

Road Trip

By

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“Mum, you’re talking about what Harry wants, not what he needs.” The brunette said dismissively. “Harry has never known what he needs. Pretty much everyone has gone out of their way to ignore his needs for his entire life. He needs me, and I’m going.”

“Hermione...”

“I’m twenty one years old Mother. I admit that I need to heal from what happened, but Harry and I will heal each other and I can restart my sessions with Dr. Borages when we get back. We’re the only ones who know what the other has been through, what the other needs.” She jammed the last of her clothing into the duffel, and then waved her wand at the bag.

Even after three years of seeing her daughter casually using magic, Cathrine never quite got used to seeing things like the overstuffed duffel shrinking to the size of a change purse.

“Hermione, you can’t do this. You can’t use Harry to get over what happened with Ron or his family.” In truth, Cathrine Granger had never cared for Ronald Weasley, not in the slightest. She had found him condescending, ignorant, uncouth, and just generally unsuitable for her daughter, but the young man had made her only child happy, and that had to count for something. The news of the almost total destruction of the Weasley family had saddened Hermione’s mother far more than she had ever expected.

The bushy haired woman wheeled to face her mother, her eyes shining with barely restrained tears. “This isn’t about Ron or the Weasleys. This is about Harry and me. Harry told me that he needed to get away from the attention and the memories, and I told him that I was going with him.” The tears began to flow as the young woman wrapped her mother in a crushing hug. “This isn’t about Ron...” she sobbed. “I can’t lose Harry too. I just can’t.”

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“Have you got enough money?” Fred Weasley asked.

“Yes mum.” Harry said quietly. “I’m also wearing my good clean boxers in case I get into an accident and end up in the hospital.”

“I’m so pleased to know about your underwear choices.” The redhead said with what had become a very rare smile. “Are you sure going off with Hermione is a good idea?”

“I am definitely positive that it’s an exceedingly bad idea.” Harry said with his own sad smile. “But I don’t see that I really have a choice. I have to get out of here. Everything here reminds me of everyone that died, your parents, Ron, George... Gin. Hermione insists that she’s coming. If I don’t get out of here, I’ll end up going killing someone.”

“Like anyone would notice one more.” Fred lightly punched Harry in the shoulder, and then his expression once again became serious. “I see George and Bill every time I turn around.” He admitted.

“And you deal with it by burying yourself in your work. If it weren’t for Verity and Fleur, you wouldn’t eat and your robes would be falling off you as they decayed.” Harry picked up a bright blue Pygmy puff off the display counter and idly stroked the creature, causing it to thrum happily. “If I had a job, that’s probably what I would do, but no one wants to hire Harry Potter, they all want the Chosen One,

or the Man Who Won.” The Pygmy puff’s sounds of happiness suddenly reminded Harry of Arnold when he was perched on... He put the animated bit of fluff back into its display case.

“Harry...” Fred shook his head, and then pulled the younger man into a hug. “If you need anything, just call. I’ll be there as fast as I can. There aren’t that many of us Weasleys left, we need to look after each other.”

Harry couldn’t think of a single thing to say, so he just returned the hug from the redhead. Behind him the tinkling of a bell signaled that the door of the shop had opened.

“Good, you are still here,” a melodious voice filled the air like music. Since that horrible day, the music had become a very sad song. “I was afraid that I would miss saying goodbye.”

“Fleur, talk to him. I’m heading into the back; I’ve got work to do.” Fred said, relieved that the French witch had shown up before Harry had left.

“We are having dinner tonight Fredrick, you and I” The woman said to the redhead’s disappearing back. “I expect to find you washed and clean shaven.”

“Hello Fleur.”

“Hello ‘arri.” The platinum blond said.

“Why is it the only time you have your accent anymore is when you say my name?”

“Because it makes you smile ‘arri. You know this.” She struck a pose. “How do you like my ‘Widows Weeds’?”

Harry snorted. “As usual, on you anything looks good.” He eyed her for a moment. “Are you alright?”

“I miss my Bill every minute of every day. It is worse at night. If I’d known how short a time we were going to have together...”

“How is little Victoire?”

Fleur gently caressed her bulging belly. “She misses her father, other than that; she is fine and growing everyday. You will be back to meet her when she makes her debut?”

“I’ll be back well before then Fleur, I’m only leaving for a month, maybe two. Long enough so that everyone can focus on something other than me.” He gestured toward the woman’s stomach. “May I?”

Fleur offered her most dazzling smile. “Of course.” She was always amused by Harry’s constant need to touch the visible evidence of her pregnancy. It was as if the young man whose life was so marked by pain and death found the idea of the creation of new life to be almost holy. She placed her hands on top of his and guided him to the places where she could feel her little beater getting in a few practice swings. When a look of wondrous delight appeared on his face, it was all she could do not to interrupt the moment by pulling him into a bone crushing hug.

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Robert Granger looked up from his carefully tended roses when he first heard the unmistakable sound of Harry's 1968 BSA Lightning, the thrum of the dual-carb 650cc vertical twins stirred something primal in the man's chest. Robert fought against the smile that threatened to cross his lips. The front gardens of the neighborhood was filled with other weekend gardeners tending to their own lawns and flowerbeds. Almost to a man, the male neighbors were looking at the big bike with sighs of deep longing and envy for the young man who was dismounting and removing his helmet. On the other hand the women of the neighborhood tended to look at the bike with undisguised loathing, though more than a few eyed the boy the way hungry dogs eye a bone. The best part was the way the boy was completely unaware of how he affected the women around him.

Robert rose from his flowerbed and approached the young man while wiping his hands on a small towel. "So, this is it then. You're leaving?"

"Yes sir." Harry couldn't meet his eyes. "Has Mrs. Granger talked Hermione out of coming?" he asked hopefully.

"You should know better than anyone that once Hermione gets an idea into her head, no one ever talks her out of it," the dentist smiled wryly. "Though, admittedly her mother is still trying. You know..." Robert turned his attention back to the Lightning. "If you're going to run off with my only daughter, you should leave me this bike. It's only fair."

Harry smiled for the first time since arriving. "In order for that to be a fair trade, I'd have to throw in a set of leathers and helmets for both you and Mrs. Granger."

"Cathrine would have my guts for garters." Robert said wistfully. "This trip you're taking, you've got money?"

"I do." Harry admitted.

"I don't want my daughter staying in any filthy hostels," the Dentist said. "Here." He pressed a large roll of bank notes into Harry's hand. "That's a thousand pounds in twenties. If you need more, call me. This," he said adding a credit card to the roll in Harry's hands, "is for emergencies."

"Mr. Granger, I've got money." Harry said in an embarrassed tone.

"Just take it. Humor me." Robert guided the young man toward his house. "Have you settled on an itinerary?"

"We're taking the Chunnel to Coquelles. From there, we're heading to Pamplona for the Running of the Bulls. I've always wanted to see that."

"Do you actually believe Hermione will let you risk yourself like that?" His best friend's father asked.

"Good lord no. I want to SEE it, preferably looking down from one of those first floor restaurants with a nice meal in front of me and a wine glass in my hand. There is no way I would run in the street with a bunch of bulls. I've done more than enough stupid things to last a lifetime. I'm going purely as a spectator. Anyway after a couple of days in Pamplona, I thought that we'd wing it. When it was just me, I was going to head to a beach and hibernate for a while; I've never really seen the ocean. With

Hermione along, I'm guessing we'll end up doing educational things." Harry smiled. "Museums, Art Galleries and such."

Robert Granger smiled. "Welcome to my world. Her mother has been educating me for most of twenty five years." The humor drained from the man. "I know the two of you have been through a lot, that you've seen things that no one your age should ever have seen, and that you've both done things that give you nightmares." He hesitated for a moment. "If I'd known, really known what you were doing, I'd have grabbed Hermione and gotten my family out of this country so fast your head would have spun."

"I know. Hermione threatened to do horrible things to me if I told you."

"I thought as much. The psychologist that Professor McGonagall found for Hermione tells me that she is suffering from Post Traumatic Shock Syndrome and a massive case of survivor's guilt. She also recommends that Hermione not go on this trip with you. She says that going with you will only make Hermione worse."

"I don't know anything about psychology Mr. Granger." The raven haired man said. "I also don't know much about families. I do know that I'm alive because I've done what Hermione told me to do. I know that the war was won by a lot of us following plans that Hermione helped to develop, casting magic that she and a very few others researched, rediscovered or created. I know that Hermione watched the man she loved die, and I know she's in pain."

"Harry..." the dentist said.

"I also know that there is only one man Hermione loves more than she loved Ron, and that man is you sir. Tell me to leave without her and I'll get back on the bike and be gone before she can get outside. I don't want to be responsible for making Hermione ill or unhappy."

"That's not what I'm saying Harry. I'm not forbidding Hermione from doing anything. She's old enough to make her own decisions. What I'm asking is that you watch out for her. She's my only child. She's been through hell with you, and as much as I hate to admit it, I trust you with her. Take care of my little girl Harry."

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"Harry!" Hermione called from a now open first floor window. "I'm still not ready, you can wait inside. Daddy, you can quit trying to talk him out of our trip."

Hermione Granger pulled her head back into the room and closed the window. "He's trying to either intimidate Harry into leaving without me, or trying to get him to change his plans so that we end up at a Butlin's holiday camp."

"Your Dad's worried about you." Cathrine said quietly. "And so am I. This whole trip is just so unlike you Hermione."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"Hermione you haven't packed a single book. Not one. You haven't left this house without something

to read since you were three years old.”

“We’re going on vacation Mum. A vacation. That means we are looking to relax.”

“I’ve spoken with Harry, Love. He tells me he’s leaving to get away from the pressure that everyone is heaping on him. That he’s frightened by what he might do if he doesn’t get away.” Cathrine reached out and stroked her daughter’s hair. “Are you running away too, or are you just following him?”

“Mother.”

“Are you sleeping with him? Doing that would not be the best idea given how you just lost...”

“Mother! No. Just... no.”

“I got you these just in case.” Cathrine Granger pressed the small paper bag into her daughter’s hands.

Hermione opened the package, her eyes grew wide. “Mother!” she gasped as a blush spread over her face.

“Just in case. It never hurts to be prepared.” The older woman said with her own blush. “Be careful Hermione, alright?”

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Hermione stormed down the stairs and entered the sitting room where she found Harry and her father.

“Good bye Daddy. Let’s go Harry. We’re leaving.”

Harry and Robert exchanged a look.

“Now Harry.” The young woman said from the door way.

“Hermione, we’ve got plenty of time; the train doesn’t even board for another five hours.” Harry said. “You can take your time saying good bye.”

“I’ve said goodbye Harry. We’re leaving. Now.”

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“Remember, they drive on the right over here.” Hermione said tightening her grip around Harry waist.

“I know that Hermione.” Harry paused as he shifted gears and accelerated to merge onto the French A16 Motorway heading for Boulogne. “Good job on charming the helmets, I can hear you perfectly. So, are you talking to me again?”

“I’m not mad at you Harry.”

“Hermione, you’ve said maybe twelve words to me since we left your house. You wouldn’t even look at me the whole time on the train.”

She opened her mouth to disagree, and then closed it. "I was embarrassed. Mum sprung a surprise on me at the last minute and it's taken this long for me to be able to speak to you without screaming."

"What could she possibly have done that would embarrass you that much? I mean you still managed to yell at me that time I accidentally walked in on you and Ron..."

"Yelling at you is easy Harry, apologizing for what my parent's think we're doing isn't."

There was a short pause until Harry asked. "And what do they think we're doing?"

"My dear mother believes we are sleeping together."

"Oh." Harry paused for another long moment. "Well, that's awkward."

"Oh, I'm not done yet. She hands me a bag from the chemists I buy my hair products from. In the bag is a box of condoms. Thirty six condoms. I can never go back to that shop."

That seemed like an overreaction to Harry, but he decided that actually saying that might not be the best idea. "Thirty six? Is that a lot?"

"It's about thirty six more than we're going to need Harry," Hermione responded in an icy tone.

"Oh, yeah of course." Harry acknowledged knowing that he should just shut up on the topic, but he just couldn't. "Did you keep them?"

"Well I wasn't going to leave them in my room... Why do you care if I kept them?"

"Could I have one? I've heard about them, but never seen one."

It was Hermione's turn to pause. "Are you joking with me?"

"Hermione, the only girls I've ever had much contact with have been you, Ginny and our other classmates. The only girls I've been alone with in a private setting are you, Ginny and Cho. You know what a disaster my time with Cho was, and nothing ever happened with Ginny beyond a few snogging sessions. I don't even know if wizards use condoms." Harry maneuvered the Lightning to pass a lorry. "Vernon never gave me the 'the talk', thank god, and what passed for sex education at my primary school covered what happens when the sperm meets the egg and was noticeably lacking in the basic mechanics of the act. My sole source of information in that vein has been Dean's rather vast collection of pornography, which I don't think is very realistic."

"If the horrible stuff I confiscated from him in the common room sixth year was representative, no, it's not." Hermione shifted in her seat trying to find a more comfortable position. "How long of a ride am I in for today?"

"Doing the speed limit, about ten hours."

"I don't know if I can ride this thing for ten hours Harry." She said

“Yeah, I didn’t think so.” He checked his mirrors and looked around. “That’s why I’ve been waiting for a long empty bit of road.”

“What?”

“Hang on.” Harry did something with his left hand on the handlebars, and the motorcycle and riders disilluioned, and then lifted off the ground.

“Harry!” The bushy haired woman shrieked and tightened her grip on Harry. “Put this thing back on the ground.”

“Sorry Hermione, this is a non stop flight.” Harry laughed.

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“Welcome to the Hotel Casa Azcona, how may I help you?” the middle-aged woman behind the check in desk asked, correctly guessing the pair in front of her were English.

“Two rooms reserved for Potter.” Harry said quietly. He hated announcing his name in public for fear of the reactions it would garner, but here in the greater world... who would know him?

“Oh yes Mr. Potter.” She reached into the file next to her station and removed the paper work associated with taking a room. “If you and your companion would sign for your keys?”

“Thank you.” She said taking the papers back. “As a personal aside Mr. Potter, I would like to thank you and Ms. Granger for your efforts last year.” Seeing their alarmed expressions she smiled. “You didn’t know that this is a mixed hotel? I’m sorry for surprising you. This used to be my family’s manor house. If you need anything from either side of the magical divide, please feel free to call the front desk, either via the in room phones or the floo, which ever you are most comfortable with.”

“Uh, thank you.” Harry said recovering from his surprise. “Could you suggest a place we could go for dinner?”

The woman smiled. “If not for Ms. Granger, I would be inviting you home with me to meet my daughter. That being said, I would be remiss not to recommend our dinning room. My Sister is the chef and is very good.”

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Hermione Granger drained her glass, then refilled her glass from the bottle on the table while marveling at what a... boy Harry was. He had roused her from her room at 6:00 am so that they might ‘see’ the running of the bulls. The actual event was interesting for almost fifteen minutes, but she found Harry’s company and enthusiasm more than made up for the boredom of the spectacle in the streets below. Who would have thought that Harry Potter of all people would turn out to be a fan of Hemingway?

They had spent the morning watching the repeated waves of fools running in front of what appeared to Hermione to be severely upset bulls, though frankly after what she had seen during the war, the rampaging cattle weren’t all that threatening really. Still, Hermione surprised herself when she found

that she was inordinately proud that Harry hadn't shown the slightest interest in joining in on the mad scramble to avoid the angry bulls.

At eleven o'clock, Harry had gotten her to follow him back to the hotel where they got on his motorcycle and made their way to the Castle of Javier. This example of medieval Muggle fortification was something of a disappointment after seeing the magnificence that Hogwarts exemplified, but Hermione forced herself to see the castle as she might have prior to her first year, and had to admit that she would have found the structure impressive, with an air of history and heritage. According to the tour guide, it was the birthplace of the patron saint of Navarre, San Francisco Javier and each year thousands of pilgrims visited. Today however the crowd was thin, perhaps the spectacle of the first day of the festival of San Fermín was distracting the tourists.

Following that tour Harry had accompanied her to the Museo de Navarra with almost no complaint. His only comment was 'what ever you want to do Hermione.' The snarky sod even bought her several embarrassing T-shirts from the Museum's gift shop.

"I had a wonderful time today Harry." She said before taking another bite of the mussel dish that the waiter had recommended.

"We deserve a bit of time off." Harry said. "Any preferences for where we head next? I only got our rooms for two nights; we'll need to be moving on."

Hermione took a long pull on her wine, draining the glass yet again, she then reached for the bottle for another refill. "What had you planned to do before I invited myself along?"

"I was going to head to a beach and girl watch for a month or so."

"So, my coming along is cramping your style?" She asked with a grin.

"My style? Since when do I have a style? You know I'm almost as smooth as a mile of gravel road. At the end of the month I would have probably been sunburned and I still wouldn't know what a condom looks like. You still owe me one by the way." He said before taking a sip from his own glass of wine.

"Oh yes. Will you want me to help you try it on?" she cooed in a throaty voice.

Harry choked on his wine. "Damn it Hermione." He gasped, trying to catch his breath while wiping his mouth with a napkin. "Don't do that to me."

The young woman grinned. "To answer your question, if you feel up to it, I've always wanted to do a bicycle tour of Provence. Explore the villages, tour the wineries, and just experience the area."

Harry hesitated. "Well, you'd have to teach me to ride a bicycle, but I'm game."

Hermione lost her grin, horrified at how she had put her foot in it for the second time in two days. "Oh, Harry, I'm sorry, I keep doing that to you..."

"Hermione," Harry reached across the table to take her hand. "You didn't do anything to me." He shrugged. "I just never learned to ride a bicycle. Provence it is."

“Thank you Harry.” She said softly. “How long a drive is it? On the ground I mean.”

That brought Harry’s grin to the forefront. “Well,” he said, pulling a map from his back pocket, “Let’s see... Looks to be about 800 kilometers to Avignon... Call it eight hours or so... At the speed limit... About half that in the air.”

“On the road is fine Harry. You almost made me wet myself when you suddenly took off.”

“Oh, well, we don’t want that.” Harry said, still grinning. “Especially when I consider where you’ll be sitting.” He dodged the slap she aimed at his arm and drained his glass. “You ready to head up to the rooms?”

“Yes.” Hermione confirmed as she rose from her seat. She waited a moment while Harry signed the ticket for the meal, assigning the cost to his room, and then laid a handful of galleons on the tabletop as a tip.

The pair made their way to their rooms in comfortable silence. Their rooms were across the hallway from each other, and each paused at the doors.

“Good night Harry.” She stood on her tiptoes to lightly kiss him on the cheek.

“Good night Hermione.”

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“Alright Hermione?” Ron asked from her side.

Hermione expanded her shield charm to cover her insane boyfriend. “Ron, keep your head down!”

“Relax Hermione,” the tall redhead said with a smile, “They can cast anything they want, and they can’t hurt me.”

“Oh,” she said using the shield to deflect a pair of nasty looking curses back to their casters. “Are you Merlin suddenly? Or perhaps Dumbledore?”

“No Hermione, I’m not Merlin or Dumbledore,” He paused for a moment as they both spotted someone moving behind him. “I don’t need to be. I’m dead.”

The blue curse hit Ron in the back, causing his torso to twist and rupture, spraying his liquefied organs all over the defensive position, and all over Hermione.

Ron fell onto Hermione, knocking her to the ground. “See?” he asked. “No worries.” The light faded from his eyes and he moved no more.

Hermione sat up in the hotel bed, soaked in sweat, screaming. It took several seconds before she regained control, her body fighting for breath in the face of the unreasoning terror of the nightmare.

She was thankful that the Hotel’s promise of ‘permanent silencing charms’ turned out to be accurate.

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"I think," Harry said quietly with an amused grin, "that you're only supposed to be sampling the wines Hermione, hence the name 'Sampling Room'."

"Pfft!" a very buzzed Hermione Granger responded eloquently. "It's not my fault they keep giving me more." Memories of the nightmares seemed to fade a bit with a little wine, or at very least they didn't seem to bother her as much.

"Oh yes, that little confundus on the waiter was obviously accidental." Harry grinned. Hanging out with the bad girl side of Hermione after only seeing the good girl for so long was turning out to be a lot of fun.

"It's not like I make a habit of it," she huffed. "This is just really good wine is all." With that she drained her glass and the server refilled it without a word, or indeed even realizing that he had done so.

Harry maintained his grin and Hermione realized how much she liked it when he smiled.

"Maybe I'll send your folks a couple of bottles, so you'll have some when you get home."

Suddenly Hermione made a decision. She took Harry's hand and pulled him along with her. "Come on Harry,"

"What's going on?" He asked as he allowed himself to be directed.

"In here," The door to the maintenance closet opened with a silent unlocking charm. Hermione pulled Harry in to the small room and closed the door behind him.

"Hermione?" Harry asked, now a little concerned as he looked about the closet that was only dimly lit by the light that came in from under the door.

At five foot seven Harry only had an inch and a half height on his best friend, so Hermione didn't even have to stretch when she pushed him against the door and wrapped her arms around his neck and covered his mouth with her own.

Harry was shocked when he felt her tongue enter his mouth. He had only done that once before with Ginny and he was boggled by the fact that Hermione tasted so very different than the other girl had.

He knew that this shouldn't be happening, but couldn't stop himself as he wrapped his arms around the girl and tried to kiss her back. This wasn't right, and Harry knew it. He fisted a hand full of her hair was oddly thrilled when she responded by reaching up to the back of his head and holding him in place in much the same way.

After several moments the pair broke the kiss when breathing became an issue. Still leaning against the door Harry buried his face in Hermione's bushy mop, while Hermione leaned her forehead against Harry's shoulder for a moment before moving to lightly bite him on the neck. She ground her pelvis into his.

"Ooh, a big boy," she cooed in Harry's ear before nipping at his neck a second time. "We'll have to do

something about that.

Harry knew that what he was doing was wrong, that he was quite possibly taking advantage of his friend while she was addled by the wine she had been drinking, but the sensation of her rubbing herself against his erection through both of their jeans pushed those protests completely from his mind. He pulled her face back to his own and as their tongues swirled around each other again, he moved his left hand to her breasts, a move she seemed to greatly appreciate.

And the door opened. Harry fell backwards, pulling Hermione along with him. He bang his head on the door knob on the way down and was only seeing stars when he ended up flat on his back with Hermione on top, still grinding against him.

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“Ow!”

“Oh, stop complaining,” Hermione laughed as she dismounted the front position of the tandem bicycle the pair had rented for the month. A tandem seemed to be the easiest way to teach Harry to ride.

“Ow!” Harry repeated, walking with his legs as far apart as possible. “That seat is evil. What kind of sick individual would invent such a thing? My boxers have gotten to know me more intimately than any human being is ever likely to.”

“Oh honestly Harry, after all you’ve done in your life, you can’t deal with a bicycle seat?”

Harry held the door to the café open for her to enter. “I don’t think Tom ever rode a bike either,” he theorized. “If he had called himself ‘Lord Bicycle Seat’ instead of Voldemort, he would have been even more feared by all the right thinking people of the world.”

“Poor Harry,” she laughed taking her seat at the first open table, “His life is nothing but trials and tribulations.”

“Ain’t it the truth?” Harry agreed, gingerly easing himself down onto the other chair at the table with a sigh.

Harry had quickly learned to depend on Hermione and her knowledge of the French language when they were in a restaurant. This saved much pointing and pantomime with waiters who never seemed to understand what he wanted, despite Harry’s suspicion that they probably spoke English better than he did.

“Well, what has been your favourite part of the trip Harry?” Hermione asked after she had ordered... something for the pair of them.

“Tonight, when we turn in that damned bike.”

“Very funny. Now answer the question.” She huffed.

“Well, spending a month with my best friend with no distractions and no one trying to kill us has been pretty nice... well other than that one tour guide,” Harry grinned. “If I had to pick a single place as my

favorite, I'd probably the vineyards. I don't think I've ever seen so much purple in one place... though that aqueduct was pretty cool too."

"I liked the wineries." Hermione admitted.

"Yeah, the sample rooms were nice." Harry agreed. "Though I'm not sure what we did could actually be classified as 'sampling'."

"The guide at that last one did get a bit miffed at us, didn't she?" Hermione asked with a blush.

"Hey, I bought a couple of cases to send to your dad, I don't know what she was complaining about, still I don't think you should have kissed me like that just to freak her out." he grinned sitting back in his chair. "So, we head for Paris in the morning?"

The young woman blushed at the memory of how she had acted in the sampling room and then nodded, "I've already made our reservations. I wish you'd let me pay my way Harry."

"Not a chance," Harry said as the waiter slid their lunch orders in front of them. "Without you along I'd end up eating nothing but fillet of old shoe for every meal. Paying room and board for full time translation services is a bargain." He dug into the fish that Hermione had ordered for them both with the gusto of a starving man.

Hermione blushed again as she recalled precisely what she had reserved, and hoped that Harry would forgive her.

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The road stretched out in front of the bike as Harry shifted into his highest gear and just let the machine have its head. This is how life was supposed to be, he told himself as the bike roared past a vacationing British family in their estate car.

Hermione pulled herself tighter to him as she sensed the increase in speed. She had stopped speaking to him half an hour before, and Harry was fairly certain that his best friend had fallen asleep and was actually managing to nap as they made their way North on the A20 heading toward Paris.

Three weeks on this trip already, three weeks in Hermione's constant company he reflected. Quite possibly the best time he had ever had in his entire life... Still, he was going to have to be careful that he didn't ruin everything by being an idiot.

There had been several occasions over the last three weeks when they had both drunk perhaps a bit too much of the wine that the French were justifiably proud of and they had found themselves becoming a touch more affectionate than they normally were toward one another. That time at the winery when Hermione had become extremely affectionate following her fifth glass of wine and had dragged Harry into a janitor's closet. If the guide hadn't done a head count and gone looking for her wayward charges, Harry wasn't all that sure they would have stopped.

It had taken buying three cases of very expensive wine to get the guide to calm down, and Harry hadn't been able to look Hermione in the eye for the rest of the day.

Harry knew that he should never have allowed Hermione to come along on this trip. She was just too damaged by losing Ron, and getting drunk and ending up in bed with him wasn't going to help her in the slightest. Not to mention what it would cost him personally if he lost his best friend in life by thinking with his dick

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"How may I help you?" the desk clerk asked having recognized the pair to be English somehow.

"We called ahead and made reservations for two rooms for Potter?" The dark haired man said.

"One room." The brunette corrected standing next to him corrected. "We reserved one room."

"Hermione?" the young man asked, much to the amusement of the desk clerk. It never failed to amuse her how so many women were in control of their relationships when they checked in.

"One room Harry," She took hold of his arm and pulled him close. "That is all we will need."

They finished checking into the hotel without exchanging another word. Harry carried their bags to the elevator and to the room, where Hermione opened the door for him. Once they were within the room and the door closed behind them, Harry stared at the beds in the room for a moment before turned to his best friend.

"What's going on Hermione?"

The girl hesitated for a moment, "when I called, they only had one room available. There are two beds Harry, I trust you."

"No, this isn't right," Harry protested, "this isn't what we talked about."

"Am I that repulsive Harry? So much so that you can't deal with spending the night in the same room as me?"

"Hermione, no... it's just that..."

"All we do in our rooms is sleep anyway Harry. Come on. I'm stiff from being on that damned bike of yours all day. Let's go for a walk and find someplace to eat."

-----oooOOOooo-----

They strolled along the streets of Paris for an hour before they actually settled on a place to eat. Harry continued to stare at the menu trying to decipher just how that name might be pronounced when Hermione ordered for them both, as had become their habit.

The idea of spending the night in the same room terrified him, though he wasn't quite sure why. During the war they had spent most of a year together in less space, more often than not in the same bed, huddled together to share body heat...

Perhaps it had been Ron's presence that made the difference.

Ron.

It still hurt to think about his goofy best friend. There had been times when the two of them had come to blows... the time Harry had waked in on Ron and Hermione making love for example, Hermione had screamed and Harry had made a bad joke to cover his embarrassment, and Ron had clocked him for his trouble.

The part of his mind not paying attention to Hermione and thanking the waiter when the food arrived was amused that Harry truly considered Ron hitting him to be a good time. They were all together then, and while life was terrifying, it was also good.

Well, good when compared to Harry's life with the Dursleys anyway, a thought which again made his inner most self smile.

Together they dug into the main course, Hermione offering him bites from her plate and stealing bites from his in exchange, all the while chattering about the museums and cultural events of the City of Lights and working her way through two bottles of wine. Harry started working himself into a state of mind that would welcome an educational experience.

At the same time Harry reflected on Hermione and her need to keep moving, to avoid pausing to think, because that brought Ron back to her mind. Harry had been half a country away when his first friend died protecting the woman he loved. What Hermione had done to the Death Eater who had killed Ron Weasley was the stuff of legends... and the stuff of Death Eater nightmares.

Harry had rushed to Hermione's side as soon as he heard, and he held the sobbing woman until she couldn't cry any longer. He cajoled her to eat, Harry was the one who started Hermione researching again, and night after night he held her in the dark as she mourned the loss of their friend. Harry's own mourning was saved for when she slept.

Part of Hermione died that day. And Harry wasn't around to help her when she needed him, he hadn't been around to watch his brother's back. Those twin failures haunted him, and likely would for the rest of his life.

The Main course was finished and the waiter brought the dessert cart and another bottle of wine. Hermione selected a large chocolate and ice cream concoction, while Harry satisfied his sweet tooth with a dish called 'Crème Caramel' which turned out to be a kind of custard. It was ok, but he suspected that he could do the same thing better.

His time spent cooking for the Dursleys had to count for something.

Thinking of Ron quite naturally brought Ginny to mind. The vivacious redhead had been lost with the rest of her family when Voldemort marshaled his forces against the Burrow trying to set an example of what happened when someone dared to defy him.

The only surviving Weasleys had been Fred because that night it was his turn to lock up Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes and Fleur because she had chosen that night to return to her parents' home to announce that she was carrying their first grandchild. The Burrow had been utterly destroyed, but the Weasleys made the Death Eaters pay for their victory. More than thirty dead Death Eaters were found

on the property when the carnage was discovered.

As he had told Hermione on the first day of their adventure, Harry's relationship with Ginny Weasley had never really progressed beyond the heavy petting of a new fairly intense relationship. The death of Dumbledore had put a halt to their experimentation, and the separation that fighting the war had brought about had all but ended their relationship.

-----oooOOOooo-----

"Harry?"

Hermione's touch on his hand brought Harry back from his musings. "Sorry Hermione, I guess I zoned out there for a minute."

She rose unsteadily from her chair and pulled him to standing. "Let's go for a walk," Hermione gestured out at the street. "Paris is so beautiful at night."

Harry laid a pile of money on the table and the pair made their way from the cafe` out into the street.

There was a reason, Harry observed to himself, that Paris is called the City of Lights. It was also a city dedicated to separating tourists from their money. The pair made their way through the night, marveling at the sights of the city. They stopped in several bars along the way back to their hotel and neither noticed that they had been holding hands for almost the whole time.

-----oooOOOooo-----

By the time they got back to their hotel room, Hermione was very drunk. Harry was fairly buzzed himself, but no where near where his friend was.

She really hadn't wanted to return to the hotel, but Harry had insisted. Upon entering the room, she had thrown herself on the bed and lay still with her eyes closed.

"Whoa! Harry make the room stay still," Hermione giggled hugging herself.

"The room isn't going anywhere Hermione," Harry laughed as he worked at removing her shoes.

"Mr. Potter, we're barely in the room and you're trying to get my clothes off!" she giggled. "My mother was right about you."

"Oh stop," Harry said dryly as he dropped her shoes to the floor. "you've figured out my master plan. Curses, foiled again. I'm going to change in the bathroom, will you be ok?"

"Oh sure," she slurred. "I'm wonderful."

In the bath, Harry pulled off his clothes and dressed in his sleeping attire, a pair of boxers and an old string vest. After brushing his teeth and using the toilet, he gathered his dirty clothing and returned to the room. The lights were off in the room and the television was on, showing some movie where the woman was wandering through a house naked, but since the dialog was all in French, Harry had no idea what was going on. The actress had very nice breasts though

As soon as Harry was in his bed, Hermione turned the television off and padded her way to the bathroom shedding clothing as she did so. As the door closed Harry caught sight of one of her breasts.

This was precisely what he had been worried about when Hermione had booked them into a single room. He wasn't going to be able to sleep with her so close... He was considering dealing with the... situation when the toilet flushed. Then the sound of water running in the sink, and finally the light around the bathroom door went out and Harry could hear the door open.

"Harry?"

"Yes Hermione?" He could just make out the girl standing between the two beds looking down at him.

"I lied to you Harry. We didn't end up in the same room because the hotel was full. There were plenty of rooms. We're in the same room because I wanted us to be."

Harry considered that for a moment. "Why?"

"I've been having nightmares Harry. Horrible nightmares. The only time I've managed to sleep is when I'm on that damned motorcycle of yours wrapped around you. Could I sleep with you tonight? Just to sleep?"

Harry's penis chose that moment to rise to its full glory and Harry's personal 'Really Bad Idea' alarms started going off in his head.

"Please Harry?"

Without saying a word he held open the bedding so that she could slide in with him. As soon as Hermione was between the sheets she wrapped herself around him. She appeared to be wearing nothing more than a sort of long tee-shirt and he could feel twin hard bumps pressing against his chest... her nipples?

"I love it when you hold me," Hermione whispered in his ear before starting to nibble on his ear lobe. She worked her way along his jaw line with kisses and nips until she was kissing him again, just like at the winery. The young woman started grinding against his thigh and Harry was shocked to realize that she wasn't wearing anything at all under the tee-shirt.

"Hermione," he gasped when she broke the kiss, "this isn't a good idea."

"Oh Harry," she answered pulling her tee-shirt off. "It's a great idea." Hermione laid down on top of him again, her bare breasts practically in his face. She reached down into his boxers and took hold of his penis. "Little Harry seems to agree with me," she whispered as she stroked him.

Harry had never been so conflicted in his life. Part of him knew that starting a sexual relationship with Hermione less than six months after Ron had died in her arms was probably the very worst thing he could possibly do.

The rest of him, holding a naked woman for the very first time in his life was incoherent with glee over the prospect of finally moving beyond virginity and was screaming for his rational side to shut the hell

up before he queered the deal. Harry closed his eyes and trying not to think about anything beyond the sensation of Hermione's kisses and her hand stroking him while hoping that he wasn't going to manifest a shoulder angel/devil set. He didn't really believe such things existed, but with magic, who knew?

Hermione was up on her knees again, pulling his boxers down, then pushing his string vest up to expose his chest, "I want you," she whispered as she straddled him. "I want you inside of me."

Harry's rational side shut the hell up.

Hermione positioned herself above him and sank down, taking him fully within her. Harry held his breath as the totally new sensation consumed his entire being. So hot... so...

Hermione began to move and suddenly Harry knew why so much of his attention had been focused on getting to this point for since he had been thirteen. With trembling hands he reached up to touch her breasts. She covered his hands with her own and pulled them tighter to herself as she continued to rock back and forth at the point their bodies joined...

And suddenly she stopped.

"Hermione?" he asked.

"What am I doing?" she asked the room.

No! Don't stop! Harry screamed in his mind. "What's wrong?"

"I shouldn't be doing this. I'm just using you."

Harry so wanted to scream, Go ahead, use me! but he didn't. "Talk to me Hermione, what's wrong?"

Hermione rolled off of him, his penis sliding out of her and slapping against his stomach. She curled into a fetal position on the bed facing away from him. "I'm a slut, I'm horrible." Her body wracked with sobs. "I'm using you to try to forget Ron..."

Harry hated it when girls cried, he never knew what to do. He wrapped his arms around her. "It's ok Hermione. Everything will be ok."

She rolled over into his embrace and was crying on his chest. "Nothing will ever be ok again."

-----oooOOOooo-----

Harry spent the night staring at the ceiling of the hotel room disgusted with himself. The naked sobbing girl clung to him through the night, even after she had had finally fallen to sleep.

She had wanted intimacy, he had resisted as best he could, but when she stuck her hand down his boxers... There was no way he could resist that. Why couldn't he offer what she needed? After all she had been through with him, because of him, when she had needed him, he couldn't give her what she wanted.

Why was it so much easier for other guys? All Dean Thomas had ever needed was the slightest

indication of interest and he was off like a shot.

"The secret of pulling birds," the Londoner had explained in a late night sixth year dorm room bull session, "is to give them what they want."

"You mean buy them things?" Neville had asked.

"No, not at all, though that doesn't hurt," Dean said with a wink. "I mean, if they want romance, give them romance, read poetry, bring them flowers, like that. If they are looking for a 'bad boy' then be that bad boy, if they are looking to mother someone, then be as helpless as you possibly can. Every girl is different, you have to figure out what she wants and give it to her."

"That seems dishonest," Neville protested.

"We're not talking about honesty Nev, we're talking about pulling birds. I look at it like this:" Dean said scratching his chin, a mannerism that his dorm mates had long before learned meant that he was about to take some barking mad theory of his and pontificate upon it as if it were from the gospels themselves. "The only way you ever get good at anything is to practice be it Quidditch, football, transfiguration or charms. And that includes sex. To get good at sex you've got to practice and to practice you need a partner. The way I see it, we owe it to our future wives to practice as much as possible now so that we know what we're doing come the wedding night, and the women need the practice too."

"That," Seamus said throwing his pillow at Dean's head, "is the biggest load of self serving twaddle I've ever heard. And I bet Ron's trying to forget you dated his sister for a while."

"I've not forgotten that at all," Ron interjected. "If I were you Dean, I'd get to the point before all five of my brothers hear about your theory."

"Damned puritans," Dean protested. "All I'm saying is that when you put a little effort into getting to know them, a confident bloke can pull pretty much any bird."

"Bullshit," Harry had pronounced. "You are the most confident asshole I know Dean, and Hell would freeze over slightly before you could pull Pansy Parkinson."

"or Millicent Bulstrode," Neville offered.

"or Hermione Granger," Seamus laughed.

"Pansy would be easy, just wait until she wants to rebel against her father." Dean said shaking his head at the cluelessness of his dorm mates. "Hell, I'm a triple threat in the rebelling against her father department, Muggleborn, black and broke. I would piss off her father faster than pretty much any other guy at Hogwarts except maybe Harry, and sooner or later every girl wants to piss off her father. Piece of cake. Millie would be even easier. She's probably going to rape the first guy who's nice to her. She get treated like crap all around, even, maybe especially, by the Slytherins. Hermione though, no how, no way."

"Damned right," Ron said.

"Oh, it's not you Ron. Hermione herself would probably kill me for the attempt, but if she got hurt, I'd have to worry about Harry."

"Damned right," Harry nodded.

"And me," Ron said.

"Ron, seriously, you and I are about evenly matched, you'd hex me, I'd hex you, lather, rinse, repeat. But our Harry is scary. We all know what happens when something or someone makes Harry angry and I have no desire to become the focus of his undivided attention..."

It wasn't until tonight that Harry decided that Dean was an idiot. Harry himself had turned out to be the one to hurt Hermione.

Harry sighed and pulled the girl closer, trying to ignore her nakedness. Allowing her to come along on this trip had been a mistake. A mistake he was going to fix in the morning.

-----oooOOOooo-----

"Your dad will be waiting for you at Heathrow," Harry said outside the international departures checkpoint at Orly Airport.

"Harry..." Hermione was crying again. "I don't know why I can't stop crying Harry, I'm so sorry."

"Hey now," Harry lifted her chin so he could see her eyes. "You are going to be alright. Its amazing you held it in as long as you did."

"How are you going to get along without me?"

"I'll just have to get used to eating fillet of old shoe and waiters laughing at me. I'll be back in a couple of weeks, a month at the most. I promised Fleur that I'd be there for the baby. Make sure you give your dad that envelope."

Hermione nodded. "I can't believe he gave you the money instead of me."

"He told me to take care of his little girl," Harry said cupping her face as he wiped her tears from her cheeks with his thumbs. "I just didn't do a very good job. Are you going to be ok?"

Hermione nodded. "I'll be good. I'll make and appointment to see my therapist tomorrow. Are you going to be ok?"

"I'll find something to occupy me for a while, then I'll be back home."

Hermione looked back and forth between the queue for security screening and Harry a few times. "I don't want to go. I'll be alone."

"You need to Hermione, you won't be alone. Your mum and dad will be there, and I'll be there soon."

-----oooOOOooo-----

Harry stood watching the big plane taxi away from the gate. He was relatively sure that that particular plane was the one that was taking Hermione home. If it wasn't, well, he was going to pretend it was.

The large white jet took its place in the queue at the runway and in less than half an hour it was accelerating down the runway and Harry held his breath as first the front wheel and then the wheels under the wings left the ground.

The raven haired wizard sighed. Now all he had to do was figure out what he was going to do with himself. The beach was still an option he supposed. As he turned away from the window he smiled. He never did get that condom...

---===oooOOOooo===---

Hermione had reserved the room for two more nights, so lacking anything else to do Harry remained in the city and did all the tourist things. He went to the top of the Eiffel Tower, took pictures of the Arc de Triomphe, and he had even gone to the Louvre. Harry had wandered around that massive museum for two hours before he glanced up at the Mona Lisa.

Did she... move?

So Harry ended up standing stock still at the rope barrier and staring through the security glass in front of the famous portrait for most of three hours. He had of course seen prints of this painting before, but there was something about the original... something that was...

After the three hours Harry was very very sure of three things. First, her enigmatic almost smile pissed him off. Commit to something woman! Second, Leonardo must have been a wizard to breath this much life into a painting, and third for whatever reason the painting was pretending to be a typical painting, even to magicals. He couldn't imagine why, other magical paintings in the collection had signaled their recognition of his magic with a wink or a wave or if they were secluded enough a quiet word. But this one...

Harry palmed his wand and covertly touched it to his throat. "Caught you," he whispered. The portrait raised her nonexistent eyebrows in surprise when his words reached her through the glass.

---===oooOOOooo===---

Despite having lost his translator, Harry still managed to find a nice place to eat, and he somehow made his desires known to the waiter only to discover that he had lost his appetite. He picked at his meal for half an hour before he gave up on it and headed back to the hotel.

He was back in his room by eight pm and had just exited the shower when the phone rang.

"Harry?"

"Mrs. Granger?" Harry said recognizing the woman's voice. "Did Hermione arrive alright? I tried calling but..."

"She's here, she's with her dad. I called to speak with you."

Oh hell. "Yes Ma'am?"

"Thank you Harry, thank you for taking care of my girl. Hermione told us what happened last night. It isn't every young man who would take kindly to Hermione changing her mind like that."

Harry hesitated wondering what he was supposed to say to that...

"I'm not calling to embarrass you Harry," the Dentist said quickly in the face of his silence. "Hermione was stubbornly closed mouthed about what happened between you, it wasn't until your friend Luna showed up at our door that Hermione was willing to talk about what happened."

"Luna?" That didn't make any sense. He hadn't seen Luna since before Ron died. "Luna came to your house?"

"Yes, she just knocked on the door just before dinner and insisted on speaking with Hermione. After Hermione spent all day refusing to tell us what had happened, her story just poured out to your friend Luna."

"So, you know what happened then?" Harry asked.

"Yes Harry, we know. Thank you."

She was thanking him? That couldn't be right. "I'm sorry I betrayed your trust. Don't worry, I'll stay away from her."

"Harry! Don't you dare try and blame yourself! You listen to me young man, you were nothing but honorable in your dealings with Hermione, and from what she says, you accepted her changing her mind after she seduced you with nothing but concern for her. She drove you past all of your resistance, stopped in the middle of making love and you held her all night long. I don't know many men who would do that."

Harry had no idea what to say to that. "Is Hermione going to be ok?"

There was a slight pause while the woman evidently weighed what she was going to tell him. "We think so. Dr. Borages felt the need to point out that she had said that your trip was a bad idea for Hermione at least twice when I called for her appointment. Hermione is strong, I fully believe she will be alright. But it's you I'm worried about Harry, and perhaps more importantly, so is your friend Luna."

"I don't understand."

"To be honest, neither do I," Cathrine Granger said. "But Luna seemed to feel that you shouldn't have been left alone. She said that she would be meeting you in the morning."

Harry sat on his bed in his Parisian hotel room dressed only in the towel wrapped around his waist. Luna coming to make sure he wasn't alone? That could be a problem.

-----oooOOOooo-----

There was a knock at his door at exactly 8 am the next morning. Harry had already dressed and was getting ready to get out of the room so that he could avoid Luna and whatever she intended to do for him.

The knock told him he was too late. Harry sighed and opened the door to find Luna staring at him with those huge grey eyes of hers. "Hello Luna, Hermione's mum said you might drop by."

"Hello Harry," the blond said, "Could we come in?"

We? Harry stepped back from the door way and Luna entered the room, towing a taller girl behind her. Harry gaped when he identified the familiar tall blond wearing skin tight jeans and a brown leather jacket. "Lavender?"

"Hello Harry," the taller girl said demurely.

Luna drew her wand and pointed it at the floor. "Scourgify!" she snapped before making to stand on the spot she had just sanitized. "A hotel room Harry? Really?"

"What's wrong with hotels Luna?" Harry asked, wonder what was going on.

"Do you know what people DO in hotel rooms? Scourgify! Scourgify! Scourgify! Scourgify!" she asked as she cleaned a path to a chair, and then a chair itself before settling on the newly cleaned surface daintily while Lavender sat silently beside her. "I mean I wouldn't mind if you wanted to spray your DNA on me Harry, but I don't want to sit in it."

Harry had learned long before not to put too much thought into Luna's pronouncements because they tended to be both quite absurd and quite literally true, so trying to ignore her suggestion that he could spray DNA on her, he asked, "OK, so what can I do for you ladies?"

"Lavender is staying with Daddy and me for the summer," Luna said casually. "Unfortunately Daddy and I have to head up to Norway to get everything ready for the Snorkack mating season prior to the big Snorkack migration. Of course the Snorkack mating grounds are a secret location which means Lavender can't come with us. Normally, we would just bring her along and oblivate the location from her memories, but well, sad to say, oblivation is a bit chancy with dark creatures."

"Dark creatures?" Harry asked before deciding that his life would probably be a whole lot easier if he didn't know. "So you want Lavender to stay with me?"

"Oh yes. Since you are heading to Norway anyway and will be arriving in time for the Snorkack migration at the Hardanger Fjord on your birthday..."

"I am?" Harry asked

Luna gave him a pitying look, "Of course you are Harry, do pay attention. So you can just bring Lavender along and that way we don't have to risk a faulty oblivation."

Harry nodded. This was odd, he had never given Norway the slightest bit of thought before, but now that Luna had said that he was going there, he was actually looking forward to seeing it. "Lavender? What do you think about this plan?"

The normally gregarious girl didn't look up, which struck Harry as being a bit out of character for his former House mate. "I'd like the chance to spend a little time with you Harry," she said quietly.

"Well, that's settled then," Luna said standing up. "I'd best be off. Daddy is going to need my help getting ready for the mating season."

"What needs to be done to get ready?" Harry asked. "I mean it's a natural event, right?"

"Just the usual things needed to guarantee a successful mating," Luna said with a shrug. "Small candle lit tables, violin music, pasta, raw oysters, a selection of wines, martinis and of course Rohypnol. Oh, Harry? No more nasty hotels, ok? Here." She dug in her handbag and pulled out a roll of canvas far too large to have fit in the bag and handed it to Harry. "I'll loan you one of my smaller tents. Sleeps six with three bathrooms and a jacuzzi. At least try to be a wizard won't you?"

-----oooOOOooo-----

Luna disappeared from the room with a pop.

Harry sighed, and then looked to his other guest.

"I know, 'of all of the hotel rooms in all of the world I had to let Luna drag me into yours.'" the young woman said with a sad smile. "How are you Harry?"

"I'm alright I suppose," Harry said hesitantly. "So, you're staying with Luna and her dad?"

Lavender shrugged. "Luna's mum was my Aunt Selene, my dad's sister. They took me in when I had nowhere else to go... and now I'm with you."

"So we're supposed to go to Norway?"

Lavender nodded and pulled a map out of her bag. "Uncle Xeno gave me this to give to you. It's a trip of just over 1400 miles and we have a week to do it."

"Two hundred miles a day? That's hardly worth doing. This room is paid for through tomorrow, so we might as well stay... Unless you'd like your own room."

Lavender was surprised by the question. "No, this is fine."

Harry sat down in the chair that Luna had vacated when she left and spread the map out on the side table. "I've never been to Norway, though it sounds interesting all, but why are we doing this?"

The girl hung her head. "I don't blame you for not wanting to get involved with me Harry. I'll just head back to England and I'll wait for Uncle Xeno and Luna to finish with what they're doing."

"That's not what I meant Lavender, besides, you've already said you'd stay the night." Harry said, stopping her from standing with a hand on her shoulder. "What's going on? I've never seen you like this."

"I keep forgetting that not everyone knows," Lavender said pulling at the zip of her leather jacket, she shrugged out of it and exposed the spaghetti strap vest she wore underneath, as well as the horrible purple mass of scars that started on the right side of her neck and traveled down her right breast disappearing under the vest.

"Oh my god!" Harry said, as he started to reach out to touch the angry purple flesh before stopping himself. "What happened?"

"Fenrir Greyback. Parvati and I were captured by his pack about a week before you killed You-Know-Who." Once again she cast her eyes down to the floor between her feet. "We were just being our normal stupid selves, flouncing through Diagon Alley, flirting with every man we saw. They killed Parvati that first night... It wasn't a full moon or anything, but they killed her anyway, they ate her alive." The girl started crying.

Harry still had no idea how to deal with a crying woman, but it seemed that the appropriate response to someone who had seen their best friend killed would be to hold them. He knelt in front of Lavender and she wrapped herself around him as if she would die without the contact.

"They petrified me and made me watch. They tore pieces off of her body and... and ate them in front of me, so that I knew what was coming for me. The next day the Aurors attacked. They overwhelmed the pack and killed Greyback, but the last thing the bastard did was rake me with his... well, nails I guess. I want to say claws, but he wasn't transformed."

"Bloody hell," Harry breathed.

"Yeah," Lavender agreed. "The long and the short of it is that I'm infected with the werewolf curse, but in a weakened form. I don't transform, not really, but at the full moon I get very irritable and hyper aggressive. The healers all tell me that they can't do anything, and that there may come a time where I do transform."

"I didn't know that was possible," Harry said, pausing for a moment. "How hyper aggressive?"

The girl sighed, "Very hyper aggressive. The healers tell me that it's unusual for someone to be attacked by an untransformed werewolf, and in the few times that an untransformed werewolf has attacked they usually kill, there have only been two survivors before me. My parents tried to ignore everything until they caught me eating a raw steak the full moon in May. They put me out Harry."

"And Luna took you in?"

"Uncle Xenon gave my father an earful when he forced his way into the house to retrieve my things. Uncle intends to put me to work at the Quibbler," She smiled, "Luna thinks the paper needs a fashion section."

"Oh bloody hell."

"Yeah," the young woman agreed as she stood up. "I understand why you wouldn't want me around Harry."

"Sit down Lav." Harry said reverting to her nickname from their time at school. "As long as you're not

actively trying to disembowel me, I'm fine with your 'condition'."

"Why?"

"Remember Remus Lupin? DADA Professor 3rd year?"

"Well, yeah, he was great..." she got a small grin, "kind of sexy too."

"He was one of my parent's best friends," Harry said. "He was also a werewolf since before he started Hogwarts. I know that the Ministry and its 'Dark Creature' crap for what it is. A person is a person, and you've always been a good person..."

"Thank you Harry." Did she dare hope he actually believed that?

"A bit of a gossip, and more than a little ditsy, but really hot and that makes up for a lot... Ow!"

Lavender pulled back her arm in preparation for another blow. "Am I hot enough to make up for that?"

"Oh, I see," Harry said with an exaggerated pout. "Pick on the Savior of the Magical world, just because he speaks his mind, you sexy hot dark creature you."

"Damn it Harry," Lavender's lips kept twitching into a smile. "I was feeling good and sorry for myself and you have to go and spoil it by making me laugh."

"Come on," Harry said rising from his chair. "Let's go find some breakfast."

---===oooOOOooo===---

They spent the day shopping. Harry considered himself fortunate that Lavender had no interest in doing the tourist things that he had done the day before. At first, he had dreaded the idea of going shopping until he discovered that Lavender was very good with glammers and could hide her scarring with little effort, that her tastes in clothing ran to the very skimpy side, and that she felt that she needed input from Harry about every purchase, which required him to get close up views of every piece of lingerie and article of clothing that she tried on.

It didn't take long for Harry to make a rather important discovery. Lavender had the most spectacular breasts he had ever seen outside of a magazine and was more than willing to allow him to see them while she was modeling her new outfits for him. Of course, the grand total of breasts he'd seen outside of a magazine numbered exactly four, and Hermione's had been spectacular as well, though hers remained the only breasts he had ever touched, but still...

Lavender, it turned out, spoke fluent French. In fact she told him that it was uncommon for a witch or wizard of their generation not to be fluent in at least one European language given how interconnected the European magical enclaves were, which just added to his general feeling of personal stupidity.

They had a late leisurely dinner in the restaurant on the main floor of the hotel, and spent the evening bar hopping.

---===oooOOOooo===---

Throughout the evening Lavender was fully aware of the looks she was getting from men in the bars, and enjoying being seen as an attractive woman again. She almost forgot what she was now.

She watched Harry as he was watching the live band, nodding in time with the music. Lavender tried to remember just why she had