

# **Absolutely Zero**

by

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## Chapter 1

It was a cool night, snow slushy on the ground. My cloak was wrapped around me, my curly hair swishing in the icy wind that bit through my skin. Ron was beside me, leading me in the direction of the Leaky Cauldron and towards a very attractive young man that I couldn't help keep my eyes off ever since I'd hit puberty. He had midnight black hair and the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen: a bright forest green.

Harry was my friend. Though I wanted more than what we were, I had no intention of telling him my feelings. What if he didn't return them? What if he thought I was ugly? But the one question that was dreadful to keep repeating was what if he just thought of me as a best friend? Or like a sister? Not someone to be intimate with. That would be pure horror.

Ron and I had tried dating, but it didn't work out too well. At twenty-one, he's married to Luna now, and I'm very happy for him. He's my best friend, and I wish him the best. And of course, Ron and I both know why our relationship didn't work out; because he wasn't Harry, and I wasn't Luna . . . God knew I was no where close. So, we split up, much to the surprise of the Boy- Who- Conquered- The- Dark- Lord (I still think the Boy- Who- Lived is a much better title). Harry was very bewildered to why Ron and I called it off.

Let me clear up some stuff that happened just four years ago.

In seventh year, in May, Harry had defeated Voldemort . . . pretty much all by himself. He had Ron and mine's help of course, but . . . it was more like mental help than anything physical.

Dumbledore had taken Harry to Voldemort (much to everyone's surprise) and when the Dark Lord was trying to hide his shock, Harry threw the Unforgivable Curse that took the bastard's life away.

It was ironic that it was quick. Of course, Harry spent three weeks in the infirmary, very ill. I had been there when he had awoken. And the emotion on his face that day made me love him so much more than ever before. He looked so vulnerable and weak, but of course, the hero of the world made it through. Harry recovered fully a week later.

And as the years went on, we stayed together though drifted away somehow. Ron and I split up at the age of eighteen, he went out with Luna and he's been married for almost a full year. While I . . . well, I hadn't taken my eyes off that bespectacled boy once. Ron would tease me about it so much. But I had my comebacks. I had once walked in on Ron and Luna going at it, and I was scarred for life to be truthful, but I had my wonderful ripostes and they made Ron beat red and made Luna give huge dreamy smiles.

At age twenty, I had had my first date after having ended with Ron. To make a long story short, it hadn't worked out. The man I was set-up with by Ginny was such a gentleman . . . but I kept comparing him to Harry.

Harry's eyes are brighter.

Harry's laugh is deeper.

Harry's hands are bigger.

Harry's smile is lovelier.

Everything about that man was so close to Harry, but not close enough, not nearly.

So that's where I am today, still dreaming that my hero would sweep me off my feet and make love to me in the worst of ways.

"Hermione?"

I shook myself and looked up to see Ron smiling at me. "What?"

"You've been standing in front of the bloody door for almost five minutes. What are you thinking about?" He paused and I tried to respond, but he cut me off. "That smile's on your face."

I blushed scarlet. Ron knew the many faces of me, as did Harry of course, but Harry didn't understand that my daydreaming face was of him; either of him holding my hands or him holding my body.

I bit my lip.

Ron grinned wider and said, "I can tell Harry--"

He didn't finish his sentence because I interrupted in a scolding tone. "You will not!"

He chuckled and pulled on my forearm. "No need to get your knickers in a twist. Now, come on, it's freezing."

I sighed as the retort I wanted to say blew away with the wind.

Ron and I entered the Leaky Cauldron and the din of the late night costumers sounded in my ears. We walked to our normal table to find that Harry wasn't there yet. Sitting down, I took a menu from the tiny stack and opened it wide to look at the familiar dishes.

"So," Ron interrupted me. "When *are* you going to tell him?"

I flushed a darker pink and hid behind my menu. Giving a shrug, I responded, "Never?"

Ron shook his head. "That won't do,"

I rolled my eyes and ran a hand through my bushy mane. "Well, what do you propose I do? Jump him?"

Ron grinned. "I'd pay a lot of money to see that,"

"Oh, you," I snapped while shaking my head, though I couldn't help crack a smile.

Ron said. "No, seriously, you can't be a virgin all of your life."

My eyes widened and I hit Ron upside the head with the glossy menu. "Hey! That is not very nice at all, Ron."

Ron shrugged a shoulder animatedly while rubbing his skull. "Come on, Hermione, you and I both know that you want Harry's pecker in you first."

"Oh, honestly," I said with an exasperated sigh, burying back into the menu like it was the most interesting thing. The heat in my cheeks was sure not going to go away that easily tonight.

The door to the Leaky Cauldron opened and a chilly air slipped passed the door, along with bits of snow. I smiled. I loved the snow. It was the best thing in the whole of London. My eyes then landed on Harry, which was without a doubt much more interesting than the snow.

I guess I lied. *Harry* was the best thing in the whole of London.

He walked towards our table and our eyes connected. He gave me a bright smile and I could have sworn my body heated up ten degrees. Ron wiggled his eyebrows when he saw my flushed cheeks.

"Hey, mate," Harry said giving Ron a manly hug that included hard pats on the back. He turned to me and my heart stopped when he leaned in. "Hermione," he whispered against my cheek before kissing it.

As he sat down besides Ron, my heart pitter-pattered back to life. My cheeks were burning. "Harry," I said with a nod, my voice choked.

Ron couldn't help but snigger.

Harry looked at me with concern. "Are you okay Hermione?"

Before I could respond, the red head prat in front of me said, "Oh, she's fine . . . now, anyways."

Good God, I was going to strangle the wanker. I glared daggers his way, my face hidden behind the glossy list of options.

"Sorry I'm late," Harry apologized when we all had ordered our drinks. "I was with Jennifer. She wouldn't let me go."

I felt my heart pang. Harry had a girlfriend of course. Why wouldn't he? My eyes filled with tears and I turned my head down. I could feel Ron's concerned gaze on me.

I sighed in relief when he changed the subject. Maybe I wouldn't strangle the tosser.

"So, how's work?" Ron asked.

Harry sighed. "As good as it gets. Oliver is not letting us off easy." Harry is seeker of Puddlemere United. "Tired as hell everyday after practice,"

Ron smirked. "I told you to go for the Chudley Cannons," Ron worked in the Department of Magical Games and Sports.

Harry sighed. "Shut-up," He then turned his gaze to me, though I made sure to keep my head ducked a bit, pretending I was still looking at the menu though I had decided on my dinner minutes ago. "So, Hermione,"

"Hmm?" I gave a casual glance up before gazing back at the menu.

"How's it in level four?" He asked.

I turned my head up slightly. I worked in the Ministry of Magic, three floors down from Ron in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Hagrid had visited me at least once a month on different occasions each appointment.

"Busy," I replied honestly. "Had a cat with hiccups just yesterday; it kept lighting things on fire. Poor things whiskers were burnt off. It was a seven year old that had gotten into his mothers potion drawer. Mixed up some of them and gave it to the cat to drink." I sighed as Ron and Harry snickered. "Of course, we didn't charge him with anything. When we asked him what he was doing playing with his mothers potions, he said, 'the kitty had no water'."

Ron grinned. "That's rich," He paused. "Must've been a cute kid,"

My gaze softened and I gave Ron a look. "You want one, don't you?"

Ron's ears lit red and his cheeks burned pink. He murmured something and nodded.

"Aw!" I let out immediately and grabbed his hands across the table. "That's so sweet, Ron. Have you told Luna?"

Ron shook his head.

Harry grinned. "Well, the condom's got to break soon, right?"

I shook my head and hit Harry on the shoulder. The contact made a shudder of pleasure run through me. Breathing in and out deeply, I said, "Harry, that's not nice,"

At this, Ron perked. "You should have been here the time she said that to me. Conversation was close to this subject,"

It was obviously time for Ron to get back at me for embarrassing him. I blushed crimson and buried my head in my cupped hands, Ron laughing all the while.

"What were you talking about?" Harry asked, perplexed, though he had a grin on his face.

Good Lord, help me.

I gave Ron a look over my hands but he shrugged.

"Hermione, you have to tell him,"

I started panicking. "Ron, please don't."

"What?" Harry asked anxiously.

"She mmphs omm," When Ron had started to reveal my secret, I put my hands over his mouth. I could tell that he was saying, 'she loves you' but I'm sure by Harry's confused look, he didn't understand.

I hit Ron angrily on the head, and took my hands away from his mouth before he could attempt to lick my palms.

We were interrupted by the inn keeper taking our orders.

"Try that again, Ronald Weasley, and I'll have my foot shoved so far up your arse . . ." I threatened when Tom left.

He grinned cheekily, rubbing his head. "Fine, fine, but if you don't tell him soon, I'm going to,"

"You wouldn't dare." I seethed.

Ron kept his saucy smile. "I'm giving you until . . . oh, say, Friday to tell him, or I'm going to write your secret in the sky."

My eyes widened. Friday was tomorrow.

"It's about me, isn't it?" Harry said.

I bit my lip and said, "No," quickly.

Ron rolled his eyes. "This one can't lie for shit,"

I kicked him under the table. "Ron, please,"

"A game of footsie, eh?" Ron teased.

I groaned just as our waiter came to us. When he dropped off our meals, Ron started up again.

"So, Hermione, found yourself a lucky one?" Ron asked through a mouthful of mashed potatoes.

I glared at him. "Not really," I took a bite of my steak and kidney pie.

Harry joined in then after taking a sip of his butterbeer. "Have you dated since Ron and you called it off?"

Harry knew Ron and I were comfortable about our break-up. Besides, it was years ago.

"I've dated," I assured him quietly.

"Do you want to settle down?" Harry asked after swallowing some of his baked chicken.

I sighed. "Of course I do, Harry, I just . . . haven't found the right guy."

"Yes you have," Ron interrupted with a happy sing-song voice.

"Shut-up," I hissed.

Harry grinned oddly. "Who's this character you've got your eye on?" Harry turned to Ron. "Have you met him before?"

Ron nodded vigorously. "Known him since I started Hogwarts,"

"Really?" Harry asked. His green eyes landed on me. "Tell me, Hermione,"

I shook my head. "No, no,"

After a few minutes of silent eating, Ron nearly done with his enormous plate of food when I was only half through my tiny one, Harry turned back to Ron.

"Have *I* met him before?"

Ron grinned stupidly. I wanted to slap that cheeky smile off of his face. I'm sure Luna wouldn't mind.

"Oh, you could say that,"

Harry narrowed his eyes at Ron and then turned them back to me. "I thought we were best friends."

"We *are*," I said in exasperation.

"Then why won't you bloody tell me?" Harry asked, irritated.

I finally shouted, "Because it's you!"

All of our eyes popped open. I covered my mouth. What the hell possessed me and told me to say *that*?

My breathing was rapid. I stood up, my chair scrapping back and banging onto the floor. I left my purse and my cloak and made a mad dash towards the door. I reached it and the cool air greeted me when I yanked open the door. I shivered and started dashing down the street.

Maybe the air was a little *too* cold.

I felt my face freeze up as my tears turned icy. The wind whipped at my hair and I got a mouth full of it. Spluttering and trembling like mad, I felt a warm hand jerk me back after a few minutes of running.

I let out a strangled cry.

"Hermione, stop, it's Ron, love. It's Ron," Ron's freckled face came into my blurred vision.

I let out a sob and buried into his chest, my bare arms popping out with little goose pimples at the frosty air.

"He didn't even follow me!" I cried into Ron as he pulled his cloak off, tying it around me. Ron's arms then wound around me and pulled me up, his arms under my knees and around my middle.

I cried harder when Ron didn't respond. Harry didn't even follow me! He doesn't care . . . .

"He doesn't care . . ." I whispered my thoughts.

I didn't know where Ron was taking me. I was murmuring incoherently. I thought he was taking me back to my flat . . . or his. But he had made a different turn.

We arrived at a completely different apartment complex which was way closer to the Leaky Cauldron, and when I looked up at the towering building, I could have sworn that I had seen it before, but my mind was numb. I couldn't think . . . could barely breathe. My body was shuddering so hard with the bitter wind. I pressed my head into Ron's warm chest. He pulled me closer as if to protect me, brotherly love flowing through him for my well being.

I muttered again. "He didn't follow me. He hates me."

"Shh," he cooed softly, walking into the complex. He walked down a familiar aisle and opened a door

with a detailed looking key. "He followed love, he followed."

I didn't understand Ron. Harry didn't follow me. He wouldn't. He hates me. He has a girlfriend. He loves me as a friend. *He, he, he!* My mind scolded. *Harry this and Harry that! He hates you and your bushy hair, you silly girl! He hates everything about you! You're a fool!*

I cried so hard I felt as though my head was going to burst and my eyes would spurt blood next. I felt Ron lay me down on Harry's sofa--

*Harry?! My mind cried.*

My breath caught and I choked on air.

I felt four hands then, taking me out of my snow soaked clothes. There was a warm fire crackling in Harry's flat, but my mind only processed the fact that his hands were *touching* me! His hands were touching me and I didn't want them to . . . but then again . . . .

"No, please," I whimpered. "No, don't touch me,"

Their hands immediately stopped. I knew they were trying to get me warm, but I couldn't stand Harry's hands on me. I couldn't. So warm and inviting yet on me for a totally different reason. I wanted him to caress me, not take pity on my freezing body.

"Hermione," Ron whispered. "We need to get you out of those clothes."

I cried. I sobbed; a right blubbering fool. "Don't touch me. Please, not Harry,"

I felt Harry's body move away. He didn't say anything. He wouldn't. I suspected he was too embarrassed or angry to even make a coherent sentence.

"Harry, get her some of your jumpers, and a pair of elastic shorts or something,"

I heard Harry step away and felt Ron's hands at my jeans. "I won't look, okay Hermione?"

I nodded and felt Ron's cloak cover the front of my body. I was still shivering like crazy even though I was getting out of my soaked clothing.

Ron had been untangling my boots from my jeans when Harry came back in. I wasn't crying . . . well, not hard anyways, and I kept my eyes closed. I didn't want to see the look on Harry's face.

I felt Ron slide a pair of shorts on me, and then, careful not to show my upper body, thrust a warm jumper over my head, he saying, "Yank your arms through,"

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I watched her cry. That's all I could do. But I wanted to do so much more: to help her, to cradle her in my arms.

Whenever she had blurted the words out at the Leaky Cauldron, my heart hammered against my ribcage and my body froze. After she had run, Ron followed . . . but I still hadn't gotten over my shock. I had paid our things, knowing Ron had taken my keys, and grabbed Hermione's purse and cloak . . . and then I ran.

I ran towards my flat and saw Ron just as he opened the door and set her inside. It hurt so much to see her cry over me. She didn't know I loved her back. She didn't know that I wanted to kiss her and shag her senseless every time I saw her.

Ron and I had started taking off her clothes, but she didn't want me to touch her, so I was sent out of the room in search of clothes as Ron instructed. I grabbed her one of my boxers and two large sweaters. I remembered then that she always loved feeling my sweaters.

When I had entered the room, Hermione was undressed though hidden under Ron's cloak. As Ron dressed her, she kept to her crying and I went to my kitchen to set a pot of tea on the stove. I couldn't stand her weeping over me.

Ron came in moments later with a sigh. "She's in a right state,"

I didn't respond, though I nodded my head towards the cabinets full of teacups. Ron took this as a hint and grabbed three.

"Do you think . . . I mean," Ron heaved another sigh and leaned against the counter after placing the mugs on the small four chaired table. "I know you like her Harry, but why the bloody *hell* didn't you *say* anything?"

"And what was I supposed to say? She just . . . caught me off guard. I thought she was falling for Dean or Seamus or Neville or something."

Ron groaned. "I gave you so many fucking hints; I dunno how you didn't figure it out."

"Because I'm daft! How should I have known Hermione was falling for me?"

"She's not falling, mate. She's already hit bottom, and hard. She has been in love with you since we were bloody *dating*."

I rolled my eyes and took the tea kettle off of the stove when it started to whistle.

"Stop trying to make me feel better; it's not working."

"Honestly," Ron said after smacking me over the head with a mitten, "she loves you. Since forever. I swear it."

I sighed as I filled the teacups to the top. "You're lying,"

"And how would you know?"

"Because she wouldn't wait for me for . . . how many years?"

"More than five years,"

"Exactly," I said. I pulled out a jar of sugar and a squeeze bear of honey. "She wouldn't wait for me for more than five years. That's ridiculous." I finished.

As I added a squirt of honey to each mug of tea, Ron said, "Well, what are you going to do, because Harry, just to shine the light, to make you bloody understand, she's out there, crying her damn eyes out because of your reaction. I mean, you could have said something-

"Ron, I was in fucking shock!" I yelled. "I love her, damn it-"

Ron grabbed my collar and pronounced every word as its own sentence. "Then. Do. Something. About. It."

I let out a slew of cuss words and asked as Ron let go of me, "Well, what do you propose I do? Jump her?"

For some reason, my best mate's angry façade faded and he smiled. "Hermione said that,"

"What do you mean?" I asked curiously as I turned and added two spoonfuls of sugar to each cup.

As I mixed in the sweet ingredients, Ron answered, "I told her to tell you how she felt, and she said, 'Well, what do you propose I do? Jump him?'" Ron mimicked Hermione's tone of voice and I smiled.

"Really?"

Ron nodded then heaved a sigh. "Seriously, what are you going to do?"

I bit my lip. "Talk to her?"

Ron nodded again. "That'd be good,"

He grabbed a mug of tea and walked towards the door, opening it and jerking his head. "Take her the tea and talk to her. I'll be in the kitchen,"

I took the two warm mugs and with a tiny groan, walked out into my living room, Ron hitting my arse with his foot, making me almost spill the tea. I slowly moved towards Hermione's whimpering body, her face towards the backrest of the couch.

After I set the mugs on the coffee table, I took her trembling form into my arms.

She gripped at my arms and said, "Don't take pity on me,"

"Hermione-" I started only to be shushed by her fingers to my lips.

"Don't speak," she whispered.

Before I could take in what was happening, Hermione was placing kisses along my jaw.

"Hermione-" I tried to say again, only to be silenced by a kiss.

It was more wonderful than I thought it would ever be. I had to be dreaming. *Hermione. Hermione Granger* was *kissing* me. And good lord did she taste heavenly. Like fresh strawberries. I felt like I'd come home. Like I was flying. My body was tingling and my blood was rushing through my veins and into my head. I felt like I was going to explode from the emotions squeezing my heart.

We both moaned as our tongues slid together, warm and caressing, soft but firm.

She and I broke apart when a cough was heard from the kitchen doorway.

"I'll be leaving now," Ron said with a grin.

He walked towards the door, grabbing his cloak and leaving me speechless. "I- what- wait- I- uh- hold on- it- err," I mumbled incoherently, still dazed from Hermione's kiss.

Ron smiled a mile wide and winked. "Have fun you two," And he left.

I turned back to Hermione, tears still stained on her beautiful, flushed cheeks.

"Hermione, I-"

"Shh," she murmured. "Make love to me, Harry,"

I gaped at Hermione as she started taking off the jumper of mine she wore. "What- I- Hermione, we need to talk."

She shook her bushy head of hair, wiping at the tears that fell from her eyes impatiently. "No talking," she said.

Her hands went around my neck and I felt her breasts press into my firm chest. My eyes darkened with love and desire for the woman sitting wantonly in my arms, and before I knew it, we were kissing again, hard and urgent this time.

"Hermione," I said when we pulled apart, her small hands working on the buttons of my shirt.

"Hermione, what are we doing?"

"Please," she whispered, kissing my completely exposed chest, making my skin burn at her soft hot kisses. "Don't speak, Harry. Make love to me."

I sat there, staring down at her. My eyes took in her glowing skin, her chocolate colored eyes, her lightly freckle-dusted flushed cheeks, and her rosy colored mouth, swollen from my kisses.

I took in a deep breath as her hands reached around herself to rid herself of her bra. She paused a moment, blushing fiercely, before slipping the loose straps off of her shoulder.

I gazed at the lovely mounds before cupping her face, kissing her lightly, feeling her bare breasts squash against my naked chest.

I muffled a moan into her mouth as a certain area down south stirred. She must have felt my hardness against her belly because she reached down tentatively and stroked me over my trousers.

"Hermione-" I tried to stop what was sure to come. "Hermione, we shouldn't be-"

She ignored me and took my hand, trailing it down to her left breast, forcing me to squeeze lightly. And when she threw her head back in pleasure, I almost lost it.

I trailed kisses down her neck, sucking at her pulse point that had quickened. She was breathing hard and whimpering as my hands caressed her bare skin, my thumb and forefinger tweaking and rubbing at her hard nipple.

"Harry," she moaned, backing up slightly. "Bedroom,"

~

Harry gathered me in his arms and lifted me up, still pressing kisses to my face.

I couldn't believe it. I really couldn't. *Harry* was going to make *love* to me. I was scared. I really was. I know Harry has done 'it' before . . . and I haven't. What if I'm not good enough? What if-

*No*, my mind growled. *No more what ifs.*

I decided then, just as Harry placed me upon his bed, that I was going to pretend he loved me. I was going to pretend he was my savior whom had just rescued me from the claws of death. I was going to pretend that the look of lust in his eyes was love, that the sparkle shining in his green orbs was all for me, and not for my body.

My body was practically shaking with fear, though. Even though I was pretending, I couldn't slow the pounding of my heart that was echoing loudly in my ears.

"Hermione," He murmured against my neck.

I couldn't help but let out a giggle as his breath tickled me.

"Shh," I was a bit giddy now. His voice had intoxicated me somehow. "No talking remember?"

"I'll make love to you," He said against my shoulder. I almost moaned in pleasure at the husky sound.

"I'll make love to you, but we're going to talk in the morning,"

"Okay," I said while closing my eyes as they misted. "Just, don't speak,"

*\*Don't speak*

*I know just what you're saying*

*So please stop explaining*

*Don't tell me cause it hurts*

*Don't speak*

*I know what you're thinking*

*I don't need your reasons*

*Don't tell me cause it hurts\**

And so, as Harry removed my clothes and pleased my body with heated strokes, I also decided that I didn't want him to tell me. It would hurt so much. He'd tell me that last night, tonight, was a mistake. I'd die if he told me that.

So, the conclusion was made.

Tonight, when Harry had finished pleasuring him and me, I would leave. I know running is foolish, but I didn't want him to explain why last night, tonight, was just pity . . . because it would hurt.

And I decided that I didn't need his reasons. One night of Harry would be enough for my dreams, for my future that did not hold him in it. That night was enough for a lifetime.

*I love you, I love you, I love you* kept running through my head as he sheathed himself within me, causing a twang of pain as he stretched me.

"I'm sorry," He whispered into my ear, causing my tears to slide down my cheeks when he broke through my innocence.

"It hurts," I muttered, too caught up in the pain to be rational.

"Hermione, I can pull out, just say the word," Harry said in concern.

He made a move to slide out, but I groaned and said, "Don't move, damn it,"

I looked up at him to see an amused expression about his face. But he took me seriously, not moving, waiting for the pain to fade away.

Staring into his eyes, something in them was different. Something in them had darkened yet glowed.

Slowly, I trailed my hands up his arms, resting one on his shoulder while the other buried in his unruly black hair.

He gave a grunt as I pulled him closer, making me cringed as he buried his manhood deeper within me.

"Hermione," he whispered hoarsely. "Hermione, you're killing me,"

"You're killing me too," I said, not able to hold in the humor of the situation.

Harry merely shook his head in laughter and kissed my lips softly.

"You're crazy," He muttered.

I bit my lip. "I know,"

There was silence for a few seconds until I felt Harry's hand travel south.

"Harry," I gasped. "Harry, what are you doing?"

"Touching you," he answered truthfully just as his hand found my center.

I let out a grunt but then the most wonderful sensation took over my pained body.

"Harry!" I cried out as his fingers worked the sensitive body area.

I almost sobbed at the pleasure that flooded through me. Nobody had *ever* touched me there. I felt like my head was going to explode as I kept screaming. *I* hadn't even touched myself down there unless it was to wash. I had been too busy with school work back when my hormones were raging and I'm still too busy at this age with work to answer to my body's pleas.

But now . . .

"Oh, Harry," I shouted, feeling a knot in my stomach try to uncurl and unwind.

Harry slowly started to pump into me, pain and pleasure working my body incisively. I knew that if his finger left my womanhood, I'd probably cry in pain . . . but good lord, he knew what to do . . . and he sure as bloody hell did it well.

Harry was panting, his finger working furiously at my entrance as he kept a steady slow pace.

I quite literally saw stars. Something was starting to erupt in me. Something- I have no bloody clue what- was making my skin light up and burn, was making my eyes darken.

"Harry!" I shouted. "Harry, something's happening!"

I then realized I was sobbing.

Harry groaned and pushed into me a bit faster. "Let it happen, 'Mione,"

My hips started bucking. I didn't mind the pain anymore. It was as if something was *in* me. And it needed to get out.

*It really needs to get out.*

A whine escaped the back of my throat as Harry caressed me with the most passionate kisses and strokes.

*I love you, I love you, I love you.*

His finger keeps to its insistent prodding and the knot inside of me is finally loosening.

Bangs and stars flooded my mind and behind my eyelids and into my ears as I shut my eyes tightly, arched my back and let out the loudest scream I had ever made.

I exploded. The bliss my body was experiencing was like none other it had experienced before. It was too much. It left me dizzy, lightheaded and crazy. And it was all Harry Potter's doing. He had made me feel as if I was riding the world, as if ecstasy had no barriers, no meaning.

My skin was aflame as my body trembled. Harry held my satisfied body and kept to his touching and rubbing, licking at my sensitive skin, nipping at my breasts, sucking on my neck, all doing this while quite literally doing me.

His name kept escaping my lips as he sped his pace even more. I noticed then that it didn't hurt anymore, and for that, I moved my hips with his, making him moan and grunt my name.

My eyes were still closed as I rolled my hips. Again, I felt something coiling inside me.

*Oh no, I thought. Oh, no.*

I didn't know if I could survive another orgasm. I was going to die of pleasure. My first orgasm had just happened seconds ago. I was going to burst if I had a- a- a-

"Ahh!" I shouted.

This one took me more by surprise.

"Harry! HARRY!"

Harry groaned and finally let go as my vaginal muscles clenched him tightly. His warm seed spilled into me and made me cry harder . . . with love, pleasure . . . everything I felt for the man cutting off my air supply.

Wave after wave of ecstasy washed over me as Harry rolled over, pulling me on top of him.

I was limp and sweaty in his arms, but I didn't care. I was too tired to try to move . . . not like I wanted to.

And good lord, doesn't he smell heavenly?

"Mmm," I murmured against his sticky skin.

"This might hurt a bit," Harry warned.

I pulled away to look at his face. What was he going to do to hurt-?

"Oh!" I cried as he slipped out of me.

I bit my lip hard. I felt so empty. And it did hurt. Harry had stretched me out and now my throbbing center had nothing to milk as his and my sex fluids ran down my thighs. I grimaced as I noticed a rivulet of blood also making its way down my thighs.

"Are you okay?" Harry asked me.

I nodded, placing my head on his shoulder.

*I love you, I love you, I love you.*

"I'm fine,"

Harry grinned sleepily. "Don't I know it?"

He shifted so that his head was on a pillow, and then he pulled me to him so that I was curled up in his arms.

It was heavenly; the feeling of love flowing around us, though I was sure that it was just my love for the Boy- Who- Lived. And as tired as I was, I didn't fall asleep. I watched Harry drift into unconsciousness, waited until he started snoring softly, before I kissed his lips delicately, my eyes running tears.

With that done, I crawled out of bed and left the room.

Hurriedly, I tugged on my clothes, my body still radiating heat, my movements clumsy, my body shaking and trembling.

"I love you, Harry," I cried quietly as I tugged his jumpers over my head.

I grabbed my jeans that were warm and toasty by the fire, bottoms still a bit moist from the melted snow. Hastily I tugged them on and looked for parchment, spotting some by the window sill, a quill and ink bottle waiting patiently beside the rough, yellow paper.

*Dear Harry,*

*I can't stand the thought of you not loving me back, for that I am leaving you; don't come after me. I thank you for last night.*

♥Love,

*Hermione*

*P.S. I'm taking your jumpers. I hope you don't mind.*

*X.O.X.O*

I looked at the letter. I wanted to write so much more, but my time was limited and I already was quietly sobbing, trying to hold back all sounds to not wake Harry. I realized, as I placed the tiny note

next to the cold cup of tea, that it was wet with my tears.

I looked around the flat once more, grabbed my cloak and purse before heading to the door, locking it behind me and then crying against it.

## Chapter 2

*\*She'd do anything to sparkle in his eye*

*She would suffer, she would fight, and compromise*

*She's been wishin' on the stars that shine so bright*

*For answers to the questions that will haunt her tonight\**

I sobbed as I ran to the lobby of Harry's apartment. From there, I flooded to my flat, cardboard boxes littered in my living room, waiting to arrive in their new home.

Wiping at the soot in my hair and sticking to my wet face, I hurriedly shrunk everything to doll size and stuffed it into a book bag, all of it fitting perfectly.

You see, that night, *I* had called the dinner meeting, to tell Ron and Harry I would be moving . . . but I didn't get to that. And now, I'm slightly glad. They won't know where I've gotten to. They won't know I'm moving closer to my parents to attend a muggle college.

Quickly, I put the apartment key on the kitchen table and scrawled a rapid note just in case Harry or Ron come looking for me.

I looked around. I had the feeling I was missing something.

A tiny meow came from the doorway to my now *ex*-room, and I looked down to see Cherie, my gray and white striped kitten, her fur fluffy and blue eyes curious.

Sniffing, I said, "I have your stuff, Cherie, just need you and your basket,"

Cherie tilted her tiny head to the side, and I walked to her, picking her up and cradling her in my arms.

Crookshanks, Cherie's father, had died two months ago. I was devastated. Harry and Ron had been there to comfort me, though Ron seemed slightly amused when we had a burial for him; however, he kept his witty thoughts in his messed up mind.

I sighed, thinking about Harry. I choked on a sob and buried my nose in Cherie. She gave a comforting purr in response, and I hurriedly grabbed her basket and placed her softly within it. Cherie curled up and promptly fell asleep.

"Ready to go, love?" I asked my sleeping kitten.

Her ear twitched and I took that as a 'yes'.

I let my thoughts of Harry drift, not wanting to splinch myself, and concentrated hard. With a *crack*, I was gone, and I was never coming back.

I arrived in Sheffield, England, no more than 5 seconds later. Cherie made a hiss, her fur on end as I landed in the tiny wizarding town, North Bruise. Funny little name, that is.

I looked down the blue (yes blue) brick road and stared up at the three apartment complex buildings. The one that I was to stay at was called Jade Rooms, which looked to be the green building in the middle.

Gazing across my new home, I saw that there was a small yet quaint red brick café with clothed tables outside and a purple robe shop connected to it called Glora Garbs. To the right of the picturesque café named Cecelia's was Linus Library; my spirits automatically lifted as I stared at the three story grayish-yellow structure.

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad without my friends. Books always took my mind off of things.

Another tear slipped and I sniffed, deciding to see the tiny street tomorrow morning when it wasn't snowing and the sun was out.

I rushed into the emerald building and as soon as I walked in, I was hit with warmth, a yellow glow in the lobby of the complex. I was home.

The third level was mine. All of it. A whole kitchen, living room, bathroom, guest bedroom and master bedroom and it was all mine. My other apartment didn't have a large kitchen; it was split in half with the living room. Truthfully, it was a last resort and rather . . . awful.

Cherie immediately pounced out of her basket and sniffed around while I dropped my back pack. The woman downstairs said I could paint my flat any color (shock of all shocks) as long as it wasn't permanent.

"What color do you think is good for the living room, Cherie?" I asked my banded kitten. Cherie merely looked up and then jumped on the window sill.

I walked towards the bare window and looked out. The sky was an inky indigo, tiny stars dotted in no particular order in the heavens.

Petting Cherie, I bit my lip. She gave a little purr, and suddenly, the emotions that lingered in my body all poured out. My chest started heaving and sobs racked my body. I hugged my kitten to me and whispered, "I want Harry, Cherie. I *need* him,"

I walked to my bedroom and fell onto the bare mattress. That was the first night I had ever cried myself to sleep.

*\*She must rinse this all away*

*She can't hold him this way*

*She must rinse this all away*

*She can't love him this way\**

-

I awoke around midday, my eyes fluttering open when the sun burned orange and red into the inside of my eyelids. I shut them quickly at the bright light and groaned, turning over in bed. That's when I noticed I was sore from head to toe.

The wheels in my head started turning and winding. Why was I so tired? And then it all hit me like a ton of bricks . . . *Harry*.

Last night rewound in my head.

*Harry. Harry. Harry.*

That's all it consisted of. All of last night. I spent most of it with Harry . . . in his *bed*.

*Oh no, what did I do?*

My eyes flew open when the realization of last night progressed in my head. Why did I leave like that? I was a Gryffindor? Brave, no? What was happening to me? Why did I feel so insecure?

I sat up slowly, Cherie giving a disgruntled meow when my foot kicked into her side ever so softly, rousing her from sleep. Every nerve ending was on fire. It hurt so bad that tears stung my eyes.

*I want my mum*, I thought as I started crying again. As childish as it sounded, I wanted her there more than anything. No, maybe I wanted Harry there more than anything.

Sobbing, I left my bare and unfurnished room and walked to my bag out in the hall that I had left by the door. I needed to change my clothes. I was still in the clothes I had worn last night; it smelled vaguely of Harry's cologne.

~

I sighed as I awoke with a post sex ache in my arms and abdomen. Circe, the things Hermione could do. She was an amazing witch; talented, beautiful, intelligent, wonderful in bed . . . *not in my bed.*

I sat up, my eyes widening. I had reached over the bed for her body, only to come up with empty space. I remembered that I had heard the door open probably a few minutes, maybe hours, before, but I didn't think anything about it. I was too tired.

*She's running.*

I bolted out of bed and tugged on my clothes that were scattered in my room and in the living room. Just as I stepped into my trainers, the back folds under my heels, my eye caught a piece of parchment under the cold tea mugs. I have to admit, that I tugged it so hard, the cup of tea spilled and the mug broke on the coffee table.

My eyes scanned the note, widening with each word, until it registered in my head that Hermione left me.

But she wasn't getting away that easy.

As I ran to the lobby, I thought about why she was leaving. She wrote for me not to come after her. She thought I didn't love her. Was she mental?

I decided, just as I shouted Hermione's address in the green flames, that she was certainly crazy.

I slid out of Hermione's fireplace just as I heard a loud crack. I shouted her name even though I knew it was useless. She was gone. And that's when I noticed it.

She was gone . . . and so were her things.

I ruffled my hair in annoyance, soot collected in it.

I didn't know what to do next. I still had her note in my hand, and then I discovered she'd left another one.

*Please be at the library looking something up on house elves,* I pleaded mentally as I picked up the scrawled letter.

She wasn't at the library, let me tell you.

*I told you not to come after me. I'm safe. I promise. Maybe sometime soon we'll meet again.*

♥Love,

*Hermione*

"Fuck!"

~

"I'm coming damn it!" Ron shouted as he dragged himself from Luna's naked body. Sleep was still quite heavy on Ron when he dressed as quickly as he could.

The intense pounding on the door didn't cease.

"Tell them to go to hell," Luna moaned, burying deeper into her pillow and the covers.

Ron nodded. He was certainly going to do that. He had probably only gotten an hour of sleep due to the fact that Luna wanted quite a long shag.

"Ron, open the damn door!"

"Harry?" Ron asked, now starting to get worried. He ran the rest of the way to the door and threw it open. "What happened? What is it?"

"Hermione-" Harry said breathlessly. "Hermione's gone!"

Ron gave him an incredulous look. "What do you mean 'she's gone'?"

"She ran!" Harry said, pushing past him while thrusting Hermione's notes into Ron's hand. "She's not here, is she?" Harry asked eagerly, running a shaky hand through his hair while looking frantically around.

"Harry," Ron said, placing his hands on his best mate's shoulders. "Harry, you've got to calm down."

"I can't!" Harry said, starting to pace the length of Ron's living room. "She's gone . . . what did I do *wrong*?"

Ron sighed and opened the crumpled papers. He read over them both, Harry mumbling incoherently all the while, and paled. "Where do you think she is?" he asked quietly, trying not to panic. He had to remain sane for his friend.

"I thought she'd be here!" Harry exclaimed. "I was sure of it! She wouldn't leave . . . she just . . . she *can't* be gone."

"Did you try her apartment?" Ron asked quietly.

Harry looked up with his face full of fury. Ron shuffled a bit uncomfortably under his gaze. "Yes, you dolt!"

Ron sighed. "Harry, seriously, calm down,"

While Harry kept pacing, Luna walked out from the hallway with Ron's shirt and a pair of tiny yellow shorts. "Tea?" she said while gazing at Harry worriedly.

Ron nodded. "The special kind, Looney,"

Luna grinned slightly. "Only the best for dear Harry, Ronald, only the best,"

"If you're trying to drug me, I'm not taking it," Harry said while glaring.

Ron laughed and asked sarcastically. "Now why would we do that?"

Luna gave a quite laugh from the kitchen. "So, Harry, care to explain what exactly happened?"

"Yeah, Harry, care to explain?" Harry looked up, hands pulling at his hair.

"She came onto me,"

Ron snorted. "Hermione? She'd never do that," Ron said.

While Ron and Harry quietly argued, Luna's face became its usual placid, her eyes widening when her brain flittered around.

"You love her, don't you?" Luna asked vaguely.

Harry and Ron paused in their conversation to look at Luna.

"Yes," Harry answered at once.

"And she loves you?"

Harry sighed. "I don't know *that*,"

"I do," Luna and Ron both said together.

"She ran because she thought-"

"I wouldn't love her?" Harry guessed wildly. "But, I do! She- she couldn't have run away because of that!"

"That's what she thought, and she didn't run away. If you didn't know, she called you tonight to tell you that she was moving." Luna said distantly while setting three mugs of tea down.

Harry's heart leapt. "Did she tell you where? Why did she move?"

Luna shrugged. "She didn't get that far into detail. She wanted to tell you two first."

At this information, Ron sat down with a plop on the couch, Harry mirroring his actions. "So, you mean to tell us, that she willingly left?"

Luna stirred the steaming tea and discreetly added some Fire Whiskey. "Yes, she willingly left," Luna answered.

As Luna set the mugs on the tray, Ron came in to carry it to the living room for her and she smiled happily at her husband.

"What happened before she left?" Ron asked as he settled into his comfy couch, Luna snuggling up to his side. His eyes followed Harry with concern.

Harry, now pacing again, said, "She practically forced me into it!"

"Forced you into making love?" Luna asked, sipping on the soothing tea after blowing at the steam.

Ron's eyes widened. "You shagged?!" Luna slapped Ron's thigh softly, muttering under her breath while rolling her eyes.

Harry sighed and sat down, burying his head in his hands. "I mean, I wanted to. I mean, I've dreamed-"

"Don't elaborate, please," Ron said.

Harry looked up. "She's lovely Ron, Luna; she's so lovely," He looked on the verge of tears.

"She is lovely, Harry," Luna said in the most comforting voice she could muster.

Ron sighed and took a drink from his tea. "Harry, tell us what happened."

"When you left, Ron," Harry started, "She had told me to make love to her. I mean, I protested, but she's like a drug." As Harry elaborated what happened, Ron and Luna gave him the most reassuring words they could. And when Harry started drinking the cooled tea, he calmed a bit, speaking comprehensibly.

"She was scared," Luna said with poignant, wide blue eyes. "I probably would have run,"

Ron frowned and pulled Luna tighter against him.

"What am I going to do?" Harry muttered, leaning the back of his head against the back of the navy loveseat he was in.

"Tomorrow," Ron said simply. "Or more like today, later on, since it's rather early in the morning," *Bloody 2:30 AM*, "go to the Ministry and ask where Hermione is working now. I mean, Hermione isn't going to sit at home all day . . . wherever this home of hers is."

"Yeah," Harry said, suddenly grinning. "That's it! I'll go to the Ministry later, ask for her address and find her!"

Luna frowned. "I don't think they'll give out information like that, Harry,"

Harry shrugged, quite sure that that wouldn't happen to him. He was Harry Potter, right? He could do anything . . . he could get anything. And right now, he wanted Hermione. He'd certainly get her, and he wasn't going to stop searching if something held him back.

"They will. I mean, I'm Harry Potter!" Harry shouted with glee.

Ron raised an eyebrow and murmured in Luna's ear, "Exactly *how* much whiskey did you put in the tea?"

~

*\*And as she runs away she fears she won't be followed*

*What could be the worse than leaving something behind*

*And as the depth of oceans slowly become shallow*

*It's loneliness she finds . . .*

*If only he was mine\**

I found myself on my parents' doorstep later that day after having unpacked. Dressed in comfortable jeans, a purple (my favorite color) turtleneck, and a leather jacket, I was relaxed . . . on the outside, while the inside of me was jumbled up with mixed emotions: happy to see my parents, distraught to have left Harry, confused on what to do next. I wanted to weep all day; and I really needed something to evanesce the pounding in my head.

The dull throb in my left temple didn't fade, especially when the navy blue door of my parents' home opened. Why, you may ask? Well, my mother let out the loudest squeal I had ever heard in my entire life. I could have sworn it echoed in my head.

I was embraced hard, and the motherly love flowing off of my mum made me start sobbing. All the emotions inside poured out and into her thick red sweater. When she asked me why I was crying, I told her I was just so happy to be home, a far cry from the entire truth. As much as I shared everything with my mum, I wasn't exactly ready to share what I had done last night, especially since my father was behind her, waiting for his hug.

He opened his arms and I leaped. He twirled me around, murmuring sweet things about his "little girl". How much he missed me. How much he loved me. The water works came all over again. If he knew what I had done, he'd be more than disappointed in me.

"Come now, Hermione. We'll get you some tea, hmm?" My mother said when my father put me down.

As I wiped my tears, walking into the kitchen, I nodded. "Tea sounds wonderful, Mum." I added, "Do you have any pain relievers? My head aches and everything hurts."

"What happened?" My mother asked worriedly, looking me over after setting a pot of boiling water on the stove.

"I- I just had some- some Defense lessons at the Ministry, Mum." I lied, not meeting her eyes.

"Did they let you off?" My father asked. "The Ministry, I mean."

I nodded and put my head on his shoulder. "Of course they did, Daddy. I quit. They can't stop me from quitting."

My father chuckled and, despite all my pain, it made me smile. "I know that, sweetheart, but did they give you any hassle?"

My smile widened into a grin. "No, Daddy, there is no one for you to beat up. No hassle at all." I was sure he'd probably want to beat up Harry if I had told him that his "little girl" was hurting because of that bespectacled man.

My mum placed a yellow, blue spotted mug in front of me. "How did Harry and Ron take the news, sweetheart?"

I hadn't been drinking from my cup, but I managed to choke on air. "What?" I asked while coughing.

As my father patted my back, my mother again asked, more thoroughly, "Harry and Ron, dear? How did they take the news of you moving?"

"I- I didn't tell them," This surprised both my mother and father, for their eyebrows rose high. "I couldn't,"

*Literally*, I thought.

"But," Mum started again. "Didn't you call a meeting with them?"

"Yes," I said. "But, things came up, you know? Work and all," I gave a shrug.

My father looked thoughtful. "Did you leave a note? Write a letter or something?"

I nodded. "Of course I did," *Slightly*, I thought. "It wasn't lengthy, just telling them that I was moving."

"And where you were moving to, right?" My mother asked suspiciously.

I blinked innocently and took a sip of my warm tea. "Of course, Mother," I decided then that I would tell her. I wasn't going to go into detail, of course, but I'd tell her what went on, just not with my father practically breathing down my neck.

I tipped my head slightly to the side, indicating that I would tell her later, and my mother nodded distractedly.

Heaving a sigh, I snuggled into my dad. Right at that moment, I let everything escape: my worry, my fear. I just wanted to loose myself in my father's embrace; I missed my home . . . both this one and the one waiting back where I'd run from.

## Chapter 3

*\*There are times*

*I swear I know you're here*

*When I forget about my fears*

*Feeling you my dear*

*Watching over me*

*And my hope seeks*

*What the future will bring*

*When you wrap me in your wings*

*And take me where you are\**

"Now, tell me what happened, Hermione," my mother demanded when my father went to the loo.

I looked down at my warm tea mug. "I'm in love."

"With Harry." My head snapped up, and I looked at her in shock.

She rolled her eyes. "Honestly, dear, you are *so* obvious."

"I was?" I asked, frightfully.

"You *are*," she corrected into present tense. "Now, I won't ask you again. Tell me what's got my daughter so distraught."

"We were at dinner," I started. "And Ron would give Harry these little hints about how I felt and then I exploded and told him."

"That you loved him?" my mum asked for confirmation.

"Yes." I swallowed hard. How much could I tell her? "So, I ran out of the pub and Apparated to my apartment, grabbed my stuff, wrote a note, and was on my way." Yup, that was a good enough answer. She need not know that I skipped almost two hours of very essential information.

"Did Harry come after you?" Mum asked in disbelief. "Because if he didn't, that boy is going to get a thrashing about by me!"

I had to smile. "Mum, I don't know if he came after me," I lied swiftly. Before I could go on, my father came back into the room.

"What did I miss?" he asked.

"Nothing important William," my mum said dismissively. Before my father could disagree, my mother asked, "Now, what courses are you taking?"

I smiled softly. "Psychology, English Literature, of course, and Greek Mythology-"

"Isn't that rubbish?" Mum asked while biting her lip in thought.

"Now, Jane, let our little girl do as she pleases," Dad said while gazing at me lovingly.

I smiled innocently at him, but I gave him that serious, grown-up look. "I'm not a little girl, Daddy."

"Of course you are," he said. "My little girl . . . that will not be married until she is thirty-five."

I raised my eyebrows. "Just last year you said not until I was thirty. What's up with rising my marriage age?"

My mother laughed. "He wants you all to himself, love." She smiled softly at me. "Can't say that I blame him."

I rolled my eyes as my parents' eyes misted. "Now, don't you start that! You both cried the day I went to Hogwarts, and then the day I moved into my flat-"

"Speaking of flats," my father interrupted, "how is your new one working out, love?"

I grinned, so happy with my new home. The only thing missing was Harry. There was still that wonderful, yet painful ache in my arms and legs as I got up, saying, "Why don't I show you?"

*\*Where you and I will breathe together*

*Once again*

*We'll be dancing in the moonlight*

*Just like we used to do*

*And you'll be smiling back at me*

*Only then will I be free*

*When I can be*

*Where you are\**

~

Three weeks separated from Harry slowly drifted into three months of tears, sorrow, anger. I tried to get my mind off of him. I really did. I busied myself in my school work and occupied my time with my job at the library across the street from my home, but when the homework was complete and my library hours were over, I naturally wept my eyes out. Harry was so lovely; he was so wonderful. His eyes enraptured me; his heart captivated every part of my body. He was my drug; I was addicted, and I did not have enough of him. I needed more.

Today was March 1<sup>st</sup>, Ron's 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday. I had bought him a new chess set and sent it off to him without a return address (as I did with everyone's Christmas presents). In the letter to him, I had written that I was well, and that I missed him, the Weasleys and especially Harry; I sent them all my love.

I decided, as I walked to my parents' house for dinner later that evening, that I was going to be tough. I was going to stick it out. I was going to stop crying over Harry.

That was easier said than done.

That night, my parents had invited me to dinner. I gave mild protests but I failed my mother's persuasion. She had not seen me in a month, and when I gave her the excuse that I wasn't feeling well (because I wasn't), she insisted that I come over so she could "soothe" her "baby".

Lord, help me.

I knocked on the front door (I had a key but I only used in case of an emergency) and no more than ten seconds later, my father was gazing at me with a broad smile. I embraced him and then stepped through the doorway, only to gag at the rank smell of whatever my mum was cooking.

"Are you all right Hermione?" my father asked.

I gagged into my hand again and said while coughing, "Smells bad--I have to get out."

My Dad led me into the living room. The smell of my mother's cooking did not reach this part of the quaint house, thank God, and I breathed the fresher air in huge gulps.

"Hermione?" my mum called in worry from the living room entrance.

"Hi Mum," I said while giving her a small smile; the tears that had collected in my eyes from gagging and choking were now spilling down my cheeks.

"What's wrong dear?" she asked as she sat beside me on the contemporary couch.

I wiped the tears away as my father stroked my back in an up and down motion; my mother caressed my hair.

"I told you I wasn't feeling well," I said in a whine.

The past week I had been throwing up all over the place, I could not eat anything normal without getting sick, and somehow, I was not quite fitting into my jeans anymore. It didn't make sense; I was barely eating, but suddenly, I put on five pounds.

My mum, being a mum, put her hand to my forehead. My father gazed at me with concern.

"Why didn't you like the smell? You always like the smell of potatoes and grilled chicken."

I ground my teeth together. God, was he trying to make me retch all over him? I was already close to doing so. If he wanted me to, all he'd have to do was to say the word "chicken" once more.

I groaned at the thought and put a hand over my stomach. "Mummy, I don't feel well."

"I know, dear," Mum said while gazing at me. She turned her head to Dad. "Go check on the food, William, while I talk to Hermione."

My father gave us a look, but he then left to do as told.

"Now, tell me Hermione, why is it that you suddenly hate your favorite meal? That's why I cooked chicken. You used to love chicken,"

I gave another moan of protest. "It's making me sick."

"What exactly do you feel?" she asked. "Does your stomach hurt?" I nodded slightly. "What's been happening for the last week, dear?"

I bit my lip. "Everything."

I then proceeded to tell her that I had been throwing up, and that I had gained weight though I had not been able to keep anything down. My mum responded by nodding and making little hums. Then she'd bite her lip and look up at the ceiling in deep thought.

She interrupted me just as I started complaining about my favorite jeans not fitting. "What- when-?" She seemed to be at a loss for words. "When did you- have you-?" Mum groaned. "I'll just let it out then. Hermione, love, have you ever . . . have you ever had sex?"

My heart started pumping and I let out a tiny little gasp. "What?" I asked. "What? No," I denied. "No, I haven't. Are you kidding? Of course I haven't! No, nope, no," I lied quite terribly.

*Ron rolled his eyes. "This one can't lie for shit."*

My mother gave me a look. She knew I was lying. "So, now that we have that covered." I blushed from head to toe. "We can go get you a pregnancy test-"

"A what?"

*Oh, no, I thought.*

"A what?" It was my dad standing at the living room threshold, his brown eyes wide when he had repeated his question.

"Daddy," I said, breathlessly. "Daddy, I'm sorry-"

He seemed to be shaking in anger. "Who was it? Who was it?"

"Daddy, I-"

"Please tell me you at least know who might have you pregnant?"

Tears were starting to burn in my eyes. My father was practically calling me a slut, as if I had slept with more than one person. And why had I been so daft? The symptoms were so obvious: late period, morning sickness. It was all there. I had not used any contraceptives with Harry.

Oh, God, *Harry*.

As my father left the room, I let out a sob and Mum pulled me towards her, murmuring words of love into my extra-frizzy hair.

~

*\*And I can see your face*

*Your kiss I still can taste*

*Not a memory erased*

*Oh, I see your star*

*Shining down on me*

*And I'd do anything*

*If I could just*

*Be right there where you are\**

~

"Good Merlin, Potter, can't you pull yourself together?"

Harry looked up at his childhood archenemy. Draco Malfoy stood there, his arm slung around Ginny's tiny waist, a look on his face between pity and disgust.

Ginny elbowed Draco hard as Harry let his head drop to the table again. Draco's eyebrows rose when Harry made no witty reply.

"Well, there's a first," he said, slightly smugly.

Ginny again elbowed Draco, this time harder, and Draco let out a shout of pain.

"What the hell was that for?"

Ginny gave him a look. "Leave him alone, Draco."

Draco merely rolled his eyes, and then turned back to a rumpled Harry. "Look, Potter- Harry," at this, Harry looked up, slightly startled, "either give it up, or find her, but don't pour your misery all over the table. It's disgusting."

Harry sighed. "I've looked everywhere. I've gone to the Ministry, but the arseholes won't give me any information. I've gone to the Grangers'. They said that they know where she is, and they told me she's just fine but couldn't recall what her address is, and I've called every flat in Britain for a Hermione

Granger, and I just can't find her!"

Harry was so distressed that he started banging his head on the table. Ginny stopped the Dobby wannabe before he got out of hand while Draco looked on in slight amusement.

"How long have you been looking for her?" he asked.

"Exactly ten weeks and five days," Harry replied back miserably. He tried to bang his head on the table again, only to have Ginny pull his hair back to stop him, causing him to yelp.

Draco tried to bite back a laugh. "Been counting the days?"

"Shove off, Malfoy," Ron said, coming down the hall from his room and into the dining room of his flat.

"And how old are you today, Birthday Boy, ten?" Draco asked in sarcasm.

Ron, rather childishly, said, "It's my birthday. Get out of my house!"

"Ten," Ginny confirmed with a smile.

Ron gave a leer her way. "Har har," he laughed with sarcasm.

Suddenly, Ron jumped and gave a shout of surprise. Harry looked up from the table at hearing Ron's cry of distress, but it was not distress, not at all. Luna had snuck behind him and pinched his bottom.

"That is the most disgusting and disturbing thing I've ever seen," Draco grimaced.

Ginny threw her purse at Draco. "Honestly," said Ginny as Draco rubbed his head.

"What do you carry in there, woman? Bricks?"

Ginny merely rolled her eyes and then turned back to Harry, who was again staring at the table. "Come on now Harry. She'll turn up soon. She's just scared."

"Of me," Harry said quietly. "She's scared of *me*."

"Not necessarily," Luna said with her wide eyes.

"What do you mean?" Harry asked warily.

Luna gave a small shrug. "She's not entirely scared, is what I'm saying."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Luna, enough of the I'm- weird- and- know- everything persona. Just tell me what Hermione is feeling."

"Well, I don't exactly know *that*," said Luna.

Ron sighed. "Shouldn't I be getting a shag or some presents or something?"

Draco practically gagged (though no one knew if it was real or not) while Ginny and Harry just blinked. Luna was grinning from ear-to-ear.

"If that is what you want Ronald,"

"Merlin, help me," Ginny whispered while looking heavenward.

Harry sighed from his position at the table. Why could he not, for once in his life, do something right? Why could he not get what he wanted?

~

*\*Now baby there were times when selfishly*

*I'm wishing that you are here with me*

*So I can wipe the tears from your eyes  
And make you see  
That every night while you are dreaming  
I'm here to guard you from afar  
And anytime I feel alone  
I close my eyes and dream of where you are\**

~

Positive. It was Positive with a capital 'P'. My father was waiting outside the door, my mother was holding that damned pregnancy test, and I was sitting on the toilet, feeling miserable. I could never go back to Harry now (not like I was planning on it), but what the bloody hell was I going to do? I looked up at my mum in distress. She read my eyes well.

"We'll see what we can do, love," she whispered with misted eyes.

I already had tears running down my face--they had been there since I bought the pregnancy test.

*I want Harry.*

*I want Harry.*

"I want Harry, Mum," I whimpered.

My mother came to my side immediately. "Is he the father, love?"

I nodded my head as I sobbed. "Don't tell Daddy,"

"Hermione," my mother started, "he has a right to know, both your father and Harry."

I shook my head. "No, I can't tell him. He'd kill me Mum," I was talking about Harry.

"Come now, Hermione. Let's get you some tea and rest. You need it love."

I stood up, wiping my tears, and opened the bathroom door. There stood my father. He saw the look in my eyes and shook his head, walking down the hall and muttering to himself.

I gave another sob and my mother stroked my back. "He'll come around, Hermione."

"No, he won't," I said through a cry. "He hates me."

My mum shook her head. "He loves you, Hermione, never doubt that. He's just a bit disappointed, that's all."

I gulped back a sob. "I only did it once, Mum, I swear it. With Harry."

She led me to her room on the top floor. "Tell me everything."

~

*\*Oh I've got to believe  
I will touch you that sweet day  
That you take me there  
Where you are  
Oh where you are  
I've got to believe*

*I'll always be waiting here*

*That sweet day yeah*

*Only wanna be where you are*

*I still believe\**

## Chapter 4

*September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2001*

*"Harry, where are you taking me?" Hermione asked as Harry tugged on her arm.*

*"You'll see," he said with a wide grin.*

*They walked quickly through thick grass that reached their knees, the smell of wild flowers strong in the air. It was Hermione's twenty-first birthday and Harry had wanted to take her somewhere special, without the loud Weasleys coming along. Harry just wanted it to be Hermione and him, all alone.*

*"So, we drive for two hours, you take me to the middle of nowhere, and you don't tell me where we are?" Hermione asked humorously. "Are you kidnapping me?"*

*Harry kept pulling her to their destination. "Those two hours of driving were extremely fun, mind you," Harry said. "And where you are is . . . nowhere."*

*Hermione stopped in her tracks, but when Harry gave another insistent tug, she again started to walk speedily with him. "What do you mean, we're nowhere?"*

*Harry grabbed her other hand and pulled her to him so that she smacked against his chest. He could feel her breathing speed up. Before his body could react to the feel of Hermione plastered against him, Harry scooped her up in his arms, much to Hermione's surprise.*

*"Harry!" she cried. "Harry, what are you doing?"*

*Harry merely laughed. "We are going to have some fun." He bounced her in his arms and Hermione clutched to him.*

*"Don't let me fall!"*

*"I'll never let you fall, Hermione," Harry replied quietly.*

*After that, Hermione made not a peep; she merely let Harry carry her with no further protest, lost in her musings. The next few minutes were spent in silence, the only sound were the crickets chirping unknown melodies and the trees whispering with the wind.*

*"Here we are," Harry said no more than three minutes later.*

*He put Hermione down gently and she gasped at the beautiful scenery before her. The rather large lake in front of her was rippling and gleaming with the waxing crescent moon's beams. The oaks' branches were swinging with the light breeze and the crickets were still singing merrily.*

*"It's beautiful," she breathed truthfully.*

*Harry grinned. He had hoped she would say something like that. He gave a tug on her arm and led her to the largest oak tree.*

*"This is my spot," Harry said while searching in his pocket for his wand. After successfully taking that out, he took out a tiny miniature basket, and Hermione laughed. Harry grinned. "Did you think I was just going to show you this?" He indicated the land before them. Hermione smiled and shook her head.*

*As Harry enlarged the picnic basket, he took out the blanket, and Hermione laid it out for them as Harry took out, to Hermione's surprise, three candles.*

*Wiggling his eyebrows suggestively, making Hermione giggle, he lit the candles with a flick of his wand and made them float in thin air, much to Hermione's disapproval.*

*"Harry, what about the Muggles?" she asked while looking around as if someone was going to pop out of the trees.*

*Harry grinned as he set their basket down. "We drove two hours, Hermione, to the middle of nowhere. No one is going to find us."*

*Hermione sighed. "Fine," she said, and then peeked in the basket. "Let's get it going Harry. I'm rather famished."*

*Harry laughed and helped Hermione take a seat.*

*The night went on full of laughter and sparkling wine and especially lovely company.*

*Harry was mesmerized by Hermione's smile, her wild untamed hair and her shimmering eyes. She was resplendent, radiant, beautiful, and he couldn't help but stare.*

*"Do you want to go for a dip?" Harry asked, smiling crookedly. He didn't expect her answer to be a yes. "Are you serious?"*

*Harry was more than shocked. Not only was going swimming in a lake full of only God knew what at midnight extremely un-Hermione-ish, she was wearing a dress and . . . it just wasn't her.*

*"Of course I'm serious," she said with a smile, "I'm twenty-one today, Harry; I'm getting old."*

*"Bullocks," Harry said with a roll of his eyes.*

*Hermione continued as if she hadn't heard him. "I want to do something crazy . . . rebellious."*

*Harry blinked. "Well then, let's go for it."*

*He pulled her up and they both ran towards the lake, giggling and laughing insanely. Just as they got to the edge, Hermione, being quite daring, jumped in first, pulling Harry with her.*

*The first thing Harry thought and said as his head bobbed back up was, "Sodding, fucking hell, its cold!"*

*Hermione scolded Harry for his language and he apologized then burst into laughter. Hermione gave a giggle and treaded water, then thrust up her foot, exclaiming, "Take off my shoe!"*

*Harry shook his head in laughter and did as he was told, tickling her feet and pulling at her toes.*

*She squealed and then threw the shoes Harry had taken off of her to dry land.*

*"This is crazy," she muttered, starting to shiver after Harry and she swam and talked for nearly half an hour.*

*"Lets get out, Hermione; you're turning purple," Harry said worriedly, swimming Hermione to the edge of the lake.*

*"Do I look pretty purple?" she asked distantly.*

*That question made Harry wonder if Hermione had had too much champagne.*

*"Lovely," he responded back with a small grin.*

*"Good," Hermione said, sounding relieved.*

*Harry climbed out of the lake and then hauled Hermione up. He tried to keep his eyes off of her curves; the water had soaked into her dress, making it like a second skin. He was very aware of just how cold she was; her breasts had made him quite conscious of that fact, indeed.*

*As a breeze blew by, Hermione pressed herself into Harry with a whimper.*

*"Maybe this was a bad idea," she said.*

*Harry nodded. "Quite right you are."*

*They packed everything quickly and hurried to Harry's car. The first thing Harry did was start the car and turn on the heater.*

*At first, the air blew cold, but gradually changed to warm.*

*Harry had taken off most of his suit, leaving himself in a white button-down and his black trousers. After having rid of most of the wet garments, he started driving back home.*

*Hermione, a few minutes later, much to Harry's pleasure and disdain, started unzipping her dress. He made sure not to look . . . to not even glimpse, but when she put the seat down and fell into a light slumber, he couldn't help but give a little glance.*

*Her shoulders had tiny droplets of water still, and her lacy bra was soaked through; he could see her nipples. Harry also noticed that, after taking a glance at the road, Hermione's knickers were rather see-through*

*He almost groaned when he saw her curls though the flimsy fabric of her underwear.*

*Harry put all of his concentration on the road then, trying to get certain areas, like both of his heads, to stop thinking about Hermione half-naked beside him.*

*He was addicted.*

~

*\*I heard you're doing okay*

*But I want you to know*

*I'm a dick*

*I'm addicted to you\**

~

"Harry?" Jennifer called, knocking on his flat door.

The blonde heard shuffling and then the door opened to reveal a rumpled Harry. He gave her a small smile and moved aside, letting her through.

Jennifer entered the messy flat with a large, magic-shut brief case, a rather large folder full of documents, and a mug of coffee.

"Now," she said, setting down her things on Harry's coffee table. She took a seat on the couch after moving a few heaps of clothing, and directed the man in front of her. "Godric's Hollow, as you know, was destroyed. The land was cleared, and it's rather large, and since you gave me an estimate of your bank account, well, you can afford it, but . . . if you don't mind me asking, Harry, what would you do with all that land?"

Harry sighed. "The field is perfect for Quidditch, and I can finally move out of this flat. I mean, some people who find my address will just knock on my door. There's no security . . . and I feel I need a real home."

Jennifer nodded. "If that's what you want, go for it Harry."

Harry wearily lay back in his chair, exhausted from another night without sleep. Jennifer eyed him with concern.

"You need to take it slow Harry; you've canceled all interviews and media showings for the last four months, you need to let it go."

"I'm not going to," Harry said with a sneer.

Jennifer dismissed the topic. Being Harry's personal secretary was a hard job to fulfill. She'd just got the job five months ago, four of those months having been tough on the bespectacled man; they were quiet tiring on her.

Jennifer was helping Harry find his lost-love interest, doing research on the land of Godric's Hollow, and trying to get Harry to go a bit more public, but what her boss wanted, he got.

Jennifer opened her calendar, an idea striking her.

"What about scheduling a vacation?" she asked. "Jamaica is always nice around this time."

Harry buried his head in his hands and then ran his fingers roughly through his hair.

"I could use a vacation," he muttered. "But I don't want to leave England. Just get me far from here."

Jennifer took out various books and scanned through them. "Well, there is a place in Sheffield with a Bed and Breakfast. It's in a tiny wizarding village called North Bruise. What do you say? No cameras, no Hermione, just relaxation."

"Fine," Harry muttered. "That sounds good. But only for a day-"

"Harry," Jennifer cut in reasonably. "A Bed and Breakfast will not only serve for a day. How about two weeks?"

Harry shook his head, thinking about his search for Hermione. "Three days."

"Five."

"Four."

"Fine," Jennifer gave in, penciling the dates and marking them "Vacation for Bloody Sake".

Harry inwardly groaned and leaned heavily back. He was 21 and stressing. What was next? Wrinkles and white hair maybe? He needed a well deserved break. He'd be searching for exactly four months in two days for Hermione. He wasn't giving up.

~

*\*I can't pretend I don't care*

*When you don't think about me*

*Do you think I deserve this?*

*I tried to make you happy but you left anyway\**

~

*\*I'm trying to forget that*

*I'm addicted to you*

*But I want it and I need it*

*I'm addicted to you\**

~

"It's a girl!" I cried with joy. "My bloody God, it's a little girl!"

The doctor grinned at me and my happy tears. My mum and dad were sitting in the room, both ecstatic. My father, to say the least, had gotten over the fact that a man had deflowered his little girl. It's not like he could try and change the past. He was content that he'd get to be a grandfather. I was so happy; nothing could ever deflate me and my blissful little bubble.

When we walked out of the Muggle hospital, I was humming and leaning against my father, happy as can be. My mind was buzzing with images of pink frilly dresses and tiny little baby socks, and especially of the ultrasound pictures I had just seen of my little baby.

"Now, Hermione," my mum started. "We'll have to start planning what you're going to do about school and the baby."

I nodded. "I've got it all figured out: I'll go to school and leave the baby at a daycare and then after, I'll take her to work with me."

My mother raised an eyebrow. "Hermione, be a bit realistic, please."

I blinked. "I am being realistic."

Father sighed. "Love, you can't take a baby with you to the library." I bit my lip. He was right. "And the baby will be too little to be left at a daycare. Tell me, do you honestly want to do that?"

As we crossed the road to the parking lot, I thought about it. No, I did not want to leave my baby at a daycare; I wanted her with me at all times. No way was I going to be able to take her to the library with me either.

"You're right. I don't want to leave her." I said.

We reached the car and my father helped me and then my mother in. After my father started driving for a few minutes, my mother questioned, "Hermione?"

"Hmm?" I said absentmindedly, smile wide on my face.

"Your father and I have been thinking," Mum said a little hesitantly.

I straightened in the backseat, eager to hear what my parents were "thinking" about.

"About what?" I asked, dreading what they were going to say, but keen at the same time.

Maybe I didn't have to quit school. I really didn't want to. I mean, if I had to, I would, but I love learning.

"Well, if you don't want to give up school, which your father and I don't want you to do either, you can always leave the child with us during the day."

"Mum, that's an excellent idea!" I said, ecstatic. Then I thought about it thoroughly. . . . "But, your house is more than an hour away." I bit my lip. "What if something happened?"

"We've got that figured out too, love," my father said. "You can come live with us."

I worried my hands. "So then it's, what, thirty minutes from school?"

"Yes," my mother said. She turned around in her seat to look at me. "Hermione, we want you at home with us."

Well, it seemed like a good idea. I wouldn't have to worry about the bills and whatnot. But I still loved living on my own and being independent.

"How about I move in when the baby is born?" I asked. "Will that be okay?"

"If that's what you want, Hermione," Dad said.

I smiled and leaned back in the back seat.

It was all going to work out. I was going to be in school. My baby would be with my parents who I trust with all of my heart, and I was going to make it! I didn't need anyone to help me but my family.

I didn't need Harry.

. . . But I sure as hell wanted him.

~

*\*Now it's over*

*Can't forget what you said*

*And I never wanna do this again*

*Heartbreaker*

*Heartbreaker*

*Heartbreaker\**

## **Chapter 5**

*\*Since the day I met you*

*And after all we've been through*

*Still a dick*

*I'm addicted to you\**

***April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002***

It was pure bliss getting away from that bloody sodding flat. Heaven on earth, it was. I seriously had to give Jennifer a raise. The place she booked for me was wonderful: large sliding windows that overlooked a lovely garden, the most comfortable bed in the world, and silence. Lovely silence.

But as much as the bed and breakfast was wonderful and so bloody comfortable, I wanted to explore the town of North Bruise. It has been a while since I've seen civilization. And the fridge in the little bed and breakfast had no food, which made no sense. And to be honest, I was starving. I hadn't been eating much. Not since Hermione left.

I wanted to find her. I *had* to find her. And I wasn't giving up. After I find some food, I would go straight to the Grangers.

Once I left the bed and breakfast, I stepped out onto a blue (yes blue) brick road. There was a café a little down the way, but my curiosity of the tiny town bloomed inside of me.

I took a right, making sure my fringe was plastered over my scar, and passed Quidditch Life, the Quidditch store in the tiny, new wizarding town. If I wasn't mistaken, the town was built not even two years ago.

Making a mental note to visit Quidditch Life before my visit in the little town was complete, I headed over to the next store, The Market; it was North Bruise's grocery store.

When I was preoccupied, I cooked, and at that moment, I felt like cooking.

*\*I think you know that it's true*

*I'd run a thousand miles to get you*

*Do you think I deserve this?*

*I tried to make you happy*

*I did all that I could*

*Just to keep you*

*But you left anyway\**

~

*\*I'm trying to forget that*

*I'm addicted to you*

*But I want it and I need it*

*I'm addicted to you*

*Now it's over*

*Can't forget what you said*

*And I never wanna do this again*

*Heartbreaker\**

*Tell Harry.*

*Don't tell Harry.*

*Tell Harry . . .*

*Oh, shoot.*

I looked at the phone in my hand, put it back down on its cradle, picked it up once more . . . then did the unthinkable.

I dialed Harry's flat number.

My stomach was churning, and I could feel perspiration start to trickle down my back. God, was I nauseous; I actually let the phone ring and ring and ring . . .

The answering machine came on, and I listened to it; I needed to hear his voice, even if it was on the phone, miles away.

"Hi, you've reached Harry Potter; I can't answer the phone right now. Leave your name and number after the ring and I'll get back to you as soon as possible."

The little ring sounded, and I breathed heavily into the phone.

*Say it.*

*Say it!*

I managed to mutter the first syllable of his name but that was all before I slammed the phone down.

Putting a clammy hand to my sweaty forehead, I let out a whimper, feeling tears well in my eyes. It was *so* good hearing his voice again, even if it was a recording: so sweet and deep. My skin was popping with goose pimples and my heart was pounding, head thumping.

I was so *close*.

As I made my way over to the fridge, rubbing my stomach over my four month baby, I thought of the reactions I'd get.

Ron: "Bloody hell! It's about time! Harry sure knows how to hit it right." He'd turn to Harry and say, "And on the first go!"

Luna: "I foresaw that." She'd say, "My crystal ball never lies."

Ginny: "Hermione, you- you- wow!" Then she'd say, all supportive like, "What're you going to name her?"

Draco: "You did it with Potter?" He'd make a face, no doubt, and say, "Disgusting."

I sighed when I looked in my fridge; nothing caught my interest.

I needed to buy pickles (which I am craving to eat with ranch dressing), peanut butter, bread, milk, marshmallows, lettuce . . .

I picked up my notepad and purple pen and jotted down all I needed. Just as I put my writing utensil down, the phone rang.

My breathing hitched. I had forgotten that Harry had caller id. Maybe it was him. Maybe he was in the loo or something and couldn't get to the phone.

Maybe . . . maybe he was with Jennifer.

I had to tell him though. My baby needs a father. Mum was right. I *need* to tell Harry.

"H-hello?" I hesitantly said into the phone.

"Hermione?" It was Mum.

I sighed, in both disappointment and slight content.

"Hey, Mum, how are you?"

"Doing just fine dear. How's Emily?"

Emily Zoe Granger. That was going to be my daughter's name. I was naming her Emily after my favorite poet, Emily Dickinson, Zoe because it meant life, and Granger because . . . because it's not Potter.

I sighed. "Emily's fine, Mum, just a bit hungry for pickles." My mother laughed. "I was just about to go out to the grocery store."

"Hermione, why don't you get maternity clothes? Is that spell healthy on the baby?"

My mother was referring to the fact that I always shrunk my stomach when I was out in public; she thought it was because I didn't like to look fat, but it was actually for the reason that I didn't want to get *fitted* fat.

"You do realize you are not fat, right? You're pregnant, and as the baby grows, you grow . . ."

Blah, blah, blah.

"Mum, I have to go now," I interrupted the lecture that I was already drowning out. "My baby wants food."

Jane Granger sighed. "All right, if you're sure you can go by yourself?"

"Mother," I said with exasperation, leaning against the counter, "I'm quite capable of going all alone."

"Fine," Mother said briskly. "But if you need anything . . ."

"Make sure to call," I finished. "I know, Mum."

"And I told you about Harry's visit a week ago, right?"

I felt my heart clench painfully. "Yes," I whispered.

"I know you don't want to talk about this, but Hermione, I'm not going to lie anymore. The next time that boy comes to my house, I'm telling him, you hear me? If you're not going to, I might as well. That baby needs a father, and I know Harry; he will take care of you. He's a sweet boy, and he's worried sick."

"Mum, please."

*\*How long will I be waiting?*

*Until the end of time*

*I don't know why I'm still waiting*

*I can't make you mine\**

She could tell I was close to tears, so she said her goodbye. Honestly, I love my mum to death, but she's so persistent. After I hung up with her and breathed a sigh of relief while wiping my cheeks, I made sure Cherie had water and her cat food before shrinking my pregnant pouch, and adjusting my clothes that were hanging on me loosely.

I grabbed my purse and headed out the door and down the stairs, thinking about my paper due Monday morning. A day in the life of Hermione Granger; hiding her child from her father's back, concealed in the tiny town of North Bruise . . . this is my story.

I chuckled internally. It was totally cheesy . . . but 100% truthful.

Sighing, I walked a bit faster. I passed a few eager street peddlers, saying, "no, thank you" at their offers on copper and pewter cauldrons, brass telescopes, and powdered lionfish spine.

I arrived at North Market safely and grabbed a cart, then tipped my head to the old owner of the market, whom bowed back. He was a sweet old man with grey hair and kind blue eyes. Mr. Roberts was very friendly; he reminded me of Mr. Weasley. He was a Muggleborn and a friend of my fathers.

"Good morning, Miss Granger, how are you today?" Mr. Roberts asked with a broad smile on his wrinkled face.

"Just fine, good Sir," I replied, shinning him a smile. "Running low on a few items; don't mind if I look around?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

"Of course not!" he cried, "Stop being silly."

I grinned. "You know me Mr. Roberts, silly, silly, silly."

"Tell your father hello for me," he said per usual.

"As always, Mr. Roberts," I said, pushing my cart forward and to the first aisle.

I found what I was looking for in seconds: pickles. After checking it off of my list and smacking my lips in hunger, I carefully grabbed two glass jars and placed them in my cart, leaning over ever so slightly.

My bum (rather large, I thought in disdain) bumped into someone, and I hurriedly turned around to apologize red-facedly.

But the "sorry" on the tip of my tongue was swallowed back hard. Green eyes stared at me in shock, and the basket the man was holding fell from his grip.

"Hermione?"

I felt choked; I couldn't speak; I couldn't breathe. And then a rush of air came to me, and I was in Harry's warm embrace, and I was sobbing like an idiot and clutching him while he croaked how much he'd missed me in my ear.

"Why'd you leave?" he kept asking. Then Harry said those wonderful words. "I love you, Hermione. Why'd you leave? Why?"

I could only shake my head, but I did say, "I love you, too."

*Tell him!*

*No!*

*Tell him!*

"Stop!" I cried, pressing my hands to my ears.

Oh, God, I was going insane. This was too much. I still could barely breathe, and I felt like throwing up. My stomach would not stop churning.

Harry's hands cupped my cheeks, his wet emerald eyes staring at me with concern.

"What's wrong, Hermione?" he asked. "You- you don't want to see me, do you?" Harry sounded hurt. I shook my head and then turned away from him and threw up. After a flash of black, I felt no more.

~

"She's going to be okay, isn't she?" The voice sounded heavenly, yet so far away. Concern and pain all etched into that voice: the voice I had missed so much.

"She'll be fine. She hadn't eaten that day, we suspect, and when she saw you, she went into a state of shock and panic, which lead her here." Harry's hand clenched my own, and warmth flooded through me.

I struggled to open my eyes. My head pounded dully and my heart was aching. I let out a whimper that sounded much like Harry's name. His hand squeezed again, and I could feel his lips grazing my cheek.

"Sleep, Hermione," Harry murmured against my skin.

I shook my head once and struggled to open my eyes. He needs to know. Why not tell him while I'm sick? He'll take pity on me, right?

"Baby," I croaked.

"I'm right here," Harry said, his nose nuzzling my neck.

He obviously thought I was talking about him. But he could be my baby too, in an entirely different way. He kissed my eyelids.

"Sleep," he repeated.

"I have Emily," I said distantly. God, my head was going to explode. "Emily's in here," I tried to gesture to my stomach, only to almost slap Harry.

Harry nodded against my neck. "Yup, Emily's here, love."

Oh, no, he thought I was crazy. He had *no idea* what I was talking about. Do I just tell him I'm pregnant? Make it easier for Harry to understand? Oh, but I just couldn't tell him! What would he say? Would he hate me forever? I guess I have to suck it up and tell him to find out.

"Harry," I started hoarsely. "Harry, I'm-"

*\*I'm trying to forget that*

*I'm addicted to you*

*But I want it and I need it*

*I'm addicted to you*

*Now it's over*

*Can't forget what you said*

*And I never wanna do this again*

*Heartbreaker\**

## Chapter 6

"I have Emily," I said distantly. God, my head was going to explode. "Emily's in here," I tried to gesture to my stomach, only to almost slap Harry.

Harry nodded against my neck. "Yup, Emily's here, love."

Oh, no, he thought I was crazy. He had *no idea* what I was talking about. Do I just tell him I'm pregnant? Make it easier for Harry to understand? Oh, but I just couldn't tell him! What would he say? Would he hate me forever? I guess I have to suck it up and tell him to find out.

"Harry," I started hoarsely. "Harry, I'm-"

"-Hermione!" my mother cried, rushing over to embrace me.

"Bloody, sodding, fucking *hell*," I cursed in a croak. I was *so* close.

If I wasn't mistaken, (which I wasn't, because I knew that voice *anywhere*, and I heard that laugh deep in my sleep and dreams and head *everyday*) Harry was chuckling softly, hand caressing mine, long, warm fingers running over my knuckles.

"Hermione!" Now my mother was shocked, not so much scared for my health. She forgot about my slip when I gave a hacking, and quite disgusting, cough. "What *happened*?"

I was about to try and answer; I apparently went into "shock" when I saw Harry, blew chunks at North Market, fainted, and . . . here I was. But I didn't get to answer her, because my mother had to open her big mouth.

"Is Emily okay?"

My breathing hitched, and I tried to sit up.

"Emily?" Harry asked curiously, trying to push me back down. He looked around the room. "No one here is named Emily. I just said that because 'Mione isn't well." He paused. "Who *is* Emily?"

"You haven't *told* him yet?!"

"Mum, please don't!"

"Hermione, he has to *know*-"

"Know what?"

"Mum, it's none of your business if I tell him or not!"

"Tell me what?!"

My mother's eyes turned to Harry. "She's-"

"Hermione!" my father interrupted what I was sure to be the worst moment of my entire life. Thank God for my father. "Hermione, what happened, love?" He hurried over and hugged me tight. I closed my eyes, unnoticed tears running down my cheek.

"Daddy," I whispered into his shoulder, "don't let Mum tell him. Please, not now."

I felt my father pull away. He had nodded softly and I sighed in relief. I smiled tenderly and reassuringly at Harry, and he grinned back, his eyes the brightest I've ever seen and shinning at me. *Me*. Hermione Jane Granger.

As my father had a word with my mum, Harry and I stared at one another, smiling softly. I could have sworn I was in heaven. Harry was so handsome. I felt my eyes start to water again, and Harry knew just

what to do. His lips silently found mine, and my stomach flopped, and I melted into him and the comforter of the hospital, and fireworks exploded behind my eyelids, and everything just fit. The missing puzzle of my life was found. I had everything I needed.

All I had needed was him, Harry James Potter, the man of my dreams, the father of my child, the love of my life.

~

\*I want to be the face you see when you close your eyes

I want to be the touch you need every single night

I want to be your fantasy

And be your reality

And everything between\*

~

Later that evening, Harry sat behind me, combing my damp hair with a brush and placing warm kisses on my covered shoulders. His kisses made me shiver and sigh in pleasure. When his lips met my skin, the warmth of his mouth rushed through my entire being, making my toes curl.

A few minutes later, he put the comb down on the tiny nightstand and wrapped his arms around me, pulling me close. I closed my eyes and wondered how I could have lived so long without Harry.

"Hermione," he whispered.

"Yeah?" I had a feeling I knew what was coming.

"Why'd you leave?" Harry asked quietly.

He sounded pained and I grimaced.

"I had to."

"No, you didn't-"

I felt tears start to burn my eyes, and I tried to blink them away, but they fell down my cheeks anyways, rivulets of hot, salty tears marking their way down my face.

I interrupted him. "You don't understand. I *had* to!" I was suddenly sobbing, and Harry was embracing me hard. "I was so *confused*. Everything happened so *fast* and I didn't know what to do; that was a first Harry. I *always* know what to do, but I didn't want to face the facts the next day with you right next to me."

"What facts?" he asked. "I don't get it. Hermione, I wanted you. I still do. Just tell me what you were thinking that night, leaving me like that?"

"I was going to leave you anyways, to move to North Bruise for school, but I didn't expect to leave you like that, after what we had done." I felt his large, warm hands rest against my stomach, and I cried harder.

I couldn't tell him. Not tonight. I'm too distressed and emotional and crazy in love with Harry to ruin his life.

"How can you want me when you have another girl?" I suddenly remembered how this whole thing practically started. That Jennifer girl. That whore who took away my Harry.

"Another girl?" Harry asked incredulously. "What are you talking about?" He was angry, I could tell.

"Who? I haven't dated in over a year, Hermione."

I turned on him, angry tears coursing down my countenance. He was looking at me in confusion, pain, his emerald eyes livid and hurt.

"Jennifer! That night at the Leaky Cauldron, you said something about Jennifer not letting you come see me. And Ron," I added Ron's name just for good measure.

Harry looked pensive. It made a rush of annoyance course through me and I suddenly wanted to bawl harder, and hit him, and my body just reacted. With a cry, I slapped him, tired and upset about everything, and as soon as his face snapped to the side, I wanted to take it back.

"Harry," I gasped. I tried to crawl away, but he grabbed my hands and forced them to my sides, then turned me over so that my back was on the hospital cot. I felt a rush of magic; the door to my room shut and locked.

I turned surprised eyes to Harry's, who was looking at me with pained desire.

"You think too bloody much," he growled against my neck.

The way his voice sounded made warm lust fill me, and I could feel my body reacting so wonderfully and painfully. I had felt like this when I thought about him the past couple of months, but I didn't know what to do, how to make myself feel erotic, like Harry did that one time.

Heat started pooling in between my thighs when Harry opened them with his knees. I struggled against his hold on me, whimpering softly when he pressed against me.

"Stop thinking," he groaned. "Please, Hermione."

"Let me touch you," I moaned. He rubbed himself against my soiled knickers, and I cried out, a rush of pleasure flooding through me. "Don't stop," I gasped.

"Sodding hell," he moaned, untying the front of my hospital gown. His fingers nimbly found my swollen and sore breasts, and then his tongue lapped at my erect nipples.

I grabbed the back of his head with a moan, and I arched up, trying harder to press him against me more. He grunted against my chest when I pushed up to buck against his pelvis.

"I love you Hermione," Harry moaned. "Always."

The tears in my eyes flowed down my cheeks. Harry wiped them away, kissing my mouth so softly that his lips barely grazed mine.

"I love you, too, Harry, so much." I cried, and he took me in his arms and kissed me an inch from death, leaving me breathless.

I sniffed when I finished sobbing my heart out, and he grinned at me with sparkling eyes and swollen lips. His fingers expertly grazed my nipples, then traveled low to the waistband of my knickers.

"Do you want to?" Harry asked quietly after nibbling on my earlobe.

I moaned. "Do you have to ask?"

He worked the pair of flimsy knickers off of me and gazed down at me, his eyes hot with lust. My breathing hitched; just his emerald eyes made intense heat course through me from my abdomen to the very tips of my toes. He took off my hospital gown with a flick of his wand, and his clothes were on the floor in a flash.

We gazed at each other for a moment before locking lips in an almost bruising kiss. He pressed his body into mine and a shock of pleasure coursed through my being, making me moan against his mouth.

He settled right in between my legs and I could feel him hard and throbbing against me. I couldn't help squeeze his muscular shoulders in vain attempt to get a hold onto my sanity, but soon I knew nothing would stop me from going insane with love and lust.

His eyes were on mine as he started to rub against me and I couldn't help shouting his name. The room was spinning and the only thing I could focus on was this feeling and Harry, Harry, *Harry*.

"Harry!" I gasped, arching my back in ecstasy.

"Good Gods, Hermione," he groaned, his forehead against mine, eyes bright. It was then I noticed he took off his glasses, and his eyes looked like they were sparkling and more brilliant than ever before. "You don't know how long I've wanted this."

"I do know," I moaned. I could barely think when his fingers found my womanhood and his mouth sucked softly on my nipple. "I-I do know," I gasped.

"I love you," he said with so much intensity my eyes glazed over. "So much it drives me insane, 'Mione"

I groaned. "Say it again."

"I love you, I love you, I love you," he whispered, his eyes screwed up in concentration as he slipped inside of me.

I gasped as a twinge of pain coursed through me. Harry didn't move for fear of hurting me, but when I started writhing in anticipation, he took that as his cue and started moving, slow and sensual, his lean body hovering over mine, shining with sweat.

He ran a hand down my thigh, lifting my leg up at the knee. My eyes fluttered shut, my arms going around Harry's neck. I was gasping with his slow strokes and groaning when he let out a grunt and moaned my name huskily.

Panting, I lifted my leg that was still resting against Harry's crooked arm to come around his waist. He used his untenanted hand to cradle my head. His nose nuzzled mine, and when I opened my eyes, his lips were grazing mine, his eyes watching me from under incredibly dark and thick lashes.

I cried out when he gave a hard unexpected bang, intense heat rushing through me.

"Don't stop!" I begged at the top of my lungs. "Again," I gasped, "do it again."

Harry kept his pace slow, but right at the end, when he had not an inch or so of himself out of me, he'd slam in as I bucked up, and these flashes would burst behind my eyelids and pure pleasure would blast through me.

He was still cradling my head, but putting his weight on his knees, he grabbed my other leg this time with his unoccupied hand and pushed it up, crunching my stomach just a bit before driving in.

Time seemed to stop as he hit a spot in me over and over that sent sparks of fire through my abdomen again and again. I didn't hear myself shouting in pleasure, I didn't know I was bucking up wildly and that Harry growled long and loud and everything just spun together and I just couldn't stop- *didn't want to stop*- the maddening feeling of Harry everywhere around me: on top, inside, outside, holding, caressing, shouting, moaning, slamming.

He smelled of sweat, of love, of him, of me and suddenly a blinding white light exploded as pleasure took over my body. Not two seconds later I felt Harry's warmth spill into me as I twitched beneath him, riding the waves of passion.

I didn't realize I was whimpering until Harry pressed his lips to mine, muffling the sound. I was still

flying down the endless cliff of pleasure I had been brought to when Harry slipped out of me.

We lay spooning on the hospital cot naked, breathing still ragged. Harry held me close, kissing my neck and the shell of my ear, his fingers running up and down my stomach.

"Beautiful," he murmured, "beautiful, Hermione."

Tears leaked out of my eyes as Harry summoned his wand. He whispered the Contraceptive Charm and I couldn't help letting out a small sob. *Why didn't he think of that the first time?*

"I love you, you know?" Harry asked sleepily while cradling my still trembling body.

I nodded, my eyes burning. "I love you, too,"

~

\*I want you to need me

Like the air you breathe

I want you to feel me

In everything

I want you to see me

In every dream

The way that I taste you, feel you, breathe you, need you

I want you to need me

Like I need you\*

~

Hermione awoke early to a pair of large, familiar hands warming her body. Moaning softly, she snuggled into Harry's embrace just as he placed kisses all along her shoulders. Hermione was so happy to have him holding her; she was in his arms, back where she belonged. She was home.

When Harry started to suck softly on her neck, she gave another moan and felt him grin against her neck.

*Prat*, she thought affectionately before turning in his arms to kiss his cheek in greeting.

"What about one here?" Harry whispered, pointing at his lips.

Hermione put the covers over her nose and shook her head, giddy at being so near Harry, nude.

Harry frowned. "I want one here," he said, continuing to tap his lips.

"Morning breath," Hermione mumbled from beneath the blanket.

"Why you little minx," Harry said, his fingers starting to tickle her tummy.

Just as Hermione started laughing at Harry's ministrations, her stomach growled horrendously and they both burst into laughter. While Harry got up and got dressed, Hermione turned on her hospital cot to look at the clock. It was nearly nine-thirty, and Hermione knew that at eleven-thirty-five sharp she had to somehow distract Harry so she could perform the charm to hide their child from him again.

Hermione knew that soon she wouldn't be able to do the spell. As soon as she hit her third trimester, the charm wouldn't work. She was only four months pregnant currently and the spell was already starting to wear off; not on her belly, but on her body. Before Hermione had run into Harry, even with the spell

on, she had been getting the worst mood swings and her breast would be sore and her back would ache horribly.

Hermione sighed and slowly sat up, grabbing the knickers and hospital gown Harry handed her and carefully sliding into them on the small bed.

"I'll go get the healer to look you over and see if you can eat, okay love?" Harry said, smile bright on his face.

Hermione nodded, her mood suddenly falling. "Hurry back, okay?"

Harry nodded and said, "Don't move." With another glance back, Harry sprinted from the room, leaving Hermione to muse silently on how exactly Harry would react if she just let the spell wear out in the middle of a conversation.

She let out a small chuckle at the image of Harry's eyes bulging in her head. That would be extremely hilarious yet utterly terrible. Out of nowhere, tears flooded her vision and she started crying softly. Not ten seconds later, Harry came in after the healer who was looking at her with worry.

Harry was instantly at her side, asking if she was okay or if anything hurt, but Hermione merely waved her hand to signal that she was fine. The healer looked her over; he took her temperature, listened to her heart beat and then declared that she was fine. He gave her a significant look, silently telling her that her child was well, too.

"Eat whenever you like, and then you can check out around noon, Miss Granger," the healer said, nodding his head toward a cabinet in the corner. "In there are some new clothes your mother brought you." He wished her good luck, told her he'd see her soon with a hidden wink and was on his way, out the door and walking in the direction of the lobby.

Harry raised his eyebrows. "Bit weird, he is," he said.

Hermione smiled softly and agreed. Harry wiped at the lingering tears on her cheeks before kissing her gently. Hermione sighed against his lips and melted into his embrace, feeling Harry grin against her mouth when her arms went around his neck. She liked the way her heart skipped when the tip of Harry's tongue pressed softly and teasingly against her bottom lip. When she was in his arms like this, she forgot about all her worries and fears. Sooner or later Hermione would have to tell Harry or he'd somehow find out, but she didn't think about it; she let herself fly down the endless cliff of love as Harry kissed her problems away.

## Chapter 7

Harry watched Hermione animatedly talk to Ginny and Luna at her flat in North Bruise five days after leaving the local wizarding hospital. Harry had stayed at Hermione's side; he wasn't going to take his eyes off of her. He was a bit paranoid to say the least, but he couldn't help it.

During the past few days, Harry noticed that there was something . . . different about Hermione. She was quieter than normal, almost as if she were hiding something from him. There were times when he caught Hermione staring at him, and she would try to say something, but it wouldn't come out. It had happened already three times in the last five days, and Harry was worried about her.

Just the other day, Hermione had been in the kitchen when she had dropped the spatula she had been using and doubled over in pain, a hand on her stomach and a grimace on her face. It happened so fast that as soon as Harry had gotten to her, she was straightening her clothes and standing up as if nothing had happened.

He had persuaded her to sit on the couch and rest while he finished the meal she had started. He was genuinely concerned for her health. Harry didn't know how to handle it. Maybe, as she said, she was just getting cramps from her menstrual cycle, but as she had told him this, her eyes darted away from his.

She couldn't lie for shit.

And Harry knew she was lying. He knew Hermione used pads, and under the bathroom sink, there were no packages of the blood absorbent wadding. He felt just a tad awful for sneaking around Hermione and looking for evidence of *something* all through her apartment. But he had found nothing anyways, though he had yet to search her room.

"You okay, mate?" Ron asked, sipping his butterbeer and gazing at Harry in concern.

Harry nodded distractedly. "Fine," he murmured. "I'm just thinking."

"How're things now that you've found her?" Ron asked.

Harry shrugged and said truthfully, "Difficult."

"How so?" Ron asked.

"She's . . . changed. There's something different about her, and I just don't know what," Harry said.

"A lot can change in four months," Draco said from Harry's other side, nursing a butterbeer from a cool bottle.

Though Harry didn't want to admit it, Draco was right. A lot *could* change in four months, and it scared the hell out of Harry. He loved Hermione with all of his heart, but what if there was something she wasn't telling him that he couldn't deal with. Some sort of secret life she was living....

When everyone left, and Harry started to slowly collect the butterbeer bottles from the table, Hermione asked him to put them down for a moment and to come into the kitchen. He entered slowly, wondering if he had done something wrong when Hermione practically jumped him, spreading kisses galore over his skin.

"I need you," she murmured desperately against his neck, pulling at his hair and nibbling at his earlobe.

Harry groaned and pushed her back, just enough so that she was against the cabinets without too much pressure. He didn't want to hurt her. Hermione was frantically trying to rip his clothes off, her nails scratching at his skin, and good God, she was wild. Her hair was a mess, her skin was glowing, her

eyes were blazing with passion, and it took every fiber of Harry's being not to hitch up her skirt and drive into her madly.

But as she found his hard length through the painful confines of his trousers, Harry growled and heaved her up so she was on the cabinets, her legs instinctively going around his waist. If she wanted it wild, Harry would give her wild. And at that point in time, Harry was sure she was asking for it.

Her fingers found the buttons of his shirt and they recklessly danced up, then down, and Harry wished she would go faster; she ended up ripping the last three buttons out. His fingers dove into her feral tresses, lost in a sea of silky hair as he slammed his lips against hers.

Harry had no idea what had come over Hermione. Maybe she *was* getting her period and was having some major mood swing; he was sure her hormones were out of whack at a time like this (*poor thing*, he thought). He wondered if that was the case, and also if he could tame the wild animal writhing in anticipation on the kitchen counter when his hand traveled down from her hair to her smooth thighs.

Her small hands wandered up his chest, making Harry's hair stand on end and making him shiver pleasantly. Goosebumps rose on his arms as Hermione's fingertips worked on the zipper of his pants. She slid it down, unbuttoned the top fastening and the material pooled at Harry's feet. He sighed satisfyingly against her lips then let his mouth wander to Hermione's slender neck as his hands continued to tease her.

Hermione growled when she felt Harry's callused hands run up and down her thighs, each time going higher to that warm place she wanted so desperately for him to touch.

"Stop teasing me," she gasped through ragged breaths.

*You, you were a friend.*

*You were a friend of mine,*

*I let you spend the night.*

*You see, it was my fault.*

*Of course it was mine.*

Harry groaned when his fingers brushed her damp curls. Good God, she wasn't wearing knickers, and she was so bloody hot and wet that Harry's toes curled in anticipation. Impatiently, he bunched her skirt to her hips and disappeared between her thighs.

Hermione curled her fingers in his hair and forgot just exactly where and who she was. She was trying to breathe, and she practically couldn't with all the pleasure flooding through her; Harry knew just how stimulate the most wonderful feelings in her.

She gasped when his tongue slid up then down her entrance, as if seeking permission. Hermione opened her legs as much as she could, though she wanted nothing more than to clamp them around his head. Her thighs kept twitching; Harry had to hold them apart.

Harry growled against her swollen, flushed lips, his body overheated with the smell of her arousal. And she tasted so good; it was all Harry could do to not stand up, pull his boxers down, and fuck her like there was no tomorrow.

"Harry!" she shouted, bucking her hips against his fingers that had just slipped into her.

Harry moaned, his tongue lapping at her wet center with heartiness, his fingers dancing along her lips and delving into her in a fast rhythm that set Hermione's hips into motion. He was ignoring that swollen bundle of nerves, but he did brush his tongue and thumb against it to tease the hell out of her.

Harry jumped when he felt Hermione's foot start rubbing against his throbbing erection and groaned when she stopped.

Hermione wasn't going to let Harry tease her without teasing back, and when he again swept his thumb against her swollen clit, he felt her clench around his fingers as she let out almighty scream that rocked the kitchen, echoing sweetly as she bucked hard against his hand, her body quaking.

Harry licked at her sweetness, his breathing hard as Hermione's leg brushed again against his excitement. His fingers were slick with her arousal as he came up to take off her shirt and then her bra.

Hermione slumped against Harry. Now that his fingers left her, she wanted more; her muscles were still throbbing with her orgasm and it felt heavenly, but *it wasn't enough*.

That's when she felt him, hard and hot against her flushed skin.

"Yes," she hissed when Harry slid into her.

Hermione rocked her hips hard against him, and Harry let out a groan that set her off; tingles of passion and pleasure made their way down to her still tender center.

Harry's pace started off fast, and it got faster, harder and much more intense. Hermione gasped and groaned and scratched at Harry's back as he pressed hard kisses against her lips. Hermione could taste herself when his tongue probed through her lips, seeking and finding and mating with her own.

Her hips ached; Harry's fingers were squeezing hard, but it just added to the pleasure. She could see his eyes blazing with so much love and passion, but they were not making love; they were fucking, and that thought sent Hermione into a whirling world of color and dizziness. She was sure that she died. She wanted to die like this, in Harry's arms with him pounding pleasure into her; it was driving her madly into the brink of insanity.

"Harry! Harry, yes!"

Hermione's shout sent him falling over the edge, and with a grunt, he spilled into her, pumping into her erratically; emptying all he had as she again spun into yet another orgasm, squeezing him almost painfully tight.

At long last, when Harry started slowing down, Hermione fell back against the kitchen counter, while Harry slumped over her. Her hands slid through his hair as his head rested against her breast; he could feel and hear her heart thumping beneath his ear.

"That- that was wonderful, Harry," Hermione said, still gasping.

Harry turned his head and pressed soft kisses to her breasts, licking and nibbling as he slipped out of her.

"I didn't hurt you though, did I?" Harry asked, concerned.

When Hermione shook her head, Harry smiled softly and pressed a gentle kiss to her lips.

"I love you," he said.

Hermione got that look in her eyes again; the one where it looked like she was going to cry and burst and again, Harry was hit with a pang of fear, anger and helplessness. She was hiding something.

"I love you too, Harry, so much," she whispered with misty eyes.

Harry embraced her, holding her as she cried softly.

"Tell me what's wrong," he said, almost fiercely. "I need to know Hermione, I want to help you. There's something you're not telling me."

Hermione shook her head, her body racking with sobs. Harry sighed; the mood was suddenly lost, and Harry felt as if it were his fault. He should have kept his mouth shut.

As Harry picked her up, ready to take her to the bath (they were both sticky and smelling of sweat), Hermione murmured soft apologies against his heated skin.

"It's all right, love," Harry said, pushing the bathroom door open with his foot. "There's nothing you should be apologizing for."

*Who am I, to say this situation isn't great?*

*When it's my job to make the most of it,*

*Of course, I didn't know that it would happen to me.*

*Not that easy.*

Harry sat at the edge of the tub, Hermione on his lap, her arms around his neck loosely as he reached forward to turn on the taps.

"Hot?" Harry asked.

Hermione shook her head. "Warm," she said with a sigh.

After adjusting the taps, Harry plugged the drain and then looked up at Hermione, running his fingers through her tousled hair.

"Are you tired?"

Hermione grinned sleepily and nodded. Harry wiped at the remaining tears on her face before lowering her into the tub.

Placing a soft kiss on her forehead, Harry murmured, "I'll get you some clothes."

Hermione nodded in absentminded bliss.

While Harry walked down the hall to Hermione's room, nude and slightly cold, he thought back to what she was hiding. She hadn't denied she was keeping something from him, and it made Harry somewhat sick to his stomach. They were best friends-

*No, Harry thought, we're best friends and lovers.*

They were best friends and lovers; she should be able to tell him everything. Whatever it was she was keeping to herself, he was sure he'd understand.

Padding through the threshold of Hermione's room, Harry considered his situation. Though he was tired from their love making, and though he was still preoccupied about Hermione's secret, he grinned; he couldn't help the feeling of flying hippogriffs in his stomach. He finally found Hermione and he had her, she still loved him, and maybe, just maybe, she would be his forever.

*Mine, he thought selfishly. Hermione is mine.*

Walking swiftly towards Hermione's knicker drawer, he picked out one of her white cotton pairs of underwear before sliding the drawer back into its place. Harry was about to get up when he felt a slight pull on his body. His eyes settled on the bottom most drawer of Hermione's nightstand.

Kneeling beside the furniture, Harry placed his hand on the knob and pulled, but it was locked. His body tensed. Was this where Hermione's secret lay?

"*Accio* wand," Harry muttered, waving his hand.

Harry's wand zoomed into the palm of his hand, and feeling as though his heart was going to jump out

of his chest, he muttered the unlocking charm then pulled again at the knob.

The drawer slid innocently back, hitting Harry's knee softly before coming to a stop. There was a manila folder, a few books and magazines, and a video tape. Taking the folder out, Harry opened it, not at all comprehending the black and white pictures until he read the words 'Emily- 3 months.'

And then it dawned on Harry, and he fell back onto his bare bottom. He didn't know his heart could beat so fast. Maybe it was a mistake, or maybe it was some sick joke, but then he thought about Hermione's strange behavior and anger so fierce blew through him, almost taking him off guard.

His fingers clenched the folder, almost shaking with fury. Why didn't she tell him? Why the hell was she hiding his- *their*- child from him? Hermione knew that what Harry most wanted in the world was a family. When was she going to sodding tell him?

The rage Harry was feeling bubbled under his skin, ready to burst. Grabbing the manila folder and making sure the pictures were tucked safely into it, Harry stormed into the bathroom, catching Hermione by surprise; she almost jumped completely from the tub.

"Harry-" Hermione started.

With almost sick annoyance, Harry cut her off, waving the folder in Hermione's now pale face. She looked frightened and livid at the same time, but Harry did not care.

"When were you going to tell me?!" Harry practically roared in questioning. "Is this what you've been keeping from me? My- *our*- child?"

Hermione, shivering from both Harry's shouting and the cold draft as she stood from the tub, grabbed her towel and wrapped it around herself. Her eyes were brimming with tears, her nose turned pink, and her head was now pounding.

"You went through my stuff," Hermione said, her eyes now leaking salty tears of fury and grief. "I wanted to tell you, and you went through my stuff!"

"When the bloody hell were you going to tell me?!" Harry shouted again, "While you were having the fucking kid?!"

"Don't you dare curse at me!" she shouted. "How was I supposed to tell you? I didn't know what to do!"

"You shouldn't have left me in the first place-!"

"I had no choice-!"

*Well, neither one of us deserves the blame,*

*Because opportunities moved us away.*

*It's not an easy thing to learn to play,*

*A game that's made for two, that's you and me,*

*The rules remain a mystery. See how it's easy.*

Harry breathed hard through his nose, trying to calm down; Hermione had just dissolved into racking sobs as she stood in, now cold, water up to her calves.

"When were you going to tell me?" he asked as calmly as he could, his eyes now burning and his heart still pumping viciously under his ribcage.

"I-I don't know," she cried, her lips quivering.

Harry felt his heart drop as he thought of something dreadful. "Its mine, isn't it?"

Hermione's eyes flashed. "Yes, it's yours! What do you think I am? I'd never-" but she didn't get to finish her sentence, because she burst into loud sobs again.

Harry felt his fury subside and he padded quietly towards her. Hermione shrank back, as if he was going to hurt her, and he felt his heart break. He came as close as he could to the tub and opened his arms; Hermione fell against him, her fingers digging into his arms as she cried into his chest. Harry buried his face in her damp hair.

"Oh, God, Hermione," he whispered, feeling stupid for shouting. "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have yelled."

"You had e-every r-right to, Harry. I should h-have told you sooner. I'm so sorry," she said through gasps.

He pulled back enough to look into her puffy, red eyes. "I love you so much, Hermione. How did you think I'd react? I'd never leave you."

Hermione's eyes swam with tears again. "I'm sorry, Harry, I'm so sorry."

Harry pressed his lips to her forehead, and he felt a swoop in his stomach as something came to him.

"Am I going to be a dad?" he asked, almost too quiet for Hermione to hear.

Hermione gave a watery smile. "You're going to be a dad."

*See, who am I to say this situation isn't great?*

*It's our time to make the most of it.*

*How could we ever know that this would happen to me?*

*Not that easy.*

## Chapter 8

"How come you named her Emily Zoe Granger?"

Harry held Hermione against him on her living room sofa after taking a shower; they'd taken it together and ended up having a long and slow shag that blew both their minds away. Harry was currently wondering about his unborn child resting in Hermione's tummy, and also marveling at how the hell she hid it so well.

Hermione, whom was resting in Harry's lap, refusing to let go of him since his discovery, looked up with slightly apprehensive eyes. "Do you not like that name?"

"No," Harry said. "I love it; I just want to know where you got it from."

Hermione beamed. "Emily Dickinson, my favorite poet."

Harry grinned. "I thought something literary had to come from this."

"Zoe, which means 'life'," Hermione continued with a smile. "And Granger because . . . because it's not Potter."

When she whispered the last part of her explanation, Harry felt as though a thousand Snitches had been let loose in his stomach. He hugged her to him and asked just as quietly, "Do you want it to be Potter?"

"Oh, Harry," Hermione sighed. "I don't want you doing something you'll regret-"

"What do you mean?" Harry almost snapped.

"I can take care of myself," she said defensively. "I want you to take part in our child's life, of course, but if you don't want to-"

Harry couldn't believe his ears. He stopped her talking by kissing her in surprise. He wanted Hermione all to himself. He wanted to marry her, and of course, he would have liked that to be later on in life and in a completely different situation, but things happened for a reason; and Harry was ready, he wanted to spend the rest of his days waking up beside Hermione.

If Harry thought about it though, he knew that Hermione would think he married her just for their child's sake, because that way just seemed much more proper. But Harry didn't want to marry her because of their unborn baby; he wanted her because he loved Hermione so much that it hurt. He'd wait forever for her if that was the case.

"Hermione," he said, pulling his lips away hesitantly. "I want to be there every step of the way."

"I don't want you to marry me just because of Emily," she said.

Harry shook his head. "I love you, Hermione."

Hermione's lips quirked up in a smile. "I know, Harry, but I can wait until you're ready-"

"I'm ready now," Harry protested weakly. "I want this," he said, taking her hands and squeezing them softly.

"I do too," Hermione said, her eyes wide and tearful, "but, please Harry, just-"

Harry again placed his lips to hers ever so softly. "I know," he murmured in understanding.

Hermione needed time. Harry could feel it. It was too soon, he'd just learned about the baby; there was no need for rushing. They'd take it as slow as Hermione wanted to take it; Harry was completely fine with that, but he really hoped his child would bare his last name.

Hermione was currently thinking similar thoughts. Her emotions were like a rollercoaster at the moment, and if she got married before she had Emily, she wasn't exactly sure how she'd handle it. Maybe she'd go into depression for some stupid reason, maybe she'd somehow endanger the baby by being too active with a wedding to handle, and not only that, Hermione wasn't sure if Harry wanted to propose just because of the child that rested contently in her tummy. Hell, Harry hadn't even seen her *with* her full blown tummy.

As if reading her mind, Harry's hands smoothed up her stomach, and quietly, he asked, "How does Emily . . . fit in there if she's four months?"

Hermione chuckled and explained, "There's a charm you can use to hide it. A few centuries ago, when woman carried a child illegitimately, otherwise, a "bastard child", it was immoral, you know? So, they made a spell to hide the child, only thing is, at the beginning of the third semester, hormones will take over and the spell would be overruled. So, even if I hadn't told you, Harry, you would have found out sooner or later." Hermione added, biting her lip.

Whispering, Harry asked, "Can you take it off?"

Hermione looked up at Harry with wide eyes. "You want me to take the charm off?" she asked, clearly surprised.

Harry nodded.

Hermione sighed softly and closed her eyes, praying for composure.

*Breathe in. Breathe out. Relax. Stay calm. This is only Harry,* Hermione thought. *Oh hell, this is Harry.*

She felt Harry squeeze her hand in reassurance.

"Please?"

When she heard his voice, broken with emotion, she felt her eyes burn. Hermione was going to show him if it was the last thing she did. So, carefully, she removed her shirt then looked up into Harry's eyes with slight anxiety.

Harry knew that she'd taken off the shirt so it wouldn't rip when her stomach grew. He took the shirt from her shaking fingers and pressed a soft kiss to her cheek.

"I love you," he whispered, his lips now wandering to hers. "I love you."

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut and whimpered into his mouth as his hands wandered up her bare back to the clasps of her bra.

"No," she said, squirming away, murmuring against his lips. "Please."

Harry moved his arms down to her waist instead. Hermione didn't want him to remove her bra if she was going to show him her pregnant belly. Her breasts were swollen and, in her mind, not at all attractive.

Pulling away from his lips, Hermione nuzzled Harry's neck, his hands moving in large circles on her back. She loved the feel of his large, rough, manly hands tracing along her spine. It felt so good to be in his arms, being held and loved.

"Will you show me?" Harry mumbled into her thick hair.

Hermione nodded against the crook of his neck and then pulled away. Taking out her wand, Hermione took another huge breath and whispered, "Don't freak, okay? It m-might hurt me a little too, so d-don't be worried."

Harry nodded, and watched, transfixed, as Hermione said the counter-spell to the enchantment on her stomach. She glowed bright pink for a moment and let out a cry of pain as her stomach started growing under Harry's hands. His breathing accelerated when the light cast away; he could see her properly now, and he felt as if a giant hippogriff was let loose in his chest, fluttering right over his heart.

Hermione felt Harry wipe the tears away from her cheeks then press his forehead against her shoulder, his hands sliding along the curve of her stomach. It was then that finally, Hermione could really breathe. So many emotions took over her that she felt as if she were melting; and she was melting, right into Harry's embrace and kisses and caresses.

"I love you so much," Hermione gasped through tears.

Harry looked down at Hermione, her beautiful brown eyes glazed with so much emotion and passion that the tears Harry had been holding back fell down his cheeks.

"I love you too," Harry said truthfully, his voice hoarse. "Please, Hermione, never use that charm again. Promise me?"

Hermione sniffled. "I promise."

With a weak smile, Harry crouched over Hermione and placed a small kiss right over her bellybutton; he pressed his nose against the curve of her belly and whispered, "And I love you too."

Right below his hand that was still placed against Hermione's tummy, Harry felt a nudge, and he looked up at Hermione with wide eyes.

"Did she just-" Harry was about to ask, but Hermione was nodding. "She just kicked you, yes," she said, smiling widely as more tears spilled down her cheeks. "I think it means she loves you too."

## **TWO MONTHS LATER**

*"I'm huge!" she gasped.*

*Hermione pressed the heels of her palms into her eyes. Harry was currently waiting outside the maternity shop's dressing room for her as she tried on pregnancy shirts.*

*"It's not bloody fair," she moaned as tears prickled her vision. "Why can't Harry have his own sodding child?" She looked up at the full-length mirror for the second time then promptly burst into tears.*

*The door to the dressing room exploded open, and Hermione choked on a sob.*

*"Hermione! What's wrong? What happened?"*

*Harry had just rushed in and kneeled in front of Hermione's chair where she was currently sitting, taking her into his arms.*

*"I'm fat, that's what! How could you find this- this- me attractive?! I look like a beached whale!" Hermione cried.*

*When Harry uncontrollably laughed, Hermione pushed him away as her body racked with hard sobs.*

*"It's n-not funny! How could you?!" she wailed.*

*"You're enormous!" Harry laughed harder.*

~

"Am I really enormous, Harry?" Hermione asked as she gazed into the mirror in Harry's room.

About three weeks ago, Harry had made it quite clear that he wanted her to move in his apartment with him; they would start looking for a home to raise their child in soon.

Harry looked up from Emily's newest ultrasound pictures and tilted his head to the side. "Sorry, what was that? I'm a bit distracted with Emily," he said with a grin.

Hermione was turned sideways, rubbing the bulge that held their child. "Well, you see, I had this dream . . ."

"Go on," Harry prodded when Hermione didn't finish her sentence after about a minute.

"And in this dream," Hermione sighed, "I asked you how you could find me attractive."

Harry's smile widened. "You *are* attractive. You're so sexy right now, love."

Hermione bit her lip and looked over at him. Harry's eyes were dark with desire; he was clearly turned on. Then again, she *was* standing there practically stark naked, in nothing but knickers and a bra, though how could he be so horny if she was the size of Brazil?

Hermione could not deny the fact that she was getting hot and bothered with just the look he was giving her.

"You called me enormous," Hermione explained.

Harry shook his head. "I'd never say that to you—"

"AHA!" Hermione said triumphantly. "So you *do* find me enormous!"

Harry looked at her incredulously. "What?! How can you— I never said that!"

"But it was certainly implied!" Hermione cried.

"You are not enormous. You're pregnant, and I like you this way."

"You like me fat?"

"Hermione!"

"What?" Hermione whined.

"You're not fat!" Harry said in exasperation.

Harry looked Hermione over as she huffed in annoyance and grumbled under her breath. She settled next to Harry, and he pulled her close.

"Are you sure?" she asked tentatively.

"I'm positive. And you're so beautiful Hermione, especially now, holding our daughter," he said, tossing a blanket over her half-naked body. "Now, enough of this nonsense; are you cold?"

Hermione snuggled back into Harry's chest as he placed the pictures of Emily on the nightstand. Carefully, Harry wiggled down and pressed close to Hermione, sighing in pleasure.

"I feel fine. A bit warm, actually, but good," she said.

Harry hummed happily, pressing his nose into Hermione's hair.

Hermione thought back to about a month and a half earlier; they had taken two weeks to themselves to talk about all of their worries and fears and about the lovely little wonder growing inside of Hermione. While Harry was terrified at what kind of father he'd be to Emily as Hermione's due date drew closer, Hermione was frightened of the pregnancy itself; she was mostly scared about the labor.

Harry and Hermione went to or called the doctor frequently and asked multiple questions, getting all the answers and reassurance they needed; it was natural to be a bit scared, he'd said, but there was nothing to worry about. The doctor had said that Emily was doing wonderfully, so nothing wrong

should happen during the labor unless something drastically changed during the last trimester.

When Hermione was exactly 18 weeks pregnant, she and Harry had gone to the Burrow to tell everyone the good news, though there was no real need to tell them for the fact that they saw Hermione's stomach as soon as they'd arrived.

"Three months to go," Harry whispered into Hermione's hair sleepily a few minutes later. "Are you nervous?"

Hermione bit her lip. "Yeah," she said, closing her eyes tightly as Harry's hand caressed her belly. "Are you?" she asked.

Harry didn't answer for a moment. *Yes*, he thought, *I'm sodding frightened*. Harry was scared of the entire bloody thing. Would Hermione be all right after Emily was born? Would Emily be healthy? Where would they raise her? How would they get along? Would Emily like him? How good of a father would he be?

*We've answered all those questions, you fool.*

Harry sighed softly. "Yes," he responded. He buried his nose in the crook of her neck. "Hermione, I'm so scared."

"Harry," Hermione said shakily. "Harry, I'm scared, too."

Harry could tell she was near tears, and he cradled her as best as he could, squeezing his eyes shut in hope the burning would stop.

"We'll make it," he said optimistically; he used the best reassuring voice he could muster. "And we'll be the best fucking parents, you'll see."

Hermione cried silently in his arms, nodding. "We- we'll be the *best fucking parents ever*."

Harry let out a deep chuckle, and Hermione shook in hilarity. Hermione didn't like Harry cursing, even if he'd stomp his toe on the bed leg in the middle of the night because Hermione wanted her pickles and honey mustard; this had happened twice before. She claimed that Emily could hear him, but just now, she let Harry use profanity, and she used it back in turn.

"I love you," Harry said, his heart lifting high.

Hermione looked at him over her shoulder, grinning broadly. Harry swiped the tears from her cheeks.

"I love you too."

As Hermione settled back into the bed, Harry pressed light kisses to her shoulders until she was at least half-asleep. He thought about the engagement ring in the drawer beside him that he intended to give to Hermione. When he would propose, he was going to take her somewhere she'd adore; somewhere away from this sodding flat that was driving them both nuts.

Harry thought they needed a getaway, and what better time to do it? Emily was due in September and currently, June was the best time for a tropical escape, wasn't it? He'd book a flight tomorrow. Where to exactly, he wasn't sure, but they were certainly leaving soon; Harry would make sure of that.

## Chapter 9

*\*Good day sunlight,*

*I'd like to say how truly bright you are.*

*You don't know me, but I know you see you're my favorite star.*

*Fa-la-la-low you I will so lets get moving.*

*Who needs shelter when the morning's coming?*

*Absolutely, there's no one.*

*Who needs shelter from the sun?*

*Not me, no, not anyone.\**

Harry smiled as Hermione gazed around, amazed at her surroundings. She'd drifted to the window's lovely view of the ocean and sighed blissfully.

"How did you know I would enjoy such a place?" Hermione asked, smiling at him over her shoulder.

Harry walked towards her, wrapping his arms around her huge belly from behind and placing his chin softly on top of her head. He breathed in slowly, loving her scent.

"Because I know what you like," Harry whispered in her ear, kissing the lobe softly before nuzzling her neck.

*Gods, Harry thought, she smells heavenly.*

She smelled like cinnamon and parchment and vanilla, and it was an oddly satisfying scent. At lazy times like this, it would make him rowdy. When Harry was sleepy, and Hermione was curled into him, smelling like she was now, her scent would put Harry into a calming trance.

"Are you sniffing me *again*, Harry James Potter?" Hermione said in a phony, scolding tone.

Harry smirked and this time buried his head in her hair.

"You know it, love," Harry murmured, pressing his unexpected hard-on against her bottom and growling. He felt like he was a teenager again, not being able to stop those sudden erections. "You make me so horny, 'Mione."

Hermione moaned and pressed back against him, causing Harry to hiss in pleasure. Tilting her head to the side for easier access, Harry starting feasting on her neck, making Hermione's pulse increase and warmth that she only felt with Harry flow through her being.

"Why did you bring me here again?" Hermione asked in distraction. Harry's hands were starting to travel along her pregnant tummy, and she knew that his next move would be to dive those fingers right under the tie of her maternity pants and drive her into insanity.

"I wanted to spend the week with you," Harry said, his breath hard against the back of her neck.

"You've had me alone for a long time, Harry," Hermione said after gasping in pleasure; Harry had run his tongue down her collarbone.

"People kept visiting," Harry said. "I only got to love you at night."

Hermione laughed breathlessly. "That's when most people do it, love."

Harry's heart gave a wild thump at what she called him, and he moaned while unbuttoning her shirt that stretched along her enormous pregnant stomach. Their baby was getting monstrous.

"Well, I want to do it all day, and I can't very well do so when people keep pounding on the door."

Hermione laughed with bated breath as Harry directed her to the bed.

~

Hermione giggled as Harry hummed sleepily against her neck, tickling the area right below her earlobe. She didn't protest though. Hermione found that she liked it when Harry tickled her. It made her feel loved; it felt like Harry was putting all of his attention on her, making her feel like a queen.

As Harry ran his hand over her huge, bare stomach, Hermione let out a soft breath, biting her lip to hold back a moan. It was then that Hermione's eyes bulged; Harry was softly prodding her in the back.

"Again?" she asked in a groan. Hermione looked at the clock. Not five minutes ago, Harry had spent himself inside of her, and now he was ready yet again.

Harry moaned, "You're like a drug."

Hermione turned on him. "And what do *you* know about drugs?"

Chuckling, Harry gently caressed her and whispered, "If you have too much, you become addicted."

"And that's how you feel about me?" Hermione asked, breathlessly.

Harry nodded against her shoulder, his hands drifting up her thigh after she had spread her legs wantonly.

"But you're so much more."

Hermione gasped when she felt his fingers on her heat. Groaning when he pressed against her folds from behind, they let loose and moved together with slow and shallow strokes, panting for air, crying out to the gods, and moaning each other's name even after they came down from their ultimate high.

~

"Oh, Harry!" Hermione gasped, looking around the restaurant in awe. "It's beautiful."

Harry grinned nervously. "So, y-you like it?"

Hermione nodded enthusiastically, her hands clapped together in glee. "It's wonderful," she said, beaming. Placing a hand on her stomach, she inhaled deeply and moaned. "I'm *so* hungry. Let's get this going, Harry."

Harry chuckled softly and nodded to the waiter to escort them to their table. Once Hermione was comfortably seated in her chair, Harry sat in front of her and took her hands into his after moving the candle from the middle of the table. Hermione smiled at him, giving him a curious smile as Harry bit his lip anxiously.

"Are you all right, Harry?" Hermione asked, tilting her head to the side in confusion.

Harry nodded as his heart thudded harder; Hermione looked so beautiful when she was befuddled or curious. Her bewildered smile was doing nothing for his rapidly beating heart.

*Steady, old boy*, Harry thought while taking in a deep breath.

"I'm fine love, just wondering if you're comfortable," Harry responded, biting his lip.

Hermione grinned in amusement. "Of course, Harry. You made sure of that when I sat down."

Harry nodded. He'd certainly made sure of that. Harry had fussed over her, helping her into her chair, asking her if she was too hot or cold in this spot of the restaurant, if her chair cushion was stuffed enough. He'd positively made their waiter a fidgeting mess, threatening the man quietly that if he didn't bring Hermione exactly what she wanted, he'd stick the restaurant's china where the sun didn't shine.

They had ordered their meal as soon as they had settled in their seats, along with two large glasses of water. When their dinner arrived, Hermione tucked in after smacking her lips together. She'd ordered a huge plate of chicken salad with a side of broccoli and cheese soup. Harry frowned when she lathered her greens in walnut and peanut oil dressing.

He looked down at his fettuccini and grilled shrimp, suddenly feeling nauseas from nerves and of the way Hermione was eating; she was currently dipping some lettuce into her soup dish.

"Want a bite?" Hermione asked through a stuffed mouth.

Harry sent out a silent "thank you" to the Gods that Hermione had a hand shielding her mouth, or he would have been seriously sick.

"No, thank you," Harry said quietly.

Hermione shrugged, speared a few pits of lettuce, dipped it in her soup, and proceeded to munch away while Harry's insides squirmed.

After about five minutes of this, Hermione looked back up at Harry and asked in concern, "Are you sure you're all right, love? You look a little flushed, and you've barely touched your dinner."

Harry bit his lip. "I'm-well, I'm a bit nervous," Harry said truthfully.

*It's now or never, Potter,* a little voice in Harry's mind whispered, almost evilly. *Just pop the question and you're home free.*

*It's not that easy,* Harry responded before sighing heavily. *I must stop talking to myself.*

"Nervous about what, Harry?" Hermione asked, her head again tilted in that adorable confusion that Harry rarely saw.

"Well, there's this- this person," Harry started.

"This person?" Hermione asked, her eyes wide and fearful all of a sudden.

"Yes, and-and she's really wonderful," Harry said, biting his lip.

"She?" Hermione all but whispered in questioning.

Harry grabbed Hermione's hands in his after her fork clattered onto her almost empty plate.

"Yes, and she's the world to me."

"Are- are you sure?"

Harry nodded. "Quite."

"So, what- who- I- I don't understand," Hermione whimpered, her nails unexpectedly digging into Harry's palms.

"I love you, Hermione," Harry said.

His face was even paler, beads of sweat forming at his forehead as his own hands clung to Hermione's.

"But?"

"But," Harry continued, "I want to make this- *us*- permanent."

"Us?"

Hermione's eyes widened even further, and Harry was sure that her eyes were going to pop out of their sockets.

Harry nodded. "Say you'll marry me. Tell me you want to be with me forever." Harry's voice was quivering.

Hermione's eyes watered and in a split second, she promptly broke into sobs.

"Yes! Yes, Harry, I want to be with you forever!" Hermione cried, choking on her tears.

Harry stood up so fast that his chair skidded back and tumbled with a loud crash to the floor, but at that particular moment, it was the least of his worries. He circled the table and embraced Hermione, holding her as she clutched at his dress shirt. Harry pressed endless kisses to her neck and face, his eyes watery and blurred with tears.

"I was so scared, Harry," Hermione moaned into his shoulder minutes later. "I thought you were going to leave me."

"I'd never leave you, Hermione," Harry said firmly. "Never."

"Oh, Harry." Hermione pressed a deep kiss to his lips. "I love you, Harry, with all of my heart," she said once she pulled away.

Harry pressed his forehead to hers, grinning like a fool, his body tingling and humming in relief and pure happiness. She was his, this woman, whom was giving him unconditional love and a family. It was all he'd ever wanted in life. And this one absolutely amazing woman was giving it all to him.

Forever.

~

After dinner and a short walk, Harry and Hermione retired to their flat where they cuddled for a long while. Harry grinned whenever he caught Hermione looking at her engagement ring with delight. He himself thought it was rather impressive.

"Harry," Hermione murmured sleepily against his chest half an hour later.

"Mmm?" Harry hummed, his fingers still treading through Hermione's hair.

"I l-l-love you," she yawned, burying deeper into his shirt.

Harry whispered the words back, and contently, with his arms around his fiancée, rested his head against Hermione's and fell into the most relaxed sleep he'd ever had.

~

"Oh, this is just simply wonderful!" Mrs. Weasley cried, clapping her hands together in delight. "Are you planning on having the wedding before you have the baby, or after? Where will it be? Have you thought about a dress, dear?"

Hermione blinked at Mrs. Weasley, wondering just how she'd thought about this in under a minute of their announcement.

"Well," Hermione said, looking up at Harry in confusion, "we really haven't thought about it too much."

Mrs. Weasley nodded her head distractedly. "Yes, yes, well, you have a lot of planning to do."

Harry raised his eyebrows, looking at Hermione. She seemed to be thinking furiously, her eyebrows

furrowed in deep thought. He knew that if she wanted to get married before the baby was born, it would create a lot of stress. Harry knew that that wouldn't be good for their child.

"Why don't we think about it on our own time?" Harry asked Hermione softly. "I'm in no hurry; I want what you want, love."

Hermione grinned brightly and pecked him on the lips. After she was settled on the couch with a caffeine-free soda, in the company of Ginny, Luna, and Mrs. Weasley, Ron, Draco, and Harry went to sit on the Burrow's back porch.

The screen door shut loudly after Draco just as Harry took his seat in one of the creaky rocking chairs. Mr. Weasley and the twins could be seen a few yards away by the broom shed, talking about some business or another. Harry couldn't help but give an amused laugh when Fred seemed to show some sort of odd jig to his father, whom mirrored his actions as best as possible.

"What do you reckon they're doing?" Harry wondered aloud, his palm wet with his drink's condensation.

Ron swatted at a bug on his arm before looking out at his brothers from beside Harry. "Dunno," he said, shrugging. "It looks like Dad is trying to learn how to dance."

Draco, who sat on Ron's other side, said, "Is it me, or are all Weasleys really bad at dancing?"

Harry snorted before taking a swig of cool pumpkin juice. The sun hid just behind a rather thin cloud, making Harry unconsciously swipe at the sweat settling on his forehead. The heat was wild this summer, and it was wreaking havoc on the whole of England.

"I dunno, but I do remember a certain someone just two years ago at the Ministry party trying to, what's the phrase those American's used to use? Ah, yes, 'boogie down' to impress a certain Loony," Harry said in hilarity.

"Hey!" Ron said crossly, "I thought we wouldn't mention that to anyone!"

Harry's eyes widened behind his glasses before he playfully waggled his eyebrows. "Woops, it seemed to have slipped my mind."

The men continued talking, reminiscing and laughing about silly things that had happened in the past years. After about twenty minutes, the women came out and joined them, smiling when they all stood at their arrivals.

"Hmm, what gentlemen we have snagged-" Ginny said.

"-and wrapped around our little fingers," Luna finished.

The girls laughed while Harry, Ron, and Draco suppressed the urge to murmur something back. Harry helped Hermione into the rocking chair he'd previously vacated and pulled up another equally squeaky chair next to hers.

"What in the name of Merlin is your father doing, Ronald?" Luna said, slightly alarmed.

Ron laughed. "I've no idea, love."

Harry and Hermione stayed at the Burrow for the remainder of the day, catching up with the Weasley's and their friends. They ate dinner with them around 6; Mrs. Weasley insisted they stay the night.

"We couldn't possibly do that, Mrs. Weasley," Harry said, shaking his head furiously.

"Besides, we're paid up at the Leaky Cauldron until Sunday," Hermione finished.

Ron intervened. "You can stay with Luna and me."

"What d' you say?" Luna asked, her eyes begging.

Harry and Hermione fended off, giving hugs and promises to see everyone again soon. Mrs. Weasley loaded them a basket full of leftovers and a blueberry pie before finally letting them go.

Harry and Hermione arrived at the Leaky Cauldron and the first thing Hermione did was kick off her shoes and groan. Harry helped her out of her clothes, into some large pajamas, and into bed. Hermione sighed and smiled when she settled in the bed; Harry kissed her lips softly before proceeding to get dressed for bed as well.

"Harry?" Hermione murmured.

"Yes?"

"Which house did you like best?"

Harry bit his lip and thought back to the other day when they'd gone house hunting. There were quite a few houses that they'd both agreed on, but the one that had really caught Harry's attention was the 5 bedroom, 4 bath house. All of it was in perfect condition for living in, and it was in such a nice wizarding community; he could see himself growing old in that house with Hermione and . . . 10 kids or so.

He told his fiancée which house he liked best, and Harry saw her grin into her pillow.

"I liked that one too," Hermione whispered. "I especially love the few acres behind the house. It'll be so pretty in the winter with the trees covered in snow."

Harry smiled softly when he thought about Christmas with his daughter and soon-to-be wife. His body filled with warmth and tingles went up and down his spine, making him shiver.

"That sounds great," Harry said, climbing into bed and sliding his arm around Hermione's huge waistline.

He buried his nose into her insanely frizzy hair and smiled.

"Harry?" Hermione muttered a few minutes later.

Harry opened his heavy eyes and asked, "What?"

"Can you get me some of Mrs. Weasley's pie?"

Harry held back a groan, and he nodded against her shoulder. "Is that it?"

Hermione turned to look at him, her eyebrows furrowed together in thought. "Umm, how 'bout some vanilla ice cream and pickles?"

"Are you serious?"

Hermione nodded and licked her lips, moaning at the thought of dipping her pickle right into the vanilla ice cream.

"God, Harry, I'm ravenous," she said, struggling to sit up.

Harry groaned and slid out of bed, padding over to the tiny kitchen to pull out Hermione's unusual food concoction. He was still extremely full from the dinner they'd had not half an hour ago, but he supposed that Hermione hadn't really eaten much at the Burrow.

"Why didn't you keep eating if you were hungry?" Harry asked Hermione as he walked back into the bedroom.

Hermione eagerly held her hands out. "I wasn't that hungry at the time," she said, digging into the

blueberry pie with vigor.

Harry looked away, his stomach rumbling in protest when Hermione dunked her pickle into the piece of pie he'd cut her. He'd learned that Hermione had an odd fascination with pickles, and with her pregnancy, she'd eat it with anything and everything. It thoroughly disgusted him, but he'd also found out that expressing his concern would get him no where but on the couch in the living room. He'd once slept on the floor because of Hermione's anger and tears; he'd vowed to never comment on her eating habits again.

Once Hermione was done, Harry took her plate to the kitchen and set to washing it the Muggle way as she brushed her teeth in the bathroom. After flicking his wand, all the lights extinguished and he clambered in to bed, awaiting Hermione's arrival.

When she finally came to bed, Harry was already half asleep. She snuggled back against his chest, and Harry groggily mumbled incoherently into her hair.

"What do you want for your birthday, love?" Hermione asked quietly.

"For you and the baby to be healthy," Harry said, kissing her shoulder and settling deeper into the comfort of her body.

Hermione's heart was pounding wildly at his words. Harry made her feel so loved and wonderful, and he cared about her and Emily so much it brought tears to her eyes.

Squeezing his hand, Hermione closed her eyes and fell asleep to the feel of Harry's heart beating against her back.

## Chapter 10

July 31, 2002...

*\*In my place, in my place  
Were lines that I couldn't change  
I was lost, oh yeah\**

Hermione felt quite proud of herself. As she looked around the filled to bursting room of family and friends, she couldn't help shedding a tear. She had thrown Harry this surprise birthday bash, and to see him so happy made her heart jolt pleasantly. This here, this was what he'd always wanted, and damn it, Hermione was going to make sure he'd always be surrounded by love.

"Are you all right, Hermione?"

Hermione started and looked up at Harry. He'd been talking with Ron and Draco just moments before, but he must have seen those damned tears that kept sliding down her cheeks.

*Sodding hormones*, Hermione thought, just as Harry swiped a tear away with the large pad of his thumb.

"I'm fine," she said, nuzzling his palm as it rested softly on her cheek. "I'm just so happy."

Harry smiled lovingly down at her before pressing a kiss to her nose. As Harry's arm snaked around her stomach, Hermione couldn't help feeling abnormally large. She heaved a shaky sigh when she looked at Ginny's small form beside Draco, and then Luna's tiny frame residing beside Ron.

It was then when she promptly burst into sobs.

"Hermione!" Harry and Ginny cried together.

"What's wrong, Hermione?" Ron asked, concern etched all over his face.

"She feels generously proportioned," Luna murmured distantly.

Harry looked at Hermione, right into her very soul. She turned her head, ashamed, but Harry cupped it and forced her gently to look at him.

"Is that what's wrong, Hermione?" he asked, so softly and deeply it sent shivers down her spine.

Hermione pressed her lips together, her chin trembling and nostrils flaring. She blinked furiously, nodded, and let out another small sob. Her head fell against Harry's chest as he mumbled words of love into her hair; Hermione had never felt more embarrassed in her entire life.

"I'm sorry," she wailed as Harry helped her into a seat. "I didn't mean to- to start crying, but I couldn't help it! I just looked a-at G-Ginny and Luna and I- I felt so . . . enormous."

"You're pregnant, what did you expect, that you'd gain a pound and be done with it?" Mrs. Weasley asked. "Certainly not, dear; it's natural to feel this way, but you're holding an entire other person in that body of yours! If anything, you should feel swollen with pride to be growing a baby so healthy."

"Swollen is right," Hermione said, frowning deeply.

She saw Draco trying his best to hide his smirk, but when it slipped up his face, she blubbered again and hid her face in Harry's shoulder.

"Draco!" Ginny hissed, hitting him hard in the side.

"Ow! Ginny!" Draco moaned. "It was funny!" He turned to Hermione. "I'm sorry, Granger, I just couldn't help it," he said sincerely.

Hermione waved a hand at him, sniffing. "It's quite all right, Draco." She wiped at her tears. "It's these stupid hormones, that's all."

"I rather like your hormones," Harry murmured in her ear huskily.

Hermione nearly groaned at the sound. Her skin was tingling, her abdomen pulsing with heat. After whispering a promise of what was to come later on that night, Hermione grinned cheekily against Harry's lips as he pressed a heated kiss to her mouth.

"I love you," Harry said against her lips, "so much."

Eyes overflowing with tears yet again, Hermione threw her arms around Harry's neck as he wrapped his arms around her stomach. She kissed him with her all and mumbled the words back; in his ear, against his jaw line, cheeks, nose, mouth....

There was a whoop from the kitchen doorway, and then a whistle. Harry laughed against Hermione's lips as everyone in the Burrow hollered and cheered at them.

Burying her head in Harry's dress shirt as she blushed furiously, Hermione couldn't help feeling overwhelmingly happy to be surrounded by my family, friends, and the love of her life.

~

*August 16, 2002...*

*\*I was lost, I was lost*

*Crossed lines I shouldn't have crossed*

*I was lost, oh yeah\**

Hermione sighed, rubbing her pregnant stomach as she settled down onto the new armchair by the window overlooking the enormous and beautiful backyard. The Weasley men, Hermione's father, and Draco Malfoy were all lugging in their new furniture into their recently built and bought home in a small wizarding village.

Over the last few weeks, Harry and his friends had been painting the outside of their home and fixing the front and back yards by mowing the lawn and planting various shrubbery where Hermione wanted them, while the Weasley women, Jane Granger, and some of Hermione's friends painted the plain white walls of their home the colors Hermione had picked out.

Overall, Hermione found it rather strenuous. She wasn't being put to work by any means, but all she could do was survey everyone else doing the labor. It was hard letting everyone else take care of her, or their home, or just everything in general. Hermione was usually always holding the ropes, and to just sit back and "relax" was making her utterly mad!

"Where do you- want this- Hermione?" Ron puffed, startling Hermione from her musings.

"Oh," she said, biting her lip. She waved her hand almost dismissively, and sighed. "Just put it anywhere."

Harry groaned from the other side of the couch. "Hermione," he huffed, "we need an exact location right now, love."

Hermione felt her resolve shatter, and she snapped, "Well, what if I don't know where I want the sodding couch?!"

"Look Granger," Draco said, poking his head out from behind the sofa the three men were holding and giving her a frustrated look, "I know you're hormonal, pregnant, and having a hell of a time carrying around that enormous Potter baby, but we're carrying a *couch*. Will you *please* tell us where to put it?"

Hermione felt tears welling up in her eyes, and she sighed. She decided to answer the git, only because she'd never heard him beg for anything from her before.

"In front of the fireplace," she responded, glaring at Draco, "obviously."

"Right," Ron said, a bit uncomfortable at their exchange.

Harry, Ron, and Draco lifted the couch a little higher and placed it where Hermione had said, all of them giving mutual groans when they finally set it down.

"Is that all of it?" Draco asked, going to take a seat on the couch.

Hermione wasn't having it. "Don't you dare sit on that new sofa all sweaty! I'll curse you so far into next week, Draco Malfoy," she threatened.

It was then that Ginny and Luna came in. Ginny merely smirked at Draco when she saw Hermione pointing her wand straight at him.

"I told you not to get in her way, Draco," she chided.

Hermione knew that soon enough, the tears brimming in her eyes were going to splash down her cheeks and everyone would leave because they'd feel awkward. To avoid that situation, Hermione hobbled as quickly as she could to the nearest bathroom and let out her tears in there, feeling utterly stupid to be crying in the first place.

*For no reason at all*, Hermione thought angrily, wiping at her tears shakily.

Not a moment later, Harry entered without knocking, which infuriated Hermione just a bit more. That is, until she found herself in his arms, crying into his shoulder. Hermione felt a shiver go up her spine and felt so much warmer with Harry there, holding her.

"What is it, love? What's wrong now?" Harry murmured softly into her hair, running his fingers through the bushy curls. "Do you want me to hex Malfoy? I'll do it if you want me to."

"I'm just-" Hermione sighed, pressing her face further into his neck. "I just feel so helpless," she said, feeling foolish. "I want to help in creating our home, but all I'm doing is sitting around. I just hate feeling useless and powerless. It's so annoying. And these *tears* just keep coming, and they're getting on my last nerve!"

Harry pressed a kiss to her temple. "You've been doing more than you give yourself credit for; you've designed the house and you're carrying this wonderful child of ours, made with love and passion."

Hermione looked up into Harry's eyes, seeing them dark with love and longing. Her heart was hammering against her chest, and it amazed her that just his burning gaze could make her tremble with want.

Sniffing slightly, Hermione pressed her lips to his, groaning when, after a few seconds of this light caress, she felt Harry's tongue tease her mouth into opening.

"Harry," she mumbled against his lips. "Harry, we shouldn't, but I need you so badly. Everything aches with wanting."

Harry groaned. "I hate your doctor. No sex until after the baby's born? I don't think I can wait that long, love. Your doctor is an imbecile."

Hermione moaned as Harry's hand squeezed her arse and his lips traveled lower down the column of her neck.

They were interrupted by a hoarse yell from Ron calling out for Harry.

"Drat," Hermione muttered, her body tingling and burning with need. She looked up at him, lust evident in her eyes. "We'll continue this later, Potter."

Harry nodded dumbly, desire clouding his vision. "Right," he said, before pressing one lingering kiss to Hermione's lips and leaving.

But they didn't get to continue that night, or the night after that. In fact, they didn't get to make love until the twenty-second, exactly eight months since that first encounter, that first touch that had sent Hermione into a whirl of emotions. And when Hermione had come down from her ultimate high, there was a sense of foreboding that took over her, but when Harry's arms embraced her, all of her worries flew from her mind.

~

*August 23, 2002...*

*\*And yeah*

*How long must you wait for it?*

*Yeah, how long must you pay for it?*

*Yeah, how long must you wait for it?*

*For it\**

Hermione groaned when she looked outside the window of the living room. It was quite a gloomy day, the sky a depressing gray and fitting her mood perfectly. Harry was to come home from work in about half an hour for lunch, and she couldn't help wanting him there *now*. The time couldn't pass by any slower, she thought, and she missed him terribly after the night they had spent together.

She had awoken to him placing a soft kiss to her mouth that morning, and when she reached out for him, he'd held her until departing for work with another lingering kiss and a promise to come home for lunch. She'd gotten up to see him to the door, even though he had protested.

"Hermione, you should stay in bed," he'd said, trying to coax her back into the warm comfort of their mattress. "Besides, I have to Apparate there anyways."

Hermione had huffed and struggled to get on her feet. "I don't care. I want to be with you."

Harry sighed and helped her up.

"Aren't you going to have breakfast?" Hermione asked when they had passed the kitchen on their way to the back porch, where Harry was to Disapparate from.

"I had a slice of toast, Hermione. Now," he'd said when they reached the back door, looking down at her with slight concern in his green eyes, "I want you to go back to bed as soon as you see me go. I'll be back around noon, okay?" After pressing a kiss to her lips, he murmured a soft, "I love you," which she'd repeated affectionately just before he zapped off.

Even though he had looked very worried about the amount of rest she was getting, Hermione had not gone back to bed. Instead, she'd taken a short shower, dressed into her maternity sweat suit, and made herself a bowl of cinnamon and apple flavored porridge to eat with marshmallows and a side of fruit.

Thinking about her breakfast that morning was making Hermione hungry, and she didn't know if she'd be able to wait for Harry to come home. She'd been having aches in her back and abdomen since daybreak, and a few times she'd doubled over in pain. Hermione had a feeling that soon, she'd be visiting the Healer again, and she'd need her strength.

Hermione walked back into the kitchen where a pot of hot chicken soup and warm, freshly baked bread was waiting. Glancing at the clock, she realized that Harry would be home in roughly fifteen minutes.

She felt a shock of excitement and longing rush through her at the thought of Harry coming home to her. This notion brought her into clearing the small kitchen table and setting cups down where Harry and she were to sit. She couldn't help bite her lip to hold back a squeal when she decided to light a few candles.

Hermione heard the key slip into the locked door, just as she was bending over from another bolt of pain that had hit her abdomen, this time much more forceful than any of the other sharp pains she'd had before.

Hermione was glad that Harry was fumbling at the door. It gave her enough time to hide the distressed expression on her face and stand erect. When he did manage to open the door, Hermione noticed that it was sprinkling outside and that Harry had instantly sought out her form.

"Hey, baby," he said in greeting, smiling crookedly at her before putting down his briefcase and slipping off his shoes.

She answered just as the front door shut behind her fiancé. "Hey, how was work?"

Harry came to her just as she was letting out a shuddering breath. He looked at her warily, and asked, "Are you all right?"

Hermione nodded, still feeling horrible from what had just happened. She felt Harry rub her large belly, and she looked up at him. "I'm all right," she assured him, and herself. "Emily's been wreaking havoc in there, that's all."

He pressed a light kiss to her lips, and Hermione felt much better then, with his warm body pressing into her side. When Harry pulled away slightly, his face still a few inches away from hers, she said, "I made your favorite: chicken soup and baked bread."

Harry closed his eyes and moaned. "You're perfect," he said.

Hermione laughed and pulled him into the kitchen so he could help her get the other dishes and cut the deliciously warm bread as she poured them both water and the steaming chicken soup that was making her mouth water. Harry was humming as he spread butter lightly onto the sliced pieces of white bread, and Hermione grinned at the sound of his warm murmuring.

Harry caught her hand after she shut the refrigerator door, and Hermione turned to him, wondering what he was up to. He had something behind his back, and it was scaring and exciting her all at once.

"What've you got there?" she asked suspiciously.

Harry laughed and brought his hands back in front of him, handing her a slightly wet but beautiful rose. "It reminded me of you," he said as she smiled at him brightly, pressing the rose petals to her nose and inhaling deeply.

"Oh?"

Harry nodded and grinned. "Beautiful and soft," he mumbled before pressing his lips to hers.

Hermione melted into his arms, kissing him back furiously, like a woman possessed. Harry smiled against her lips before she let out a whimper. Another throb slammed against her abdomen, making her stomach clench, and she pulled away from Harry and cried out, tightening her hold on his arms.

"Hermione!" Harry shouted, clearly worried at her distress. "Hermione, love, are you all right? Do you want me to take you to St. Mungo's?"

"No," she whimpered stubbornly, gasping for breath. "I'll be fine. I'll be okay." The pain had hit full force, but it was gone after a few seconds.

Harry was looking at her with a mixture of apprehension and doubt.

"Are you positive, Hermione? You don't look so well, and I think it's better to be safe than sorry. I should take you to the hospital." He seemed to be rambling, looking around wildly as if searching for a sign of what to do next.

"Harry," she started reasonably with a tone that broke no argument, "even if I am in labor, *which I'm not*," she added firmly after seeing his obviously anxious stare. "My water hasn't broken yet. I'd still have plenty of time to get there and settle and all that good stuff."

Harry blinked at her. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," Hermione said with slight exasperation. "Now, can we please eat?"

Taking a huge breath, as if it were causing him pain, Harry nodded. "But if you feel *any* discomfort at all, tell me and I'll do whatever I can."

A small smile bloomed across her face. "All right."

"Do you promise?" he asked, his tone almost scared.

Hermione nodded, her smile falling at his look of deep concern and love. "I promise," she said.

Harry helped her to her seat, and the next hour was passed with small talk, concerned glances, and the slurp or crunch of food being consumed. During this time, Hermione would look down when Harry stared at her as if expecting her to sprout two heads. It was driving her crazy, these penetrating stares he'd give, making her feel slightly uncomfortable.

"Harry!" Hermione finally snapped, slamming her cup onto the table when she'd caught him watching her again. "I told you that I'm- *oh!*"

Hermione's stomach clenched and she cried out, pressing a hand to her pregnant stomach; Harry was by her side before she realized it, and he was coaching her into breathing deeply and slowly. It was when the pain subsided that Hermione felt something wet trickled down her thighs.

"Bloody hell!"

~

*Three hours later...*

*\*I was scared, I was scared*

*Tired and under prepared*

*But I'll wait for it\**

"I'm so tired, Harry," Hermione couldn't help complaining. Her head was throbbing and those stupid contractions were driving her mental. Tears were suddenly falling down her cheeks, and she was crying, "Please make it stop, it hurts so bad."

"I know, love," Harry said, looking so scared. "The medicine should make you feel better. Just give it a few minutes, baby."

Whimpering, Hermione pressed her head back into the pillows, trying desperately to rest. Harry's hand was spreading her hair back from her sweaty forehead, and then he was applying a wonderfully cool wet cloth against her head.

"Oh, God, you're a saint, Harry," she said in thanks, sighing softly as he continued running his fingers through her awfully tangled hair as best as he could.

Just a few hours ago, when they'd arrived at St. Mungo's, Harry had almost had a panic attack when the

Medi-Witches and healers had said that their night of sexual intercourse had triggered the contractions. Hermione had merely moaned in slight regret, but they'd said that the baby was waiting for the right moment to come out anyways. Her healer had said the baby was about 7 to 8 pounds already.

"That can't be possible!" she'd said. "It's been only 8 months; surely you must be mistaken."

But Healer Mallory, a woman with kind blue eyes and graying brown hair had said gently, "You're a witch, my dear, and witches have a tendency to give birth in roughly their 8<sup>th</sup> month; the fetus grows differently for Muggles. You and your child are ready."

And if her healer was correct, she'd been in labor for about 10 hours already.

"And how is that possible?" Hermione had asked in slight panic.

Healer Mallory smiled softly. "You slept through most of it, my dear."

Hermione didn't understand how she could've slept through such pain, but then she'd thought of how tired she'd been after making love with Harry not once, not twice, but a whopping three times.

She was brought out of her musings when Healer Mallory opened the door to her room.

"How're you feeling, Miss Granger?"

She was about to respond to the healer's question, about to say she felt miserable, but instead she said, "Call me Mrs. Potter, if you please."

Healer Mallory looked at Harry with an eyebrow raised, then nodded when he gave her a lopsided grin.

"Right then, Mrs. Potter."

Hermione grinned up at Harry brightly, and he beamed down at her, pressing a soft kiss to her lips.

"Well," Hermione responded after a minute. "I think the contractions are lessening in pain, thanks to that potion you gave me, but I was wondering when I'd get out of this first period of labor."

The healer smiled. "I was just going to check if you're ready to prepare for the next phase. I'm just going to see how far along you've dilated," she'd said before pulling up the covers.

Hermione blushed slightly, still not used to the healer checking her, even though she knew that Healer Mallory had probably seen many women in this similar position.

She looked up at Harry, and he smiled at her reassuringly, softly, lovingly. She felt warm all over to know that her fiancé was here in the room with her, caring for her while her parents, friends, and some very close professors were in the waiting room, all of them supporting and anticipating Emily's arrival.

"It seems we're ready for the next period in the first stage," the healer said.

Startled, Hermione looked away from Harry's gaze to see Healer Mallory tucking the covers back down Hermione's legs.

"Really?" Harry asked, seeming amazingly calm. Hermione had a feeling he was quaking on the inside.

"Hermione's dilated a good four and a half centimeters. Your contractions are going to get longer, my dear, and the pain will go away mostly. It'll wear off in a few hours, but I'll give you another dose if it's unbearable," the healer said, writing something on her clipboard. She looked up after a moment. "Do you have any questions?"

Hermione nodded her head, biting her bottom lip anxiously. "In this active phase of the labor, what'll be the difference? I know the contractions are to get longer, as you said, but what should I expect?"

"Well," the healer said, setting down her clipboard. "You won't be able to talk during your contractions,

and now that the potion is taking effect, you should experience some slight dizziness and drowsiness. Also, now that I've given you that pain reliever, my dear, I can't have you getting up."

Hermione nodded, asking this time, "And how long will this phase last?"

The healer smiled sympathetically. "Up to six hours or more," she said.

Hermione let out a puff of breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. Why couldn't Emily just slide out of there already? Frustration gripped her, and she felt her eyes brim with tears.

"It'll be fine, love. You're doing so great," Harry whispered into her ear, stroking her hair.

Hermione sniffed.

Biting his lip, Harry turned to Healer Mallory. "Can I have a private word with you?"

Just as the older witch nodded, Hermione whimpered, "Don't leave me."

*\*And if you go, if you go  
And leave me down here on my own  
Then I'll wait for you, yeah\**

Harry turned to his fiancée, and said, "I'll be back in a flash, baby. I promise you."

Hermione gave a sob. "Please hurry back."

Harry looked torn; he didn't want to leave her, but he just needed to ask the healer something very important. Harry had to know what to do when the pregnancy would get intense, what to tell Hermione and how to encourage her. "I'll be right outside, Hermione," he assured, pressing a swift kiss to her lips before heading out.

Hermione watched him go, her lip trembling, and then felt foolish when he left the door open and everything, so he could keep an eye on her, and she could watch him. He was only a few feet away, and she missed him.

~

*Seven hours later...*

*\*And yeah  
How long must you wait for it?  
Yeah, how long must you pay for it?  
Yeah, how long must you wait for it?\**

"Harry," Hermione murmured, shivering, her hand reaching out for his. "Harry, c-can I have some water?"

"Of course you can, love," he replied just as shakily.

Hermione was currently in the Transition Period of the first stage, which was the most intense by far. The contractions were about a minute long and coming roughly every three minutes. She was starting to lose it. Hermione wasn't sure she could continue with the labor. The pain was starting to become agonizing, and she felt so bad for snapping at Harry every once in a while, but she was feeling nauseas and there was this amazingly uncomfortable rectal pressure.

"I don't think I can do this anymore, Harry," she moaned after taking a sip of water from a straw. "Tell the Healers that they can all go home now, because I just can't do it."

"Don't lose faith now, love. You've come so far, and you're doing such a wonderful job," Harry said, then groaned when Hermione clamped down on his hand and cried out.

Another contraction was taking over her, and it was worse than before. Harry was telling her to breathe, in and out in that stupid pattern that sounded incredibly slow in her ears, and she wanted to give up; everything hurt so badly. But Harry continued to coach her through it, telling her that it'd be over in a few seconds, that Emily would be coming out to greet them soon.

And that's the thought that kept her going. She wanted to see her child, wanted to know if she had her father's eyes.

Hermione fell back onto her pillows, gasping for breath and crying. The Healer was there, saying something to a couple of Medi-Witches that Hermione couldn't quite hear. Harry was placing kisses against her temple and dabbing her cheeks and forehead with that cool, damp towel.

Her head swiveled to the clock on the wall to the left of the door. She couldn't believe that it was nine in the morning the next day. She was going to die, she was sure of it.

"Harry?" she questioned, her body still shivering.

"Yeah?"

"Am I dying?" she asked, tears falling rapidly from her eyes.

"No," Harry said firmly. "Don't say stuff like that, Hermione. Do you hear me?"

Hermione nodded, not even aware that the Healer was checking under her blanket again. She found that she didn't really care anymore.

"Right, then, my dear," the healer said. Hermione had the urge to hit her. "I think it's time to start pushing."

"What?" Harry and Hermione both murmured in shock.

Healer Mallory smiled. "In roughly an hour, you shall have your baby in your arms, but only if you push when I tell you to, all right, my dear?"

Suddenly Hermione didn't know if she wanted to strike the healer for calling her "my dear" again, or if she wanted to hug her for the news she'd just sprung upon them. In just an hour, she'd be holding her-  
*oh!*

With a grunt, Hermione felt the urge to push until the child was out, and the healer advised her to, counting to ten before telling her to stop. It was one of the wildest sensations Hermione had ever felt, and it was making her body shudder with excitement, causing some of the pain to dull.

Harry was there, every step of the way, holding her hand, encouraging her, practically helping her push by bringing her up forward when she needed his help. When she struggled, he'd assist her in anyway possible, and with their combined efforts, with their strength and love, they made it through.

Soon enough, their ears were ringing with their daughter's cry, and it was just like a beautiful song. The song of life.

*\*Singing please, please, please  
Come back and sing to me, to me, me  
Come on and sing it out, now, now  
Come on and sing it out to me, me  
Come back and sing\**

## **Epilogue**

*August 24, 2002...*

Harry was there, every step of the way, holding her hand, encouraging her, practically helping her push by bringing her up forward when she needed his help. When she struggled, he'd assist her in anyway possible, and with their combined efforts, with their strength and love, they made it through.

Soon enough, their ears were ringing with their daughter's cry, and it was just like a beautiful song. The song of life.

Except this song of life wasn't their daughter.

"It's a boy!" cried Healer Mallory.

Hermione fell back onto her pillows in exhaustion and shock.

"A boy?" Hermione whispered in astonishment. She turned her head to see what Harry's reaction was but then whipped it back when the healer placed her son on her belly.

Harry's mouth dropped open as he took in the sight of his *son*, wailing at the top of his lungs as the healer wrapped him in a blanket. Harry was astounded, and furthermore, extremely happy. It didn't matter that his expectations had been let down, this little blessing of a boy was *perfect*.

After a few seconds in his mother's arms, Healer Mallory whisked him away to clean him. Hermione turned bright and teary eyes to Harry.

"I thought you said it was going to be a girl," Harry said, wondering how this had happened.

"I thought so too, but oh, Harry, he's beautiful." Hermione turned her gaze to the Medi-Witch whom was swaddling her baby. "It's a boy," she murmured. "Good heavens," Hermione said, crying and laughing all at once, "It's a boy!"

Harry was laughing with joy, tears running slowly down his face in sheer happiness. He quickly headed to the door and stuck out his head, turning his face so he could look down the corridor where his family and close friends were gathered.

"Hey, Ron!" Harry called loudly. Ron looked up from his seat at the end of the hall; he stood up in confusion and asked what'd happened in a panic. "It's a boy!"

"A *boy*!?" Ron shouted, before he whooped and yelled down to the other members in the waiting room. "Hey, you lot! It's a boy!"

Harry threw his head back and laughed before retreating into the room. But while he'd been happily shouting his glee, something inside the room had gone horribly wrong. He knew it the minute he set his eyes on Hermione.

"Harry," she gasped desperately; her eyes were pained, and he was immediately at her side, at her aid.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

"Harry, something's happening. Oh, it *hurts*."

~

Harry's heart was overfilled with love at that moment. He was gazing at his beautiful fiancée holding their *twins*, a healthy boy and girl that Hermione had somehow managed to push out of her.

It was a complete and utter shock to both Harry and Hermione that they were having two babies; Hermione had just about fainted at the news.

"Harry?" she whispered. Harry could tell she was more than exhausted. Carefully, he reached out for the closest baby, Emily, and cradled her, grinning down at his baby girl. "What're we going to name him?"

Hermione was smiling at him when he looked at her from his seat at her bedside. She was glowing, and Harry couldn't help but place a soft kiss to her lips.

"Well, love, what do *you* want to name him?"

She thought for a moment, back to when she didn't know the sex of the baby and had chosen a name for each gender.

"I really like the name Jeffrey; it means Gift of Peace. Before I knew the sex of the baby, I looked up a bunch of names; I thought of your father, and I looked up his name. James means Supplanter. So, then I looked up other names with the same meaning. I came up with about ten names, and Jacob just stuck with me."

"Jeffrey Jacob Potter?" Harry asked, his face breaking out into a huge grin.

Hermione nodded her head animatedly. "Do you like it?"

"Yes," Harry said truthfully. "I love it."

~

Jeffrey Jacob Potter was born at 9:19AM on a cloudy Wednesday morning, weighing in at 8lbs. 4ozs. He was 22 ½ inches long. His sister, Emily Zoe Potter, was born 44 minutes later at 10:03AM. She was 7lbs. 12 ½ozs. and 20 ½ inches long. While Emily had a mop of black curls atop her head, Jeffrey only had a few wisps of light brown hair.

They both had dark gray-blue eyes that a few weeks after their birth, turned a beautiful emerald green.

~

*6 months later... March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003*

"Where're my favorite niece and nephew?" Ron called as soon as Harry and Hermione turned up at his flat in Diagon Alley.

Hermione laughed softly and looked down at Emily. The infant was currently very engaged in blowing bubbles with her mouth, and when Hermione turned to look at Jeffrey, whom was being held by his father, he was grasping Harry's glasses and squealing.

Looking around, Hermione smiled at all of her friends. She exchanged hugs and kisses with Luna and Ginny, and hugged various Weasleys before finally reaching Ron.

"They're right here," Harry said, shutting his eyes as to not get hit with his spectacles. Jeffrey laughed at the silly scrunched up face his father made. Harry carefully disentangled himself from his son's clutches and handed him to Ron. Jeffrey's eyes grew wide as he stared at Ron, but before long, Jeffrey was clutching Ron's vivid red hair and laughing as if it were the funniest thing in the world.

Placing a soft kiss to Emily's baby soft curls, Hermione carefully left her in Ginny and Draco's care before turning to Ron and giving him a hug.

"Happy birthday, Ron," she said, handing him two presents.

"Two?" Ron asked, grinning widely as he took them. He shook the boxes and wondered aloud, "What's in it?"

Harry laughed, the quiet music in the background giving the room a calming feel, as well as the soft

lighting and the gentle, cool breeze blowing in from slightly opened windows. He took the bag of baby essentials away from Hermione, whom smiled at him in slight thanks.

"Well, you'll have to wait until you open all of your gifts, eh?" Harry said, waggling his eyebrows. He held the bulky yellow bag up in his arms for Ron to see. "Now, more importantly, where can I put this?"

Ron smiled and led them to one of the two guest rooms, only to find it occupied with a flushed Angelina and goofily grinning Fred. Ron comically covered Jeffrey's eyes, shooting daggers at his brother.

Fred ignored his brother, just to irritate him more. "So, Harry and Hermione, decided to get back from that honeymoon of yours, I see."

Harry grinned while Hermione blushed prettily. They'd gotten married about a month back and went on a honeymoon to Spain for just four days in the middle of February. They were supposed to be staying for a week, but Harry and Hermione could not bear to leave the babies alone for more than a few days. They'd agreed that Emily and Jeffrey were much too young to be separated for that long from their parents, even with the reassurance of the healers that a week away would be all right, so they'd come back just a few days before Ron's birthday.

"That, Frederick Weasley, is none of your concern," Angelina said, glaring at her fiancé.

Fred blinked down at Angelina after gulping hard. "Yes, dear," he said glumly.

"Right," Ron said. "I'll, err, leave you two at it. But don't go *too* far at it, and if you are going to, err, you know, *please* don't stain the sodding sheets."

Leaving a flustered Angelina and a laughing Fred behind, Ron led Harry and Hermione into the farther guest room. Harry set down the baby bag onto the bed in the empty green room.

Hermione looked around the room in slight surprise. "You painted it green? I would've thought-"

"Luna couldn't bear for the other guest room to be orange, too, so she picked this color," Ron said, his ears turning a bit red at the tips.

Jeffrey let out another squeal and pulled at Ron's crimson ears.

Harry and Hermione laughed. "Jeffrey's very excited to see you," Hermione said, snorting a bit unladylike.

Jeffrey had never heard his mother snort before, so he turned widened emerald eyes to Hermione before holding out his arms for her. Ron laughed and placed Jeffrey into Hermione's arms, whom then proceeded to squeeze her nose.

A few moments later, Ginny came in, followed by Draco, bouncing a crying Emily in her arms. Harry cringed when Jeffrey then burst into tears; he always cried when Emily was in discomfort and vice-versa. It made everything just a bit harder to deal with, but Hermione and Harry took it as best as they could.

Jeffrey calmed after Emily was changed of her soiled diapers and only sniffing. Sighing, Draco raked a frustrated hand through his hair. "Emily scared the sodding hell out of me. I was playing with her and then her face scrunched up and turned red and I thought she was suffocating or something!"

Ginny comforted Draco and calmed him down. Harry and Hermione traded slightly amused looks.

Luna was at the doorframe a second later, asking a bit distantly, "Would you do this with your own child?"

Ginny shot Luna a look, and Draco looked a little scared suddenly. Hermione was unexpectedly anxious; something felt very odd all of a sudden. Ron looked at Ginny and Draco a little suspiciously. He asked slowly, "What're you two playing at?"

Ginny and Draco shook their heads stubbornly; weeks later, everyone found out why they'd been so jumpy: they'd eloped and Ginny was expecting.

"Why didn't you tell us sooner?!" Mrs. Weasley had raved.

"I wasn't positive then! I'd taken a Muggle pregnancy test, and I wasn't sure if I should trust it, so I made an appointment with St. Mungo's about a week ago, and only then did I know I was *really* pregnant."

"There are Muggle pregnancy tests?" Mr. Weasley asked with interest.

Mrs. Weasley shot him a death glare, and he promptly shut his mouth. She'd turned back to her only daughter and her "boyfriend" and asked, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Hermione shot Harry a look, biting her lip. Harry gave her a grimace before turning back to watch the Weasley women battle.

"What do you mean, 'what are you going to do about it?'" Ginny asked, her face flushing red.

"Marriage, Gin," Ron croaked; he couldn't believe his baby sister was going to have a baby, and *before* him.

"Well, you see," Draco finally spoke up, looking ill. "We're already married."

Ginny gave a slightly hesitant smile before holding out her left hand to show her family the amazing sized diamond rock on her ring finger.

Mrs. Weasley had then promptly passed out.

Suffice to say, March had been a very exciting month. But with March came the changes, the grieving, the happiness, and life. It was slow and quick and painful yet so straightforward all at once. Relationships blossoming, children growing, old friends and family dying. It was life. Meaning.

Through the years, Hermione would look back on the simplicity of her childhood while she watched her children play out in the garden. And Harry would watch Hermione, so blissful and happy that she'd given him everything he'd ever wanted: love, family, and life. So much joy she'd given him, so much that they didn't stop with those twins, but added onto their family tree with three more beautiful, healthy children.

Two years after Jeffrey and Emily came Aria Gabrielle Potter in the month of October, with waves of light brown hair and eyes just like her mother's. Harry and Hermione had thought that this was the last bun in the oven, until Hermione felt those telltale effects again just a few months after the birth of their third child.

The fourth Potter baby was another girl, and Harry and Hermione could not have been any happier. They named her Amberly Maeve Potter; the odd thing about her birth was that she was born during a blizzard in November. A few years later, Harry found it rather amusing because his youngest daughter had an amazingly wild head of dark auburn hair and Hermione (amusingly, of course) blamed it on that damned blizzard.

But they didn't stop at four children. Harry felt the need to have one more. When he'd confronted Hermione about the idea in their bed one night, with the children fast asleep, she had agreed so quickly Harry could've sworn she'd known he was going to ask.

Their fifth and last child was named Nicholas Eron Potter, looking the replica of his father.

But of course, the Potters weren't the only ones to expand their family line. The Weasleys were producing spawn like no tomorrow. Ron and Luna ended up having five beautiful children, three of them redheaded boys, the other two adorable little strawberry blond witches, and the Malfoys had three babies, two of them amazingly blond boys and the other, a tiny redheaded baby girl.

To say the Potters were happy was an understatement. They tackled each day with vigor, never dwelling too much on the past or future, but focusing solely on the present and loving every minute of it. The couple had its bumps, oh yes, but they always made it through in the end. There was absolutely no way they'd change a thing.