

CHAPTER 8

THE KISS

In the early morning hours of August 6th, Hannah slipped off down the secret corridor and stepped through the enchanted doorway to the storage room of the Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes joke shop. She entered the space to the sight of the twins sorting through their accounting books, thumbing through the previous nights sales receipts, and counting anxiously through the thousands of galleons they had raked in from the registers.

“Morning all!” she sang out as she burst through the curtain divider and into the storefront.

“Good morning!” responded Fred and George cheerfully from behind the sales counter.

“Well, it looks as though you two had a fairly successful night,” she said, eyeing up the mass of galleons they had spread across the surface of the countertop.

“Yeah, an excellent night actually,” said Fred.

Hannah took to working the main floor, going over the racks with her elf magic to spice up the shoddy, rusting displays.

“Honestly, you two...your products are brilliant, but you really need some assistance with your merchandising. You can't just group a pile of stuff into a mound on a wire rack and expect people to be impressed. You have to make it interesting and shopable,” she breathed exhaustedly.

“Well, that's why we hired you,” said George wryly.

“Yeah, our sales have gone up 47% since you've started working here. With any luck we'll be opening a second shop by Christmastime,” said Fred as he eyed her up in her cut off jean mini shorts, red-cropped wrap top, and high-heeled sandals.

Hannah snorted and shook her head, keenly aware of the implication behind his suggestive comments. She settled on transfiguring the shoddy metal racks into eye-catching wooden stair step displays, clothing them in sashes of bright multi-colored sheer fabrics. She topped each display with enchanted floating, bold-colored slated signage, which was bewitched to affirm the price and name of the item displayed beneath it. She flicked her wand at the corners of the room and several tall statuesque potted red bromeliad planters sprouted from the floor. Then, she plied her wand in the air, again, and several wooden pillars topped with lit lavender scented candles cropped up among the displays.

“Nice one!” said Fred.

“Try not to get too carried away with the plants and those scented thingies. I’ve got allergies,” said George.

“Look, you’ve hired me to help you, and I’m helping you. So, clear off and let me do my job,” snipped Hannah playfully, crisscrossing her wand at the ivory rickety plastic stained shades and swapping them with brilliant crimson silken draperies.

Fred scraped their monies into a large burlap sack, fixed it closed with a wiry string, and said, “Alright, George. Do you reckon we ought to take this bag of galleons to Gringotts?”

“Yeah, we’ve still got a half hour before we open. That should give us plenty of time,” said George.

“Want to come along, Hannah?” asked Fred.

“Nah. You lot go on ahead. I’m going to work on the floors and the back room next. Besides, Angelina and Varity are due here in a few minutes. Someone will need to let them in.”

“Hey, if they say anything to you, tell ‘em we’ve asked you to wear your uniform cloak,” said George.

Hannah wrenched her face and said, “What? Why?”

“Well, they’re a bit miffed that you get to prance around the shop like that and they’ve got to wear their uniforms,” said Fred.

“Sorry, boys. No offense, but I wouldn’t be caught dead in those ghastly cloaks. Either take me like this, or leave me.”

“We’ll take you,” said Fred and George instantly.

Hannah snorted and shook her head in amusement.

“See you in a bit,” said George as he and Fred slipped past the plate glass doorway and headed off down Diagon Alley.

Hannah conjured a mop and bucket, and bewitched them to scrub the floors while she tended to the organization of the back room. When she pushed through the long crimson curtain divider to enter the storage space, she found herself coming face to face with a tall, heavily cloaked masked man.

“Severus!” she gasped.

“Good morning, Hannah. How are you?” he said, leaning in to kiss her.

“What are you doing here? Are you insane?” snapped Hannah, slapping him away.

“I was wandering the corridor and noticed a new enchanted doorway. I thought I would look into it. So, we’re a sales girl now, are we? Such a pleasure it is to see how you have put your remarkable talents into such a formidable occupation.”

“Nose down, Severus! I’m only doing it as a favor to the twins. Besides, I enjoy hanging out with them. They’re fun. And my instructions from Voldemort were to get close to *everyone* in the Order, not just Harry.”

Snape scowled at her and said quietly, “Speaking of Mr. Potter...how were his Occlumency lessons?”

“Ugh! They were a complete disaster.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Snape said with a sneer.

“No, I mean he did alright. He definitely has it in him, but—”

“*But?*”

“I saw that dreadful night that you killed Dumbledore. It nearly destroyed him having to relive that awful memory.”

“Hannah, we’ve discussed this before,” said Snape impatiently.

“I know. It doesn’t make it any less dreadful though, really. And it doesn’t change the fact that we wouldn’t be here like this, if you hadn’t,” she said sadly.

“I’m tired of being punished by you for the choices I’ve made!” said Snape heatedly.

“Yeah? Well you’re not the only one being punished, in case you hadn’t noticed!” hissed Hannah.

“If you recall, you *chose* to help me,” Snape retorted hauntingly.

“I *CHOSE* to help you, because, had I not, you’d be dead right now, and you know it!”

“Enough!”

“Oh, yes, isn’t it always when you know I’m right!”

“Hannah.”

“Fine! Is that all you have for me? I have work to be done before the shop opens,” said Hannah arrogantly.

“We need to discuss the details of meeting that you attended with the Order of the Phoenix yesterday. I shall send you an owl later this evening with instructions on what hour you’ll need to arrive at my place.”

“Very well. Now if you don’t mind,” said Hannah shortly, motioning about the room to the multiple tasks that lay before her.

“Oh, yes, I wouldn’t want to keep you from performing your...*essential* duties.”

Hannah sneered at him.

“By the way, I am to be informed of all the new enchantments you conjure from this moment forward. Are we clear on that?” said Snape sternly.

Hannah rolled her eyes at him and snapped out sarcastically, “Yes, *boss*.”

“I shall send for you later,” said Snape smoothly.

Hannah brushed past him and began sorting through the curved wooden bins of products that lay in disorganized heaps throughout the congested storage space, taking extra care to hurl a few of the heavier objects over her shoulder in his direction.

Snape shook his head at her in exasperation, then stepped through the enchanted entrance, snapping the door shut behind him.

The day matured quickly. By late afternoon, Harry found himself impatiently passing the time away in the sitting area of the secret room, awaiting the start of his second Occlumency lesson. He was thumbing blankly through some of the spell books piled on the coffee table when Hannah emerged from the lavatory in a revealing ivory silken nightdress.

“Ready for your lesson, Potter?” she said.

“Yeah,” he muttered faintly, spending his full effort eyeing her up in her stimulating attire, wallowing in his instant and swelling desire for her.

“Go on and prepare your mind. You’ll want to clear it from all thoughts,” said Hannah soothingly as she approached him.

“Okay,” breathed Harry, finding it difficult to do much of anything other than focus on the secrets that lay beneath her sensual apparel.

“Ready, then?” said Hannah.

“Yes,” he said untruthfully, still completely lost in his visual addiction.

“One, two, three, LEGIMENS!” belted Hannah.

The room before Harry was lost to a series of blinding images that had taken him over.

He was sorting through his trunk in search of his invisibility cloak; he was handing Ron a vile of Felix Felicis; He was rushing to meet Dumbledore; they were parting the school grounds, apparating together...

Swiftly, Harry found himself back in the Grimmauld secret room and Hannah was nursing a bright red cheek.

“Ouch!” exclaimed Hannah. “That was very good, Potter! But, you’re vicious with those darn stinging hexes of yours. Try to keep the spells away from my face, would you? A girl’s appearance is rather important, you know!”

“Sorry,” he said nervously.

“Apology accepted. Just be sure and aim for my chest and below,” said Hannah with a hint of annoyance in her tone. “Here we go!”

This time Hannah didn’t count to three; Harry was caught completely off-guard.

*He and Dumbledore were in the cavern by the sea. *Dumbledore became frightened. He moaned, “Don’t want to...stop...I don’t want to. Let me go. Make it stop, make it stop!” Dumbledore continued, “I can’t, don’t make me, I don’t want to!”**

“WHOA!” yelled Hannah as she was blasted halfway across the room, tripping past the recovery of her balance and smashing hard against the floor.

“Hannah!” Harry called out, running toward her.

She sprang to her feet almost instantly, gushing, “Harry, that was EXCELLENT! EXCELLENT! That’s EXACTLY what we’re looking for! FANTASTIC!”

Harry blushed. He found himself more determined than ever to succeed for her.

With wands at the ready again, Hannah confronted him with a forceful determination, belting out, “LEGIMENS!”

Harry felt himself being vigorously ripped from the present, returning to the moment they had left off.

Dumbledore was crying out desperately, "It's all my fault, all my fault...I know I did wrong! Oh, please make it stop and I'll never, never again. Don't hurt them. It's my fault, hurt me instead. Take me!" Dumbledore implored further, "Make it stop, make it stop, I want to die! Kill me!"

"NOOOOOOOO!" bellowed Harry. The sights and sounds of the room swarmed back into focus and he lay scattered about the floor.

"AHHHH!" shrieked Hannah in agony.

Harry saw her clutching her arm and dodging at least a hundred flaming sparks that were rushing toward her. He fired his wand into the air, shouting out, "Immobulus!" Every flicker turned instantly to ash and feathered briskly to the floor. He ran instantly to her aid.

"Owww," groaned Hannah, holding onto her left arm and nursing over a dozen sweltering burn marks on it. "Oooooo, it really hurts!"

"What's happened? Are you alright?" shouted Harry alarmingly, grabbing her arm and tracing his fingers gently over her wounds.

"OOH, an inferno hex! How thoughtful of you. Well, at least you missed my face this time," Hannah joked playfully, wincing through her pain.

"I'm so sorry. I—"

Hannah swiftly interjected, "Harry, that was your memory of the night you retrieved the Horcrux of the necklace. Am I correct?"

"Yes, yes, it was," he said confirming her, swallowing hard in a vain attempt to ingest his upset.

"Harry, I saw it through Dumbledore's eyes. I saw how my mother died. I needed to know, to see it for myself. Thank you, Harry," her words broke off into a chilling whisper. She was still clutching at her arm.

"Here, let me," said Harry kindly, gently taking hold of her arm and passing his wand over her wounds in tight persistent circles. "Immendo!" he called out. Within an instant, her arm was fully healed.

Hannah continued to favor it as Harry held onto her. For some reason he wasn't letting go. *Why wasn't he letting go?* He was drawing himself nearer and nearer to her, his heartbeat surging. She was breathless. He was moving closer and closer, his lips greeting

hers. He was kissing her, kissing her, and kissing her. The room was spinning out of control. He was inching her to the floor...

Suddenly, Hannah slipped out from beneath him and took off running toward the center of the room, gasping, "Harry, *no!*"

"Hannah! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to! It's just that—" he choked, reaching out to her in a swell of panic.

She waved him off and brushed the tips of her quivering fingers briskly through her hair, clearly struggling to shake his touch.

"Harry, it's alright, really," said Hannah breathlessly. "It's been an emotional few days for both of us. I understand. Really, it's okay. I'd forgotten myself for a moment there as well. Perhaps we ought to end our lessons for the night. You've done wonderfully and I'm actually rather drained. I was thinking of turning in." She pushed off toward the bed, fanning her face with one hand, while digging the fingers of her other hand into the pillows arranged at the headboard, tossing them recklessly to the floor.

"Yeah, that's fine. I understand," said Harry, entirely masked in his shame. He remained by the fireside, staring into the flames, rubbing his hand briskly against his forehead over his prickling scar, and thinking, *What is it about Occlumency that always seems to bring out the worst in me?*

He started to shuffle off in the direction of the enchanted doorway that lead into the Grimmauld living space when Hannah called out to him, "Wait! Harry?"

"Yeah?" he answered hopefully.

"You were brilliant tonight. You should be proud," said Hannah, awarding him with a reinforced smile.

Harry nodded awkwardly, and then disappeared behind the doorway.