hermione to relax again, moaning as Ron's lips ran over her neck and collarbone, before dropping to her breasts. Then his hands and mouth began their magic and Hermione lost track of anything but the sensations he was creating in her body. She arched into and beneath his touch, filling the air with soft moans of his name.

Ron captured her wrists in one of his hands and held them over her head on the bed. He experienced one brief moment of hesitation, when he was poised above her on the bed, her eyes locked with his, her lips parted, the back of her foot stroking against his calf. The air was charged between them and they breathed in unison. Ron felt moved to whisper in her ear, demand that this be the first of many nights, but he stopped himself at the last second. She only wanted tonight. She would get her wish.

He lowered his body to hers, whispered her name and, reinforcing his grip on her hands, joined their bodies. It was exquisite, the tight, warm, soft feel of her wrapped around him. Ron couldn't move at first. He stopped breathing as she adjusted her legs to lock behind his back. He whispered her name again and then shook as she wrenched her hands free and ran her nails over his back, begging him to continue in a rough whisper. Then he began to move and she cried out for him, moaning her pleasure until he was lost in the sound of her voice.

The fire had long since died by the time they were able to pull themselves apart. Ron lay staring at the ceiling, wondering when and why things had changed. Why they had to go back to the way they had been. For a few seconds, as she had looked into his eyes, Ron had begun to wonder if maybe...he pushed the thought away and reached for her across the bed.

Hermione was turned away from him, curled around the pillow. Ron slid behind her and placed his arm around her waist.

"Hermione."

"Hmm?"

"You really don't have to do it. I know why you think you do, but-"

"I have to." Hermione turned to face Ron. "It's for the best." He could barely make her out in the dim light, but he could tell from her voice how much she was struggling to hold on to the useless lie.

He moved his hand along her back. "I wish we could stay like this a while longer." Ron smiled as Hermione's hand moved along his stomach, slowly traveling lower. She giggled.

"I love that you're always ready." She moved her hand in slow strokes until he filled the circle of her hand, firm and strong. Ron pulled her over him until her hips rested firmly on top of his. Hermione maneuvered a bit, adjusting to the feel of Ron inside her. She arched her back and squeezed. Ron gasped. Hermione giggled again.

"I don't even care anymore about whoever you were with first," he said. "Whatever he taught you-that is amazing."

Hermione leaned down until her lips were next to Ron's ear and whispered, "I don't think I ever told you my tutor was a'he'."