

The Tangled Threads of Time

The scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years. All was well.

Harry closed his eyes and allowed a feeling of contentment to settle over him. With an internal smile of satisfaction, he snuggled up against the warm body in front of him.

Wait ... What?

Why was he lying on his side in a bed, spooning up behind ...who?

Information began pouring in from his senses. He was naked. He was lying between a pair of sheets. His arm, wrapped across the chest of the figure in front of him, confirmed that 1) it was definitely female, 2) she was wearing a thin nightgown, 3) she didn't seem to be wearing anything under it, and 4) this was a good thing.

His brain chided his arm that it was not allowed to make judgements like that.

His hips confirmed that the woman in question was not wearing anything under her nightgown, as it had ridden up in back and her bare bum was pressed against his crotch. And they agreed that this indeed was a good thing! Before the judgmental part of his brain could respond to that, the analytical part of his brain determined the identity of his bed companion.

It was Hermione.

Harry found himself wondering how he had come to that conclusion, since as far as he could recall he'd never been in this position with her. He also wondered why he didn't find the whole situation more alarming. On the contrary, there was somehow a feeling of rightness to it all. Somewhat befuddled, he decided to open one eye.

Darkness. He shut his eye again and pondered some more. There was something decidedly odd about this.

It was at that point that another part of his brain finally managed to make itself heard.

Ron's going to kill me!

This was followed a second later by a similar observation.

And if he doesn't, Ginny will!

To say nothing of what Hermione herself would do to him! But ... on the other hand, it was possible that Hermione was here of her own free will. The only other possibility that came to mind was that he'd somehow forced her here against her will. And that was inconceivable.

Actually, the whole thing was inconceivable. How could he have gone from waving goodbye on the platform to his son one second, to being in bed with Hermione the next? It didn't make any sense!

Unless this is a dream.

Harry couldn't help letting out a sigh of relief. OK, that was a much better explanation. Still, dreaming about being in bed with your best friend's wife wasn't exactly proper. But you couldn't control what you dreamed about, right?

This line of reasoning was abruptly brought up short by another realization.

Is it more likely that you're standing on the platform dreaming about being in bed with Hermione, or that you're lying in bed with Hermione dreaming about standing on the platform?

Now, that was a disturbing thought.

Had he, or had he not just finished putting his son on the Hogwarts Express? His son ... what was his name again? Albus, right. AlbusSeverus Potter.

Why on earth would I name my son after that greasy bastard Snape?

Harry shook that thought aside, chalking it up to his half-awake, half-asleep state. There were much more important things to worry about right now. Like, for instance, why he was cheating on his wife and three children ...

Three children who he couldn't remember anything about, other than the fact that he'd just been with them on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. Not only that, he couldn't remember *anything* about his and Ginny's life together.

It was as though his marriage and family had no existence prior to that event.

OK, so being here with Hermione is real, and the platform was a dream. But if that's true, then ...

He couldn't recall anything about how he came to be here with Hermione either.

Harry lay in deep thought for some time, trying to work through what was and what was not authentic. Deciding to try an experiment, he tightened his arm around Hermione's torso and pulled her closer. This elicited a response from her as she wriggled slightly against him, shifted her position a bit, then settled down again. He let out the breath he'd been holding.

All right then. This is real. I'm real. Hermione's real.

Everything else is still up in the air.

He opened an eye again, to discover that it was a bit lighter than it had been. In the dim light he could make out that they were in a bedroom, one which he didn't recognize, although there was an air of familiarity about it. Perhaps he could look around a bit, and expand his reality to more than two people in a bed.

Moving very deliberately, he slowly disengaged himself from the woman in his arms, somewhat regretfully. Carefully, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat up. On the floor beside the bed he found a pair of running shorts, exactly where he would have expected them to be. Except, of course, that he had no recollection of leaving them there. He stood up and pulled them on.

It was the most bizarre sensation, while moving out of the room and through the house, that everything was at the same time alien and familiar. Behind the door at the end of the hall would be another bedroom, and next to it was a bathroom. Neither of which he'd ever seen before. Around the corner was a stairway, which would lead down to the living area on the right and the dining area on the left. He crept down the stairs and discovered that again, his surmise was spot on. The house felt like his own, and yet ...

This is just creepy.

He decided to stop in the kitchen for a glass of water. But when he entered the room, just as he was about to turn on the light ...

"Master Harry Potter, Sir," a high pitched voice squeaked. "Can Dobby be getting you anything?"

Harry whirled and gasped. There, standing before him ... but it couldn't be ... it just wasn't possible.

"D...Dobby?" he stammered. "But ... but ... you're dead!"

"Oh dear," the small being lamented, wringing his hands. "Master Harry is forgetting again."

Then everything went black once more.

-oooOOOooo-

When Harry regained his senses he found himself back in the bedroom, this time sitting up in the bed, resting against the headboard. Hermione was sitting on the edge of the bed to his left, holding his hand. He stared at her for a few moments, trying to sort things out. As he focused his attention on her, he noticed that she was wearing a nightgown, most likely the same one he'd noticed the first time he awoke. It was of a lightweight, slightly transparent summer fabric, thigh length, with thin straps and a scoopneckline. And now there was also *visual* evidence that she wasn't wearing anything underneath.

He realized that he'd been staring at her chest, and glanced up guiltily to her face, only to find her giving him an amused, affectionate smile instead of the glare he'd expected.

"How do you feel?" she asked softly, giving his hand a squeeze.

"Confused," he answered honestly. He glanced around. "Where are we?"

"This is our home," she responded carefully. "We live here. You and me." She gestured to their joined hands. There, on their ring fingers, were matching wedding bands.

Harry nodded, somewhat in a daze. But this did confirm the direction his thoughts had been going. "I just had the strangest dream," he confessed.

Hermione shook her head gently. "Unfortunately, that wasn't a dream."

Harry's eyes widened in alarm.

If that wasn't a dream, then is this?

Another scene flashed through his mind, this one also set on the train platform.

Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?

Hermione continued, "Ever since the final battle with Voldemort, you've had ... other memories ... that have surfaced from time to time. We're not sure why – some sort of curse he cast on you before he died, as near as we can tell." She paused to let this revelation sink in.

Harry mulled this over for a while, then nodded. That was a better explanation than anything he'd come up with so far.

"So, what was it this time?" Hermione inquired.

Harry related the scene from Platform 9 ¾. Hermione grimaced. "Ron again. Well, it could be worse. And you being with Ginny makes sense. Certainly better than the one with her and Malfoy together." Harry's head snapped back in shock. What a revolting thought!

"Who else have you and I ended up with?" Harry wondered, now beginning to grasp the concept that he'd been through this before.

"Besides Ginny and me, there have been a few where you were with Luna," Hermione responded. "The strangest was probably Daphne Greengrass."

Harry frowned in puzzlement. "Who's that?"

"She was a girl in our year, in Slytherin," Hermione revealed. "I don't remember much about her, except that her name came right after mine in the alphabet, so we were called up together for our OWL's."

Harry shook his head. He had no recollection of the girl at all, and so agreed that any scenario where he actually married her was extremely implausible.

“As for me, sometimes I’m with Ron ...” Harry cocked an eyebrow at her hesitation. “And sometimes I died in the final battle,” she continued in a low voice.

Harry’s eyes widened. That would have been a crushing blow! He wondered how long it would have taken him to recover from her loss. He tightened his grip on her hand and reached over with his other to stroke her arm in a gesture of comfort.

“Well, I’m certainly relieved that those times weren’t real,” he declared fervently. Their eyes met and held each other for several seconds before she nodded with a grateful smile.

Hermione returned the discussion to his current memory. “So you had three children and I had two?” she continued, making some notes on a pad of parchment. Harry would later learn that she kept detailed records of all of what she called his ‘alternate universes’.

“Yeah,” Harry confirmed. “Mine were named James, and Lily, and ... Albus Severus.”

This time it was Hermione’s turn to glance up in shock. “Well,” she declared, “that in and of itself should be pretty solid evidence that this one wasn’t real.” Harry nodded again, having already come to that same conclusion. Then he glanced around again and frowned. Something still wasn’t right.

“So, now that we’ve got that sorted out, why can’t I remember what really happened?” he wondered.

Hermione set her parchment aside. “That’s the strange part, and why we’ve concluded that these are more than just dreams,” she informed him. “They seem to be real memories, and they crowd out your memory of what happened here.”

Harry’s chest began to tighten as a bit of panic began to take hold.

“Don’t worry,” she hastened to reassure him. “We’ll get it back. It just takes a while. I’ll need to guide you through the process step by step. We’ve done this before.”

Harry felt his body relax as his apprehension began to ease.

“First, you need to clear your mind and relax,” Hermione instructed. “We’ve pinpointed the approximate time where your memories usually begin to diverge.”

“Oh? When’s that?” Harry queried. But before she answered, Hermione gestured to him with a ‘get on with it’ hand motion, indicating that he should follow her previous instruction. Accordingly, he closed his eyes and took several deep breaths, preparing himself.

“Think back to when we were on the horcrux hunt,” she directed. “When you were about to destroy the locket with the sword.” He nodded, not bothering to correct her that it was Ron who

destroyed the locket. “Remember the image that came out of the locket?”

Harry felt his face turn red as he recalled the naked bodies of Hermione and himself entwined together in a passionate embrace. The erotic sight had severely shaken Ron, paralyzing him with dismay.

“That was real.”

Harry’s eyes flew open. “What!” he exclaimed.

But Hermione only returned a sly smile. “Close your eyes again.” Harry shot her a look of disbelief, but obeyed.

“The horcrux used that image to try to take control of Ron, but pulled it from *your* memory,” she revealed. Harry shook his head, still not able to accept what she was telling him. “You don’t think it pulled that from Ron’s mind, do you?” she reasoned. “That’s not exactly something he was likely to fanaticize about.”

“It might have been one of his nightmares,” Harry pointed out stubbornly.

“It might have been, but it wasn’t,” Hermione insisted. “Now, focus on that image, of the two of us together ... naked ... sweat glistening on our bodies ... kissing ... making love.”

Following her direction, with an odd mix of eagerness and reluctance, Harry allowed his mind to fill in more details. And indeed, it did.

His eyes shot open. “Sweet Mother of Merlin!” he gasped. “When did that happen?”

Her smile broadened. “Remember Godric’s Hollow?” He nodded. “How close we felt to each other in the graveyard? Something changed between us that night.” He nodded again. He’d felt that too, but then they’d encountered BathildaBagshot, who turned into Nagini and attacked him.

“When I got you back to the tent I was absolutely terrified that I’d lost you,” she informed him as her eyes moistened. “I had to strip you down to heal you, and then I put you to bed. When you finally woke up, I ... well, I couldn’t control myself.”

Now it was her turn to blush. Harry smiled at her discomfort, then closed his eyes again, retrieving more images ... Hermione climbing atop him and pressing her body onto his ... declaring her love ... sitting up and removing her clothing, then embracing him once more ... and how things had progressed from there. It was most assuredly all coming back to him now!

He opened his eyes and grinned. “You were a bit of an animal there,” he teased.

She huffed, but didn’t deny his description. “Well, it’s a good thing, isn’t it?” she declared. “If I’d waited for *you* to make a move we might still be dancing around each other!” He acknowledged her point and opened his arms, inviting her to cuddle up with him on the bed. Their bed. She accepted.

“I just thought of something,” he stated, running his hand through his hair as he tried to recall the scene precisely. “One time while we were sitting outside the tent together, you looked around and asked if we couldn’t just stay there in the forest and grow old together. Did that happen?”

“Yes,” she replied with a fond smile. “That was the next morning. The sun was shining and I was feeling particularly possessive. It was nice to be able to shut out the world, if only for an hour or two. Even if I knew it couldn’t last.”

“That scene makes more sense now,” he commented. She nodded.

“So, that was our first time, then?” he confirmed.

She nodded. “And every night from then on. Keep trying to remember.”

And he did. Amorous activities filled his mind, as the two of them explored their relationship. His breathing quickened, and he felt himself responding physically. Embarrassed, he glanced down to see if he was making a noticeable tent in the sheets.

“Don’t worry, I’ve seen it plenty of times,” she reassured him smugly, seeing where he was looking. “But perhaps that’s enough for now. If you reminisce about every time we made love in that tent, we’ll be here all day.” She had a teasing smile on her face once more.

“Right. Back to the locket.” He shook his head as a particularly vivid scene burst from his memory. “Oh my!”

“Which one was that?” she inquired, stroking her fingers sensuously up and down his arm.

“I think it was the first time we tried oral sex,” he admitted sheepishly.

“Hmm.” She thought for a moment. “We weren’t very good at it initially,” she revealed, before turning her face to his with a wicked grin. “But we got a lot better eventually.” Her hand started to wander toward his crotch before she thought better of it. Harry’s mind went temporarily blank. He was most definitely looking forward to retrieving some of *those* memories.

“Now, if you’re finished distracting me, we’ll continue,” she chided him good-naturedly. “Tell me how you remember the scene with the locket.” He complied. When he finished she shook her head.

“OK, we need to fix that one next,” she decided. “First of all, it wasn’t the next day, it was a week later. Next, you and I followed the doe patronus *together*. It would have been extremely irresponsible for you to run after it without telling me.” Harry agreed with that, and Hermione continued. “Ron did appear and help me pull you out of that icy pool, though,” she revealed. “After I dried us all off I had a few choice words for him.”

Harry winced, wondering if it had been as bad as what he recalled. Then he realized that he needed to remember this on his own, and closed his eyes once more. The scene shifted in his mind as the correct memories replaced the faulty ones.

“I couldn’t be *too* mad at him, since his absence did allow us to discover our feelings for each other, after all,” Hermione noted, providing some commentary as his new memories began to take form and sharpen.

Harry nodded to signal that he now had this batch sorted. “And I was the one who held the sword, not Ron,” he recalled. “So why did the horcrux go after him instead of me?”

“I think it could sense which of the three of us had the weakest mind,” she reasoned. “If it could control him, he might have been able to stop you.” Harry agreed that this was plausible. He next focused on the aftermath of the destruction of the locket, since this had been when he thought he’d made a pretty specific declaration of his disinterest in a romantic relationship with Hermione.

“So, then you said, ‘It’s not like that’, and he looked relieved,” Harry noted.

“Yes, but he took it the wrong way at first,” Hermione added. “I meant that we didn’t really think of him as useless, that we hadn’t laughed at him, that we’d really been devastated when he left. But he thought I meant that you and I weren’t romantically involved.”

“But that’s exactly what I remember telling him,” Harry informed her. “I came right out and told him that I loved you like a sister.” She tilted her head back and regarded him with a frown for a few seconds, then giggled.

“Well, it’s a good thing you didn’t *really* say that, isn’t it?” she pointed out. “The things we’d been doing for the past week were hardly proper behavior to be engaging in with one’s sister!”

Harry decided she needed to be tickled for that. After she’d squirmed in his arms for a few seconds they got serious again.

“So, in your memory, you came right out and told him you weren’t interested in me, and essentially told him I was all his?” she clarified. Harry nodded. “Well then, I think I’m going to label this one ‘Weasley Fantasy’,” she decided, reaching for her parchment. “For both him and Ginny – a dream come true, ending up married to each of us, with kids and everything.”

“One Big Happy Weasley Family,” Harry added with a grin. “You could label it OBHWF for short.”

Hermione shook her head. “One Big Delusional Weasley Fantasy is more like it. No, I think I’ll just call it WF.”

While she was writing, Harry began his meditation again. It was getting easier and easier to retrieve these memories, each requiring only a little prompting from Hermione. He now focused on Ron’s reaction to their revelation. He knew his redheaded, hot-tempered friend would not have reacted well.

He was right. He now recalled the blowup when they returned to the tent and Ron realized that they’d been sharing a bed in his absence, followed by Hermione setting him straight in no

uncertain terms. Ron twice got up to storm off, only to be yanked back with a flick of Hermione's wand. At length, she had him thoroughly cowed.

"He pretty much agreed with everything you said from that point on," Harry observed as he opened his eyes once more. Hermione nodded, a fierce gleam in her eye, which reminded him how inadvisable it always was to get on her bad side.

"Are you ready to go on?" she asked. With a determined set of his jaw, Harry agreed. He knew they were only getting started.

To his relief, they worked through the visit to the Lovegood house with only minor alterations. But then they came to their capture and imprisonment in Malfoy Manor.

"I know this one must be different than I remember, because ..." he paused and looked around. "I did see Dobby here earlier, right?"

At the mention of his name, the house elf appeared, having evidently been waiting for this cue. "Master Harry Potter Sir," he blurted out, while wringing his hands in consternation. "Dobby is being so sorry for stunning you."

Hermione broke away from Harry's grasp and knelt down next to the nervous little creature, taking his hand. "You did fine, Dobby; exactly what was needed. We're very lucky that you were so alert." At these words, Dobby calmed down (at least calm by his standards) and turned back to Harry.

"Will Master Harry be all right?" he worried. Harry nodded to reassure him, and smiled. He'd missed the fanatically loyal little fellow. Relieved, Dobby snapped his fingers and vanished.

Hermione returned to her spot on the bed next to Harry. "So, we have a house elf?" he prompted. Hermione nodded with a sigh.

"Yes, we do, and he's a wonderful help," she admitted. "I don't know what we'd do without him. And you know very well how devoted he is."

Harry cocked an eyebrow. "And SPEW?" He spelled out the letters, having no desire to annoy her right now.

Hermione locked eyes with him, her gaze softening. "I learned that being bonded is not the same as slavery." She raised their joined hands to indicate their wedding rings. "There are bonds that benefit both parties involved. And bonds given freely can bring a great deal of happiness to everyone involved." Harry nodded slowly, realizing the obvious truth in her words.

"Any kind of bond can be abused," she declared. "Husbands sometimes abuse their wives, and wizards sometimes abuse their elves. That's what we need to fight against, the abuse."

She suddenly chuckled at the look of wonder on his face. "And we have this discussion every time you lose your memory," she complained with a smile. "Now, as for Dobby, he has standing orders

to do that whenever he notices you acting strangely, as though you don't know where you are," she explained.

"How often does this happen, then?" he wondered.

"Quite often at first, but not so much any more," she informed him. "It's getting less and less frequent, so we're hoping it will end soon." She hesitated as if deciding what she should reveal at this point, then continued, "This one may be related to all the craziness yesterday." Harry looked at her with the obvious question in his eyes.

"Yesterday was the one year anniversary of the final battle."

Harry pondered that information for some time. "But we should get there one step at a time," he suggested. Hermione nodded solemnly.

"So, Malfoy Manor." As they began discussing the sequence of events it became evident that Harry was having more trouble with this one. Finally Harry leaned back and blew out a sigh of frustration. "It seems like I have conflicting memories on this one – I keep recalling things that are contradictory. Like when you were tortured ..." He reached out and grabbed one of her hands, then the other turning them over and examining them, finding only smooth skin.

But he distinctly remembered the foul epitaph MUDBLOOD carved into her arm.

"Bellatrix used the Cruciatus curse on me, it doesn't leave any marks," Hermione pointed out soberly.

"She didn't carve anything into your skin?" Harry persisted. She shook her head no. "OK, then, that didn't really happen," he decided. "But when Ron and I finally made it upstairs, she did have a knife to your throat?" This time she nodded. "And then Dobby showed up and dropped the chandelier on you, but Bellatrix jumped out of the way?"

Hermione's brow wrinkled in consternation. "Harry, that doesn't make any sense. Think it through. If the chandelier had fallen directly on me it would have crushed me." Now it was Harry's turn to frown. She was right about that. "Focus on the knife," Hermione suggested. "I think it will be the key to getting the correct memory."

Harry closed his eyes again, willing the scene to unfold properly.

It was a standoff ... Bellatrix pressed the knife into Hermione's throat, drawing blood, while screaming at him and Ron to drop their wands ... then ... then Dobby appeared and pointed his finger at their enemies. There was a loud bang and all of the still standing Death Eaters were hurled across the room. Harry summoned their wands while running to Hermione, coming to a stop next to her along with Ron. She threw her arms around him, still trembling, both from the effects of the torture curse and from the terror of the knife at her throat. Dobby came up beside them to pop them to safety, but Bellatrix screamed and threw her knife ... and ... Dobby snapped his fingers and the knife reversed course, flying straight into the insane witch's throat!

Harry's eyes flew open. "It was the other way around!" he marveled. Hermione nodded with a satisfied smile.

"I was pretty much out of it at the time, but I have to admit that it felt really good to see that evil witch finally get what was coming to her," she declared, snuggling up against her husband. The two of them relaxed for several minutes, allowing their emotions time to recover after reliving that gut wrenching experience.

Finally Hermione glanced up and grinned. "There was something particularly interesting that happened after that when we got to Bill and Fleur's home, that I suspect you don't remember."

Harry decided that this was her way of challenging him, so began meditating again. Since his first memory of their arrival at Shell Cottage had been burying Dobby, he knew he had his work cut out for him. Again, he focused on the part that he knew was different – this time Dobby's survival.

Falling to his knees as they hit the ground ... looking up at Dobby, standing there with the knife sticking out of his chest ...

He shook his head – no, there was no knife – and the picture dissolved and reformed.

Dobby standing there with a worried look on his face ... Hermione's body twitching in his arms ... Bill and Fleur racing out to meet them ... holding Hermione tight against his chest as they all hurried to the cottage, his stomach clenching at the little whimpers of pain escaping from her lips ... laying her in the bed as gently as he could ... her desperate pleading that he stay with her, hold her, love her ... Fleur pulling the blanket over the two of them and casting a spell ...

Harry's eyes shot open and bulged out comically. "She didn't!"

Hermione managed to stifle a giggle. "She did," she confirmed. "It turns out that the best treatment for Cruciatus exposure is maximum skin contact. You bundle the patient with another person and then vanish their clothing. Fleur took one look at the way I was clutching onto you and knew exactly who she should use."

Harry shook his head, still in shock at the new memory of her naked body shivering against his own while he ran his hands gently over every bit of her skin he could reach. "Good thing Ron didn't carry you to the house then," he muttered.

She smiled and leaned up to kiss him on the nose. "It wouldn't have mattered. I'd still have been calling out your name. And if she hadn't been sure, she'd have put Luna in with me."

Harry's eyes became slightly unfocused as he briefly imagined that scene, but then shook it off before it could get him into trouble. Instead, he turned his thoughts to the time he'd been the victim of the same curse. "Madame Pomfrey didn't do that for me after the Third Task," he objected. He tried to avoid sounding disgruntled.

Hermione smirked. "Oh stop your pouting. Do you really think Poppy would have allowed a

fourteen year old boy and girl to snuggle together naked in the hospital wing?"

Harry scowled at her, but couldn't stop his mouth from twitching. "You were fifteen," he pointed out smugly. Hermione rolled her eyes in response.

"First of all, I don't think she was even told that you'd been hit with that curse," she pointed out. "It was already more than an hour later when you finally got to the hospital wing. And second, what makes you think it would have been me?" she challenged.

Harry frowned in puzzlement. What was she implying? He had fancied Cho that year, as he recalled, but ...

"You were underage, so they would most likely have used someone of the same gender," she informed him with another smirk.

He groaned, suddenly not wanting to continue that line of discussion. But she raised his spirits considerably when she assured him that even at fifteen, she would have been willing to offer her assistance even in that manner, if it had been required. "I was rather devoted to you back then, if you recall," she reminded him. That confession brought a broad smile to his face. Then he decided that it also deserved a heartfelt kiss.

Next up for review was his memory of the Gringotts break-in and the retrieval of Hufflepuff's Cup. After confirming that the basics of the operation were as he recalled them, Harry quipped, "One thing I definitely remember is how hot you looked in that low cut top of Bellatrix's after the polyjuice wore off."

This earned him the classic Hermione response. "Oh honestly, Harry," she huffed as she rolled her eyes. "Try to focus on the important parts!" But, he noticed, her lips betrayed her as they curled up into a small smile.

"Now, the two key differences that I noticed were that Dobby was with us, and we kept the Sword," she instructed. "Both of which were related. Because Dobby was with us, we had an easier time of it in the vault, and Griphook wasn't able to snatch it away from you. We did end up flying out on the dragon, though."

Focusing on Dobby and the sword, Harry was soon able to reconcile his memories with Hermione's. "So, we destroyed that horcrux as soon as we got away from the dragon," he noted. Then he frowned. That meant that there would be significant discrepancies between his memories of what happened when they'd reached Hogwarts and what actually occurred.

"Then we apparated to Hogsmeade, set off an alarm, and ran into Aberforth," he continued.

Hermione nodded, but added, "And Dobby accompanied us, as far as the Hog's Head. Then he popped away to Hogwarts and we said we'd meet him there."

Harry shook his head. "I don't remember that at all," he complained. And from that point on

everything's all mixed up. It's like I went through it two or three different times."

Hermione wrapped an arm around him and pulled him close. "That's because we're getting closer to the nexus, which was your final confrontation with Voldemort," she explained. "Everything is tied to that. You don't ever quite get this part completely straightened out. Tell me about it."

Harry ran his hand through his head in agitation. "Well, we went through the tunnel into the Room of Requirement. And Neville may or may not have gone with us. And then I went to Ravenclaw Tower with Luna to look at the diadem. Or we didn't go there, we went to find the Gray Lady. Or was that later, with Nearly Headless Nick? And McGonagall fought Snape in the Great Hall and drove him out of the castle. Or, she and Flitwick confronted him in a corridor near the Ravenclaw common room and he jumped out a window. Everything's so jumbled. It was complete chaos."

He turned to look at Hermione, his brow wrinkled in confusion. "And you went down to the Chamber with Ron somewhere in there and ... but no, the horcrux was already destroyed. And you kissed him, right in front of me in the corridor. Or, maybe it was somewhere else. And then Snape showed up again. No ... we went looking for him. But I can't remember why. And we found him ... in the Shrieking Shack ... no, in the boathouse. And Voldemort killed him ... or Nagini bit him. And as he was dying he gave me some memories ... but you can't put memories into tears, you draw them out of your head with a wand, so how ...?" He shut his eyes tightly, trying unsuccessfully to force the disparate images into a coherent whole.

"And Neville killed the snake with the sword at the beginning of the fight, but you and Ron chased it around the castle *during* the fight, trying to stab it with basilisk fangs. And when I fought Voldemort ... we seemed to bounce all over the place, first one location, then another. But you can't apparate inside Hogwarts. On the other hand, I also seem to have confronted him in the Great Hall as soon as I revealed myself. And then we taunted each other for what seemed like forever while everyone just stood there and watched us, before I defeated him with a single spell."

He held his head in his hands and shook it. "Talk about unrealistic," he muttered. "And I defeated him because I was supposedly the master of the Elder Wand, even though he'd killed me with it just a half hour before."

Hermione's soothing fingers running through his hair, and her soft voice in his ear brought him back to his senses. "It would probably be best if I told you what really did happen," she decided.

"Yes, we did go to the Room of Requirement, and found it full of students," she began. "They were indeed happy to see you. Luna did think of the diadem, and took you to see the Gray Lady. But she didn't know where it was hidden. All three of us, not just Ron and I, went down to the Chamber, but couldn't find anything there. Then Dobby popped up and suggested the Room of Hidden Things." She paused as she tried to make certain she got things in the right order.

"Then Ron, out of the blue, said we needed to make sure the house elves all got out safely. I was so amazed I hugged him. And kissed him ... *on the cheek* ." She paused to scowl at Harry. "So don't you go giving me grief about that!" Harry quickly shook his head to assure her that he had

no intention of doing anything of the sort.

“We went back to the Room of Requirement, summoned the hiding place, found the diadem, and destroyed it with the Sword. But Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle ambushed us on the way out. We nearly had them defeated when that moron Crabbe cast Fiendfyre. We found some brooms and managed to get out, but the three of them were trapped inside and burned to death.” She stopped to take a breath and check to see that he was following. His eyes were closed again.

“When we got out of the Room, we ran into McGonagall, who told us that she’d just been up to the Headmaster’s office and found something that Snape had left for us. That’s where we found the memories. We used Dumbledore’s pensieve to look at them. And ...”

“And that’s when we found out that I had a horcrux in my scar,” Harry finished, as the picture now solidified in his mind. “And when we came out of the pensieve, I looked at you and you looked at me and we both knew what I had to do.”

“And I told you I’d go with you,” Hermione replied softly. They both had known as soon as she’d said the words that it was the ultimate expression of her love for him.

“And I wanted more than anything to tell you no, and make you stay behind, but I knew that you wouldn’t hear of it even for an instant,” Harry confessed. His hand found hers and they entwined in a soothing acknowledgement of the emotional power of the recollection.

“Then you put the Cloak on and left, but a voice behind me called me back into the office,” Hermione related, as she resumed the story. “That’s when Dumbledore explained the final part of his plan to me. I wasn’t in any mood to hear it, but he insisted that it would work, and was your only chance to survive. I used my charmed Galleon to summon as many of the remaining members of the DA as I could, and we set out after you.” Harry nodded, fitting that piece of information into place while still working out what came next.

“I gave out instructions as we crossed the grounds, and by the time we got to the forest every one of us was disillusioned and silenced,” she continued. “That slowed us down, but eventually we found the clearing where Voldemort and his Death Eaters had gathered. What was surprising, though, was how few of them there were. No big army of thousands of evil wizards descending on Hogwarts. Nor even hundreds. I doubt if there were even fifty of them.” She shook her head. “Just a small, egotistical band of ruthless killers who nearly conquered an entire country.”

A grim smile of satisfaction crept onto her face. “And there you were in the middle of them, all alone, standing up to them, challenging them.”

“I’d stopped in the Entrance Hall as I went out to give the Sword to Neville, since I didn’t want Voldemort to get his hands on it,” Harry commented, taking up the tale. “And told him to make sure to kill Nagini. I knew you’d be right behind me, with some brilliant plan to back me up.” He smiled and gave her hand an affectionate squeeze. “But I needed to go out there by myself; my resolve might have faltered if I’d had to look into your eyes again and see what it was doing to you.”

“I know what you mean,” Hermione whispered. “Standing there and watching him kill you was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do.”

Then she was in his arms again, and on his lap, as they now faced the most difficult, emotionally draining piece of the entire ordeal.

“I know you have no memories of what happened next, since you were off in your out-of-body experience, but when you went down Voldemort collapsed as well,” she told him. “And that was our cue to attack, while the Death Eaters were in a turmoil. Dobby blasted them all off their feet, and we started raining spells on them. Neville went straight for Nagini and decapitated her with one swing.”

“Way to go, Neville,” Harry murmured in admiration.

“You’ve told me before about your little visit with Dumbledore in the clouds, and how long your conversation took, but for us it was less than a minute,” Hermione informed him. “But in that time we managed to down all the Death Eaters. It was fortunate that there were only two giants left, and they only fought half-heartedly. I think Voldemort’s hold on them was broken when he ... well, when whatever it was that happened to the two of you. And then you both woke up.”

Her grip on him tightened, and he responded, pulling her more snugly against himself. Now, his memory of the event returned.

There was no Narcissa Malfoy leaning over him to desperately inquire about the fate of her son. Instead, it was Hermione herself, cradling his head in her lap, willing him to come back to life. With something inside him telling him that his mortal foe was simultaneously regaining consciousness, he pushed her aside, rolling to his knees and springing to his feet in one motion.

But Voldemort was waiting for him. He must have undergone his own epiphany, because his face reflected a mixture of terror, resignation, and pure hatred.

“You may think you’ve defeated me, Potter, but you will never be at peace,” he hissed. A beam of pure black energy shot from his hand and struck Harry directly in the forehead before he could even think of dodging.

And then, a mere fraction of a second later, the most feared dark lord of the last fifty years crumbled under the onslaught of a barrage of curses, all fired by young witches and wizards not even out of their teens.

Harry paused for several seconds, trying to recall what followed, but finally shook his head. “Everything’s a complete blank after that,” he complained.

Hermione nodded. “You were unconscious for the better part of a day. And when you finally woke, we at first thought you’d been driven insane. It was like those nightmares you used to get about Voldemort, only worse. You didn’t seem to be able to distinguish reality from your dreams. You kept looking at people in shock, thinking that they were supposed to be dead. One healer who

examined you suggested that you had severe multiple personality disorder. It took weeks before we began to catch on to what was happening.”

She looked away and blushed. “I discovered that it didn’t seem to be as bad if I crawled into bed with you and held you. And the more intimate we were the better you did.”

Harry smiled as the reason for her embarrassment became clear. “I don’t imagine the healers at St. Mungo’s considered that an appropriate treatment,” he quipped. Hermione’s blush deepened.

“No, they certainly did not,” she acknowledged. “But I was tired of waking up every morning wondering who you were going to be that day, or who you thought you were married to. It was quite disconcerting the first time you pulled Ginny onto your lap and kissed her.”

Now it was Harry’s turn to blush, and Hermione added in a teasing tone, “Somehow it didn’t seem to fluster Luna, she took it quite calmly when you proclaimed your love for her.” Harry chuckled – that did sound like his somewhat odd Ravenclaw friend.

“And Fred and Dobby both eventually learned to check with me before stopping by to see you,” Hermione added.

“Fred’s alive too?” Harry broke in eagerly. “Who else?” But Hermione shook her head.

“That should wait until later; you’ll remember them yourself rather than have to go through people one by one,” she pointed out. Harry nodded his agreement.

“So how did it happen in the memory you woke up with this morning?” Hermione inquired, wondering, as she did each time he’d thought she ended up with Ron, how she could ever have come to the decision to marry *him* .

Harry frowned. “See, that’s the thing,” he told her with a perplexed expression on his face. “I don’t know. I remember it being right after the battle, and deciding I was exhausted and just wanted to climb into bed. And next thing I knew I was a lot older and taking my kids onto Platform 9 ¾.”

“And nothing in between?” Hermione asked in astonishment. Harry shook his head, somewhat relieved that she was as puzzled as he was.

Hermione thought for a few moments about the implications of this revelation. “Well ... I think that may be a good thing,” she decided finally. “If you’re down to getting only fragments of other memories, it may be almost over. This could even be the last time we have to go through this!” She wrapped her arms around his neck and gave him one of her enthusiastic hugs that he recalled so well no matter which set of memories he was dealing with.

“OK, I guess we should get on with it then,” he suggested. “It sounds like we still have a whole year to go. Including some pretty important stuff, like our wedding!”

To his surprise, Hermione’s blush returned. “Actually, we have a shortcut for that,” she revealed.

“Now that we’re past the nexus, there’s a way to bring everything back all at once.”

“Oh?” he responded hopefully.

“Remember, the power you had over Voldemort was love,” she asserted. “And that’s what enabled us to finally overcome his final curse.” She smiled at him seductively. “Haven’t you noticed the common theme yet?”

She stood up and took hold of the hem of her nightgown, pulling it off over her head.

“All we need to do is make love.”

Harry’s mouth went dry as he gazed upon her gloriously naked body. It was one thing to have memories of her this way, but quite another to experience it, here in the flesh.

He scarcely heard her as she continued her explanation. “We discovered this one time when, according to your memories, we had been lovers before the final battle, but I had been killed. You mourned me for the rest of your life. When you ‘woke’ to see that I was still alive, well ... we celebrated quite enthusiastically.”

Harry nodded absently, his attention focused elsewhere. Specifically, on the changes in her body from what he recalled. Her breasts were larger, much fuller than in his recently recovered memories. Not only that, her waist was thicker, and the bulge in her tummy – either Hermione had put on a bit of weight in the past year, or ...

Hermione was well aware of where his thoughts were, and responded to his unspoken question.

“Yes, Harry. We’re going to have a baby.”

“That’s ... that’s fantastic!” he whispered in awe.

Hermione smiled and pulled the sheet away from him. Then she flicked her wand to vanish his shorts, leaving him attired as she was. Her smile broadened as she observed that he was already quite ready for her.

“Is it ... is it safe?” he gasped, as she straddled his hips.

“Most definitely,” she assured him. “The baby isn’t due until the end of October, so there’s no problem. And I should warn you, many women experience an increased desire for sex while they’re pregnant. Including this one.”

“Does that mean that you’re even more of an animal now?” he teased.

“You’re just going to have to find that out for yourself,” she replied with a salacious grin. “Go ahead, they won’t break,” she added as she saw him eyeing her enlarged breasts.

One last thought flashed into Harry’s mind as he took them in his hands, while she lowered herself

onto him and they joined together.

All was well indeed, in this, the best of all possible worlds.

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