

Epilogue I

Hermione at Hogwarts

Harry and Hermione sat snuggled on the sofa in the Grangers' parlor. Harry finally said, "Before we talk about us and what I've been up to, you must have some questions about what happened."

"A few," she confessed. "What happened to the Crouches, and to Professor Moody for that matter."

"Moody is still embarrassed and very twitchy, but physically he's recovered," Harry said. "Crouch Junior is dead of course, while his father is in hiding, but we'll come back to him. Snape is still Snape, but part of our deal is that he has to treat you nicely for the next three years."

"Me? Not you?"

"Fine, we'll jump to that," Harry said. "You do know that the only reasons I wanted to stay at Hogwarts three more years is so that I could be with you and so I could establish my self in this time, right?"

"I keep forgetting that you're partially from an alternate future," Hermione admitted.

"Well, I blew my choices when I had to show I was the Heir of Merlin. Still, that and defeating Voldemort has given me some leverage. First, I was tested on my N.E.W.T.s over two weeks ago. I got the results this morning. They agreed that I could skip the O.W.L.s if I did well on the N.E.W.T.s."

"How did you do?" Hermione asked eagerly.

"O's in Defense, Charms, and Transfiguration, although I probably only got the O in Transfiguration, instead of an E, because I'm an Animagus. E in Muggle Studies. A's in Potions, Creatures, Runes, and Arithmancy."

"You never took Muggle Studies, Runes, or Arithmancy," Hermione pointed out.

"True, but I have a solid Muggle background, and I had to teach myself Runes and Arithmancy for the trip back."

Hermione pouted. "Eight. And I won't even be allowed to take eight N.E.W.T. classes."

"True," Harry admitted. "You could still do the Muggle Studies."

"True," she admitted in turn.

"And I think you might want to plan on doing Astronomy."

That made Hermione stop short. "Why?"

"Because Sinistra and Vector offer an advanced tutorial in Calculus and Higher Math Theory for those taking both," Harry said. "I know how much you like doing the runes and languages, but you are a natural and brilliant mathematician. Take both, and you can have a career that spans both Muggle and magical maths or astro-physics."

Hermione almost looked convinced, so Harry went on, "You told me that that should have been your dream career in your last life and that you regretted not doing that. That doesn't mean it has to be in this one, but I wanted you to know about it."

"I'll have to think about that," Hermione admitted. "What else?"

"There's the school, and how I'll be near you the next three years. Which first?"

"I'll be selfish and say us," Hermione said.

"Fair enough," Harry agreed. "First, you do know what a metamorphmagus is, right?"

"You're one of them, too?" Hermione asked.

"A very limited one," Harry said. "I haven't had a hair cut since I was about eight."

"Why'd you settle for that one, then?" Hermione asked, and then flushed.

"I think because I had a subconscious memory of my dad," Harry answered seriously. "Anyway, I can't really change anything. However, in the last lifetime, when I was trying to develop the gift and failing, I did discover I could do one really neat thing."

"And what is that?"

"If I concentrate, I can take a bit of polyjuice potion and keep the form I change into as long as I want."

"Really?"

Harry nodded, "As long as I don't change back to myself, I keep the polyjuiced form."

"And this means what, in the context of our being together?" Hermione asked.

"Ah, well, meet the next three Defense teachers at Hogwarts," Harry said.

Hermione had to pause to get her mind around that concept. "You mean, you're going to polyjuice into someone else. . . ."

"Some Muggle's form, yes," Harry agreed. "Three, actually."

"And teach Defense for the next three years?"

"Yes," Harry agreed. "We'll have to find some forms that physically appeal to you. The Headmaster has agreed to overlook the usual rules about staff-student relationships, as our relation preceded my being hired and of course because we'll be keeping it secret."

"So, you won't be Harry when we're together?" Hermione asked.

"Some times, but not too often. It takes about half an hour of my really working on it to make the transition stable. It's not a very comfortable thing to do," he admitted.

"And you're doing this. . . ."

"In part to get experience as a teacher, but mostly because I love you and want to be around you," Harry said. "Is that so difficult to understand?"

"Understand, no; believe, yes," Hermione admitted.

"Care to make a preliminary survey?" Harry asked.

"I suppose. . . ." Hermione's eyes went wide when suddenly there were over two hundred of what looked like action figures around them, all around eighteen inches high and dressed in white briefs. "Who are all these men?" Hermione asked.

"Just Muggles," Harry answered. "Just take my wand and touch one on the head. You can say 'yes', 'no', or 'maybe'. If you want to see one life-sized, just say 'grow'. 'No' eliminates the choice, 'yes' and 'maybe' will simply sort them into two groups to be viewed later. And don't worry, the real person will never know, and we'll be making up fake biographies for them."

"Will anyone know besides the Headmaster and me?" Hermione asked, casting her eye. None of the men were ugly, and all seemed to be in decent shape or better and between the ages of 25 and 30.

"And Remus and Sirius, and Luna," Harry answered. Seeing the puzzled look, Harry simply said, "Trust me, Luna will know anyway."

"Alright," Hermione said, still looking.

"And no, I won't think that you'll fall in love with me in another body or anything like that," Harry assured her.

"Good, because we won't be having sex in any forms but our own," Hermione said.

"I'll make certain to gather plenty of hair, then," Harry said.

"Well, not face to face sex, any way," Hermione amended, since a few were actually very cute.

Harry watched, amused, as Hermione first eliminated the nine with really red hair, the four strawberry blonds, and three of the four with auburn hair, and then made an assault that eliminated about thirty others. Hermione made three more sets of choices, which finally eliminated all of them. "What's the score, do you know?" she asked.

"There were two hundred and seven," Harry said. "You eliminated seventy-eight, said 'maybe' to a hundred and eleven, and were more positive about eighteen. You can choose the first tomorrow, but your parents will be home in half an hour or so."

"Will you stay?"

"I will go out and come back, so you can say I arrived after Four-thirty," Harry said.

"Good plan."

Harry formally asked the Grangers if Hermione might accompany him to Diagon Alley every day during the week until they left for two weeks in France in August (the three Grangers would be visiting the Delacours). They agreed, as Hermione had already finished all of her summer homework.

Harry showed up the next morning three minutes after the Grangers had left at 8:06. Harry apparated them away while they were kissing.

Hermione broke the kiss and saw that she was in a small flat. "I was going to ask how you were going to walk up and down Diagon Alley without being mobbed," she said, "but are we ever going to leave the flat?"

"Us getting mobbed," Harry corrected. "You are the Heir of Merlin's promised."

Hermione froze for a second, then admitted, "You're right. I guess we just stay here all day, every day, and fool around." She smirked. "Poor us."

"We can, but it turns out I own nine buildings in Diagon Alley, and almost every building in the Alley but Gringotts has apartments of some sort in them. I chose this flat because it has its own entrance. No one will pay much attention to us. We'll pick out my first identity and establish him as a person this summer. You will be my visiting girl friend -- I have about fifty women for you to choose from. We'll polyjuice together."

Hermione wrinkled her nose.

"It won't be too bad, I promise you," Harry said.

Harry had the eighteen choices reappear, although life sized and nude. Hermione eliminated all those who weren't circumcised or who didn't meet a certain minimal requirement. This left three of her eighteen first choices. They quickly made a preliminary choice, and then did a thorough exam -- they didn't want Harry's identity to have any hidden medical problems.

The end choice for Harry's first year was a shade under six feet tall, and moderately muscled. He had dark blue eyes and dark hair, but not as dark as Harry's, and it was slightly wavy. He was good looking, although not as coldly good looking as Tom Riddle had been. He looked to be about twenty-five or so.

Hermione had to admire the selection Harry had made for her to choose from for herself. They all looked to be between 20 and 25, and were all between 5 foot 4 and 5 foot 7. All were attractive, but none were stunningly beautiful. All had nice legs, and all had either masses of hair or very long slightly wavy hair.

"Harry, do you have a hair fetish?"

"I love running my fingers through your hair," Harry admitted.

"So, any preferences?"

"Hermione, I picked all of these," Harry pointed out.

"Okay, I'll pick her." Hermione's choice had hazel-green eyes, incredibly pale skin, and the most hair of any of them, masses of black curling tresses, and a bit more body hair than Hermione was used to, although the Muggle had shaved under her arms and her legs. Her basic shape was much like Hermione's current one.

"So, it's still only a bit after Nine," Harry said. "Shall we retire to the bedroom, and afterwards we can talk about the school and such, then go for lunch and shopping?"

"Sure."

A little after 10:20, the two threw on light dressing gowns and came back to the front room to talk. "So, what news about the school?" Hermione asked.

"The good news is that they agreed to license the school to me on my terms, and to allow the Examiners to test all our students at the end of the Fifth year. As we expected, students can only stay through their Fifth year. However, they've also decreed that we cannot compete for students with the other three schools."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, if either parent attended Hogwarts, Tara, or the Ysgol, or if a sibling attends one of them, no student can attend the Royal unless they can prove they can't afford the fees to one of the other three, at least until our students grow up and have children. So, that will leave five groups to draw from for the most part for our first few years: all those proud but impoverished magical families that we wanted to reach anyway; the home-schoolers who can afford to hire their own tutors and likely will anyway; those who send their children overseas; immigrants; and the Muggle-born. However, only one group will receive only an invitation to the Royal."

"Let me guess," Hermione said. "The Muggle-born."

"The Muggle-born who don't speak Gaelic or Welsh," Harry agreed.

"That sucks," Hermione said.

"It does. I've hired Barty Crouch to teach a Magical Traditions class. Every First year will take it, as will any Muggle-raised student after their First year."

"So, a First and Second year will take Astronomy, Charms, Defense, Herbology, History, Potions, Transfiguration, writing, science, and maths, plus Muggle Life and Magical Traditions?" Hermione thought about that, "Even I think that might be a bit much." They had talked about adding some Muggle subjects to the curriculum.

"I was thinking, maybe we could collapse the two year science course into one year. Sinistra ended up having to teach us a lot of math and physics anyway. Put all that into the First year and have them memorize the constellations over the summer for their homework. Then they can start Astronomy proper in their Second year."

"I'll talk to Sinistra about that," Hermione said.

"We may or may not keep the writing. The First year Muggle and Traditions courses would be pretty simple," Harry said. "That wouldn't take up a lot of their time. Also, I thought besides Flying the first year, we could also offer swimming for every other year. Get their magical butts moving."

"Good idea."

"I also talked with Mister Ollivander about setting up a little market once we get into our third year of operation, for merchants from both Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade, and some others. He said if we can have at least sixty students with decent pocket money to sell to, he can sell the idea to the merchants."

"We'll have to wait and see how many have pocket money," Hermione admitted.

"The Wizengamot did agree to subsidize the cost of three work robes, a pair of shoes, and a cauldron for each student per year. Those that can afford them can use the money elsewhere. I was thinking, we could have school copies of the texts. If people wanted to pick up their own copies, that would be fine, too."

"More costs, less income," Hermione worried.

"True," Harry had to admit. "Still, we want as many as we can get to come."

"True," Hermione said with a sigh.

"They also agreed to take over a section of rail from the Muggles. It passes near an abandoned mining village, which is only six miles from the school. I can arrange a portal to take them safely from the village platform to the school."

"So, we get our own version of the Hogwarts' Express?"

Harry nodded. "And I was authorized to make portkeys to take students to Platform Nine and Three-quarters if they request it."

"Then it looks like we will have our selves a school."

"It does indeed."

Harry then took her back to the kitchen, where there were two large cauldrons of polyjuice simmering. "This will be something new," Harry said. "Snape developed it for Voldemort in 1997 in the last time line. You take the first dose like we did in Second year." Hermione wrinkled her nose. "After that, I can transform these into lozenges, that I can actually flavor with anise. Each carries a dose and you need to start sucking on it about five minutes before the dose runs out. To resume the same shape, you just pop a lozenge. You just have to drink the initial dose, as long as you don't take some other shape, besides your own, of course."

"Impressive," Hermione said.

Harry handed her a watch. "This will lightly vibrate seven minutes before the dose runs out."

"Even better," Hermione said.

Henry Clay was a fairly popular Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. He was successful in getting about a quarter of the Fifth through Seventh years to produce a Patronus. His Fifth years did not particularly enjoy having to directly learn how to deal with boggarts again, but that was about the biggest complaint against him, other than the Slytherins' disdain of a teacher who claimed to hail from Australia.

They had complained of unfair treatment (meaning, in reality, being treated exactly as anyone else). That stopped after Snape's echoing their complaints had ended in a duel, and the Potions Master had been defeated by being hit by seventy-five minor hexes in three minutes, after his shield had been blown up.

Clay's students scored well on the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s, approximately equally those scored two years before, when Remus Lupin had taught. Together, they represented a high peak compared to most other years in recent history. Only the year in between them had even come close.

Most students were sad to see him leave after only one year. Clay had explained that the position had been cursed by Voldemort, and it would take three good Defense teachers working in a row to break the Curse, and that he had made a good start.

That made many of them feel a bit better.

Over the Yule Break, though, the students had been introduced to Henry's fiancée, Olga Romanova. Considered by herself, or if one just looked at a Muggle photo, she was nothing special. In person, she was a fiery Slav. If her hair hadn't been so dark, many would have sworn she was at least part-veela.

Most understood why Clay wanted to follow her to the Urals. Many of the boys, and some of a girls, would have as well, if they had been asked.

The next year's teacher was just as competent, but a lot more intimidating. James Kettle stood 6 foot 9 and was a burly 24+ stone (over 330 pounds) of solid muscle and sinew. Draco Malfoy had stared at the man during the feast, and changed his class schedule the next day. Severus Snape was the most well-behaved he had ever been. After a friendly tussle between Kettle and Hagrid ended with Hagrid only winning two out of three submissions in the friendly contest, Snape walked on egg-shells, almost tried to smile, and never once did the world 'Mudblood' pass the lips of anyone near the Defense professor, who had announced that first day that he was a Muggle-born who was by profession an expert troll wrangler.

The students, especially the Fourth and Sixth years, were driven hard. By the end of the year, the Defense students were in good shape if they liked it or not. The O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. students, with several good years of instruction now behind them, scored better than ever.

Kettle did have one weakness, however. Her name was Becky Ito, a Japanese-Canadian (Kettle was also Canadian). She was just barely 5 foot 4, and if she weighed 8 stone (112 pounds) it was because of the huge D-cups on her slender frame. A few of the students tried to win points by showing cleavage, only to find that it was not easy doing pushups in a push-up bra.

While very grateful for their training, most students were not terribly sad to see Kettle go.

The third Defense teacher was in many ways the oddest. He was a very average-looking man of about thirty, very slender with very short blond hair and piercing blue eyes. He wore a very plain brown robe, more like a habit, belted with rope. He wore odd sandals which, when asked a few days after the first night feast, he claimed were made from recycled automobile tires which he had bought in Lagos. He was merely introduced as Brother Z.

The students knew they had an odd one right from that first night. This was reenforced the next morning, when they found Brother Z awaiting the arrival of his colleagues at 7:00 am in a lotus position and floating a few inches above the staff table.

The students also knew they had another dangerous one when Professor Snape walked in and made a sneering comment about fakirs -- and was turned into a seal without Z making a movement. Fiery letters then erupted behind them: BETTER TO BE SILENT AND BE THOUGHT FOOLISH, THAN TO SPEAK AND BE PROVEN A FOOL. If any had missed the point, a small sign then appeared above Snape's head, which flashed 'FOOL' until the Headmaster had arrived.

"Feel the magic within you," had become a mantra that students would remember like they would "CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

"Magic can be logic, as in Arithmancy or Potions," Z lectured all of his first classes. "Magic can be music in your soul. Those who are in touch with both will be the true magicians. Those who obsess about the music or the logic will become lost. Those who try to force magic to do their bidding will lose their soul."

Even the over-worked Head Girl, Hermione Granger, who was also learning three languages magically and trying to complete Muggle courses in higher maths and physics, stopped and listened to the music of the magic within her under Z's graceful tutelage.

Luna Lovegood regretfully had to deny any relationship to the contemplative Brother. She did learn to listen to the logic of magic, just as Hermione had learned to listen to its music.

Again, the students taking the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s set a school record. Hermione was very grateful and proud to have scored 8 O N.E.W.T.s, and was accepted to Cambridge.

As for the Defense position, the next holder, a retired New Zealand auror, held the position for the next twenty-two years, before she retired from Hogwarts as well. And with the end of the Curse on the Defense Position, Voldemort's influence was held to be cleansed, at least from Hogwarts itself.

The plaque honoring T.M. Riddle's 'special service' to the school had disappeared by the time Brother Z had left.

No one ever mentioned missing it.