

The Ritual

Part 1

The Ritual, Part 1

Hermione Granger bit her lip thoughtfully as she pondered the ritual she had just discovered. How would the other two react to this idea? For that matter, how did she feel about it? She sat there, working through different possible scenarios for several minutes before deciding to go through with it. Even if they didn't do the ritual, bringing up the subject might help answer some other questions she had been struggling with. She marked the page and closed the book, then stood up to go find Harry and Ron and show it to them.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione had been living together in Grimmauld Place for a month now, searching for information on the Horcruxes. After a week at Privet Drive they had moved here and had renewed the Fidelius charm. Hermione had helped Harry cast the charm, and Ron was made the Secret Keeper. The only other person who had been let in on the secret so far was Remus, who checked in on them occasionally. Other than that, they were alone in the house, as the Order had stopped using the house as headquarters after Sirius died.

They were reasonably comfortable here, and each had their own room. Hermione had insisted that Harry take the master bedroom suite when he had tried to give it to her. Ron was in the room he had always used when they stayed here. Hermione had decided not to use the room she and Ginny had shared on the first floor, preferring to be on the second floor closer to the boys.

Harry did the cooking, pointing out that he had the most experience at it, having been cooking for the Dursleys for years. Hermione initially objected, not wanting him to be reminded of the treatment he had undergone at their hands, but he responded that he enjoyed cooking for people that appreciated it. Also, he found it a relaxing break from the tension filled nature of their researches.

The Black family library had been a gold mine of books on dark magic, some of which was totally revolting. Hermione spent virtually all day, every day up there, poring through the books to find a method for destroying the Horcruxes. They had already found one, right here in the house. It turned out that RAB was actually Sirius's brother Regulus, and that they had in fact found the locket here two years previously when they were cleaning the house. It was Ron who guessed that Kreacher had stolen the locket, and Hermione who remembered the stash of his treasures that she had discovered at Christmas that year when she tried to give him a present, and Harry who crawled in and fished it out. So now it was sitting on a table in the drawing room, waiting for them to figure out what to do with it.

The other problem that occupied Hermione's mind was her relationship with Ron – or lack thereof. Despite how obvious she had been during the previous school year about wanting to get together with him, they were still dancing around each other. She was getting tired of it. At first she had thought his reluctance to say anything to her was due to his shyness, but his escapades with Lavender had put that notion to rest. All they had right now was an occasional hug, which unusually flustered Ron. Honestly, the hugs she gave him were hardly different than the ones she gave Harry, and he never got flustered. She had hoped that this meant that Ron was struggling with some sort of romantic feelings for her. The only other indication she had of his interest in her was that Ron always looked annoyed when she sat on the couch next to Harry.

Frankly, he needed to give her more than that or she was going to give up and look elsewhere. Of course, her only other option right now was Harry, and she had long ago placed him into the 'off limits' category. Although she had lately begun to question exactly why he was off limits, she was still not comfortable thinking about him that way.

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"You want us to do WHAT!?"

Hermione gave an exasperated sigh, although she was inwardly quite nervous about the whole thing. "I just explained it Ron. There is a class of rituals that have to be performed in the nude, and these are among them."

"That's disgusting!"

"Honestly, Ron, simple nudity is not that disgusting. We're all of age now and supposedly adults. We ought to be able to handle it." She looked at Harry for support and received an uncomfortable shrug. At least he wasn't objecting. She turned back to Ron and narrowed her eyes. "Or do you mean that the idea of seeing me nude is disgusting?"

Ron's eyes went wide. "No! I mean ... well ..." he was bright red now. "It's ... it's just wrong."

"Ron, this is nothing compared to some of the rituals in these books. If you want to talk about 'wrong' consider human sacrifice. Or cutting someone's heart out of their chest while it's still beating."

Ron got a look of complete revulsion on his face. Harry broke in, attempting to lighten the mood. "Well, compared to that, nudity doesn't seem so bad, does it?" Hermione shot him a grateful look for backing her up.

"So, you think this is all right, then?" Ron challenged Harry.

Harry shrugged again. "Well, you and I have seen each other starkers plenty of times. I'll admit it will be uncomfortable with Hermione, but it will probably be even more uncomfortable for her, as the only girl." Ron's eyes narrowed now, a trace of suspicion working its way into his glare. He wheeled back to Hermione.

"I suppose it has to be all three of us, does it?"

"Well, technically, it only needs two of us. But there has to be at least one male and one female, and like Harry said, I'm the only girl here." She let that thought hang in the air. This was it. The ball was in Ron's court. Perhaps Ron recognized her challenge, perhaps not, but he let the opportunity pass him by, preferring to suddenly find an interest in his shoes. Hermione folded her arms across her chest and glared at him, but it had no effect as he wouldn't look up. Both of them were broken from this stalemate when Harry cleared his throat.

Harry was fully aware of what was going on between his two friends. In fact, he thought Ron was being a daft git about it. Ron would be lucky to have a girl like Hermione as a girlfriend. While Harry wasn't sure if it would work out, since the two of them did seem to antagonize each other quite a bit, he thought they ought to at least give it a try. But Ron just wouldn't take that final step. Down inside, Harry suspected that Ron didn't think that Hermione was pretty enough, but he would never say that out loud. If that were in fact the reason, he thought Ron was being ridiculous. While Hermione wasn't classically beautiful like Lavender or Ginny, she certainly wasn't ugly. Harry thought she was actually reasonably good looking.

Unfortunately this line of reasoning always led Harry to the uncomfortable question about why *he* hadn't ever considered Hermione as potential girlfriend material. The only answer he could come up with was that he had automatically consigned Hermione to the 'just friends' category, and the possibility of changing that classification had never come up. Probably because the night he had first noticed just how attractive Hermione was, and first looked at her 'that way', was the same night that he had decided that Ron was interested in her 'that way'.

"Actually, I think I should be one of the participants," Harry declared, now that he had his friends' attention. "I just feel that I should be involved in destroying it." There was an uncomfortable pause, but neither of his two friends objected. It was his show after all. They were just the assistants. If he felt that he had to be involved in the destruction of the Horcruxes, it was his decision. "So Ron," Harry continued, "it will be Hermione and me, and you can participate or not, your choice."

Ron now turned his glare on Harry, but Harry refused to back down, and met his gaze. "What about Ginny?" Ron demanded.

"What about her? I told you a month ago, I broke up with her."

"Why not do the ritual with her? Why does it have to be Hermione? I can apparate over to the Burrow right now, tell her the secret, and have her back here in five minutes. I'll guarantee you she wouldn't mind doing a naked ritual with you."

That statement led to a full set of glares. Hermione glared at Ron for bringing Harry's relationship with Ginny into this. She wasn't sure exactly why, but the idea of Harry and Ginny being nude together bothered her. That thought in turn made her uneasy. *'So, you're more comfortable with the idea of you and Harry being nude together than Harry and Ginny being nude together?'* an annoying inner voice challenged. As Hermione had no answer for the inner voice she ignored it, and continued to glare at Ron.

Harry also glared at Ron for bringing up his relationship with Ginny. "Ron, I've told you I don't want Ginny involved in this, and that's final."

Ron glared at both of them for making the situation so uncomfortable for him. *Why couldn't things just stay the same while he figured out what he wanted?* As long as he was uncomfortable, he wanted to make sure they were too. "So," he countered, "you'd rather see Hermione naked than let Ginny know about this project, is that right?"

Harry and Hermione's eyes met briefly, sharing a touch of embarrassment with the way Ron had just worded that, but in that look they also communicated to each other a willingness to go through with it. They turned back to Ron and Harry found his voice first.

"What difference does that make to you?" he challenged.

Hermione followed right after. "Yes, why exactly would *you* care if Harry sees me in the nude?" Inside she silently pleaded with him. *'Come on, this is your last chance. Speak up and tell me you have feelings for me.'*

It was not to be. With a final glare at each of them, Ron snapped, "OK, fine. Just leave me out of it," and stomped from the room.

Hermione was determined that she would not cry about the situation, but the moisture gathering in her eyes seemed intent on ignoring her wishes. She was staring at the door with her hands clenched into fists at her sides when she felt Harry come up behind her and put his arms around her. Without thinking she leaned her head back into his chest and sighed.

"I'm sorry," he offered.

"Why?" She wondered just how much he had figured out.

"I'm sorry it's not working out between you and Ron. I'm not completely blind. Even I can see what you're trying to do. It doesn't seem to be working though, and I'm sorry you're being hurt."

"Thanks, I appreciate it. And thank you for being here for me." She put her arms over his and hugged them to herself. "Well, I'm not going to waste any more time worrying about him. I've embarrassed myself enough already chasing after him. We've got more important things to do." She let go of his arms and twisted around to face him, stepping back slightly as he released her. "Are you sure you want to go through with this?"

Both of them turned pink as they turned their thoughts to what they had committed to do, and both of them noticed and shared a laugh. "Do you think we'll get to the point where we can talk about it, much less do it, without blushing?" Harry asked, still chuckling.

"I think I have an idea," Hermione replied thoughtfully.

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Harry and Hermione met each other at the top of the second floor landing a short time later. Hermione had suggested that they needed to get comfortable being nude in each others' presence before they attempted the ritual, as one stammered incantation could prove disastrous. So they were going to disrobe and do a walk through without actually saying the words, repeating the process until they were comfortable with it. In order to avoid the discomfort of watching each other undress, she had suggested that they both take all of their clothes off in their bedrooms, leaving only one article of clothing remaining. Harry had chosen an old tee shirt of Dudley's that came halfway down to his knees, and Hermione had borrowed a tee shirt from him that covered her to nearly the same extent. Harry had added the suggestion that they do the acclimation in the drawing room instead of one of their bedrooms, and Hermione had readily agreed. So now they smiled at each other, each sneaking a glance down at the other's bare legs, and padded barefoot down the stairs to the first floor drawing room. When informed of their

plan, Ron had declared in a huff that he would be in the kitchen and that they should 'have fun doing whatever it is that you're going to do'.

Now that the moment of revelation was at hand, both of them were considerably more nervous than they had been when it was just a theoretical discussion. Finally Harry blurted out, "On three then?" Hermione nodded.

"One, two, three." They both reached down and simultaneously pulled the hem of their tee shirts over their heads and quickly looked up to take in the sight before them.

"Uh, Harry," Hermione offered after a few seconds, her voice a bit higher pitched than usual. "Remember that bit about maintaining eye contact?"

"You're not exactly looking at my eyes either."

"OK, perhaps we should just forget that rule. Just don't stare at any one place for too long and try to look at my face occasionally ... oh my!"

Harry fought to keep from covering himself with his hands, as the whole point of the exercise was for them to see *all* of each other. "Hermione, I'm sorry. I just couldn't help it. Please don't think I'm ..."

"No, no that's all right," Hermione stammered, finally tearing her eyes away from Harry's growing problem. "It's just a natural reaction, I know. I just didn't expect it to happen so quickly."

"Well, I mean, that pretty much sort of happens with teenage males when they see an attractive naked woman," Harry replied, still struggling to look away from Hermione's body. There was just no safe place to look. Her shapely legs led to a small patch of curly hair at her crotch, and when he jerked his eyes away from that they landed on her waist, which he had no idea was so nice and slender, as she rarely wore tight-fitting clothing, and moving up from there were her lovely breasts which were nice and firm and curvy and ... *Stop that!!* he ordered himself.

Hermione's figure wasn't anything out of the ordinary, but she was, after all, nearly eighteen and kept herself in good condition. Her body was as firm and shapely as it would probably ever get. And Harry didn't exactly have a lot of experience viewing nude women for comparison. And he was a seventeen year old boy after all. All-in-all, she looked perfect as far as he was concerned.

"So, you think I'm attractive?" Hermione found herself asking shyly.

"If I didn't before I sure do now," Harry blurted out before he could catch himself. This comment left both of them bright red. "Well, I guess we have a ways to go with the whole blushing thing," Harry remarked with a nervous laugh, trying to collect his runaway thoughts and steer them toward less dangerous territory.

"Right," Hermione declared firmly, fighting the same battle. She was *not* thinking about touching that, and she was most *certainly* not thinking about how it would feel inside her.

Harry decided that he should keep talking, figuring that talking about it was preferable to silently thinking about it, since his thoughts were being so resistant to his demands that they behave. "Um, you do look good, Hermione," he stammered. "You have really nice ... I mean a very nice figure."

Hermione was grateful to him for breaking the ice. "Thanks Harry, you do too." *No, that didn't sound right. Boys didn't have nice figures.* "I mean, you have a good looking body." She felt herself responding to that thought, and hoped Harry wouldn't notice. Unfortunately for both of them, the part of her that was responding was exactly the part of her he couldn't stop glancing at. And his mouth was still on autopilot, trying to come up with anything to fill the awkward silences.

"So ... your, ah, your nipples – sometimes they're soft and now they're hard. Why is that?"

"Well," Hermione responded, trying for a calm, clinical answer, "that happens to women either when they're cold or when they're aroused." *Whoops. Should have left out that last part.* However, it seemed that her brain was also sending thoughts directly to her mouth without much control.

"It's not very cold in here," Harry pointed out, finally managing to look into her eyes.

"No, it isn't," Hermione said, swallowing hard, realizing that staring into those green eyes wasn't helping her at all.

They both found themselves involuntarily moving toward each other, locked in a gaze that seemed to reveal in each of them things they had never seen before. Harry reached out his hand to take her arm (*Her arm! Focus on her arm and not on what's right next to it!*) but as he made contact she jumped back two feet as though shocked back to her senses.

"Um ... yes ... all right then ... let's take a look at that ritual, then, shall we?" she blurted out in a rush. She hurried over to the chair where she had put the book and bent down to pick it up.

"Wow!"

Hermione whirled to look back at Harry, who had his hand to his mouth in mortification. He tried to shake his head to indicate that he didn't really have anything to say, but she put her hand on her hip and gave him a look that let him know she wasn't going to accept that answer.

"Well," he stammered, "I ... uh ... I just noticed that you have a really nice looking bum."

"Oh." She blushed again, pleased at the compliment in spite of her continued embarrassment, and embarrassed even more by the fact that she was pleased. "Well, so do you."

Harry gave her a strange look. "I haven't turned around yet, Hermione. You haven't even seen my bum."

If possible, she was now even more embarrassed. "Ah yes, about that. You see, I, uh, actually I accidentally walked in on you when you were

getting into the shower the other day.”

“Oh. Of course, right, well that explains it, yes,” Harry rambled, wondering why his mind was making such a big deal out of the fact that she had seen him getting into the shower and apparently thought his bum was worth commenting favorably on, when after all they were both completely starkers right now right next to each other and boy did she look good and wasn't his *problem* ever going to relax? He managed to stop both his mental and verbal rambling and cleared his throat.

Hermione took that as a signal that this conversation was finished and turned back to the book, opening it up and placing it on a table, where they both stood next to each other reading it. *That should help, right, since they weren't looking directly at each other any more?*

Wrong.

Each of them was acutely aware that they were within inches of each other's naked bodies, and the fact that their hips occasionally bumped, which neither would have given a second thought to before, or that her breasts were just slightly out of his line of sight for the book or that a certain part of him was pointing directly up at the book all conspired to make it take considerably longer than it should have for them to read about the ritual Hermione had selected. Harry, thinking that it might help if he acted the way he would normally act in this situation, and just forget that they weren't wearing any clothing, reached out and put his arm around her waist.

That didn't help either. His brain insisted on calculating exactly how far his fingers would have to move to be able to touch her breast. For her part, Hermione's brain was making a similar calculation regarding her hand and a certain engorged organ. Finally, after forcing himself to focus on the words written on the parchment of the book, Harry's eye locked on one particular word and his brain refused to let it move on.

“It says this ritual has to be done by virgins.”

Hermione immediately stiffened and pulled away from his arm. That movement prompted his brain to attempt to assess what it was that had made her do that, since his arm had been very happy where it was.

Oh no!

“Hermione!” he gasped. “I'm sorry! I never meant to imply that you had ... I mean that you weren't ... I mean ... Arrgh!”

Hermione smiled at his reaction to the thought that he had offended her. In fact, her reaction had been prompted by the fear that he was referring to his own non-virginal status. She moved back toward him and put her hand on his arm to calm him down, just as she had a hundred times in the past. “That's OK, Harry. Your comment just surprised me, that's all. Don't worry, I haven't done anything like that. I've always thought that should be saved for marriage.”

Harry's relief was palpable. “Oh good. Me too.” He wasn't sure why he was so relieved. And it wasn't just because her virginity was required for this ritual. He supposed that it was because he thought of her as a sister, and guys were expected to be protective of that sort of thing. Like Ron and Ginny for example. Unfortunately, he was having trouble convincing himself that that was the only reason. He certainly didn't seem to be having brotherly thoughts about her right now.

As it happened, Hermione was having very similar thoughts about Harry's revelation about *his* lack of sexual experience, and she didn't have the overprotective brother excuse to fall back on. She forced herself to move those thoughts in another direction. “Well,” she admitted. “It's not like I've actually had the opportunity to test those principles. Honestly, I've never even kissed a boy.”

Harry's forehead crinkled into a frown. “But what about Viktor? Ginny said you two had snogged.”

“What? Why would she say that? I never told her ...” One possible reason occurred to her, but Hermione didn't want to go there right now. “Well, maybe she misunderstood me. He did give me a peck on the cheek goodnight kiss after the ball. I never really went out with him on what you would call a proper date. I was too worried about you ...” Another thought she didn't want to pursue right now nagged at her, and she pushed it aside as well. (It went something along these lines: 1) She was supposedly the thing Viktor would ‘sorely miss’. 2) She was much more concerned about Harry than about Viktor. 3) What then did that say about how she felt about Harry, or how he felt about her?)

They were talking together more or less normally now. Perhaps they were finally getting accustomed to the nudity. By unspoken mutual consent, they dropped the subject of Viktor and went back to their reading.

They continued studying the ritual in silence, only noticing after several minutes that they were holding hands. Perhaps subconsciously not wanting to let go, Hermione reached up with her other hand to take hold of the page. She waited and looked at him, silently querying, until he nodded that he was ready and she turned it. Having already read through the ritual once, she waited with bated breath to see his reaction to the sketch on the new page.

“Hermione?” His voice had a slight quaver. “I have to touch you there? And you have to hold me there?”

“It seems so,” she answered as evenly as she could. “Do you think you can do that?”

“I ... I ...” he attempted to answer but failed, partly because he wasn't sure what the answer was. “Isn't there some other ritual we could do instead?” he finally managed, thereby avoiding the question temporarily.

Hermione bit her lip before answering. “Yes, but the other ones would all involve us having sex.”

Harry jerked back involuntarily, but she squeezed his hand so that he couldn't let go and pull away too far. “No!” he almost shouted. “That would be much worse!” He had been trying for quite a while now to keep his mind from going in that direction, and now the barriers he had been erecting to curb it were instantly shattered. It wasn't until almost a minute later that he got his roaming thoughts under control enough that he noticed the crestfallen look on Hermione's face, and the slight quiver of her lips.

“Oh no,” he groaned. “I've managed to insult you again haven't I?”

Hermione shrugged, stalling for time until she could answer without her voice breaking. "I guess that depends."

Harry frowned until he figured out what she was implying, then offered a hesitant smile. "Hermione, I think it should be obvious that I didn't say that because I don't find you attractive." His face flushed while Hermione's eyes dropped to where he was still displaying his unflagging appreciation for her current state of undress, and a smile of her own crept onto her face. "I'm sure that having sex with you would not be at all unpleasant. What I meant was that I wouldn't want you to have to give up something so precious to you. You just said you wanted to wait until you were married, and I would hate to take that from you."

Hermione turned her eyes to him with a warm glow of appreciation, and said softly. "Thank you Harry. But you know I would be willing to do even that if we had to."

Harry swallowed hard. What an incredible offer she was making. But he knew she was completely sincere about it, and furthermore he had known it even without her saying so.

"I ... I really don't deserve you, Hermione," Harry finally replied, matching her soft tone and warm gaze. Both of them were still working out all of the possible meanings of this declaration when they were interrupted by a pounding on the door.

"Aren't you two finished in there yet?"

Alarmed expressions broke out on both their faces, which each tried to hide from the other.

"No Ron, we're not," Hermione managed to shout back. "But you're welcome to come in here and join us if you're willing to." It was clear to all three of them that she meant 'willing to get naked'.

Harry and Hermione held their breath, each silently hoping that Ron would decline the offer. "No," came his irritated voice finally. "Don't worry about it. Take all the time you need." Stomping noises marked his progress back down the stairs to the kitchen.

"Whew. I'm glad he didn't take you up on that," Harry stated without thinking what that would sound like.

"Oh?" Hermione replied, her voice betraying a bit more interest than she wanted to admit to.

"I mean, it would have been pretty awkward if he were to see how I'm reacting to you," Harry said sheepishly, gesturing at his still erect member. "And frankly, I have no desire to see what his reaction would look like either."

"Perhaps you're overestimating what his reaction would be," Hermione suggested, the tone of her voice a mixture of hopefulness and uncertainty. Harry scowled inwardly. If Ron's behavior had her thinking so little of herself then he deserved to lose her, the big git.

"I hardly think so," Harry replied forcefully, allowing his gaze to sweep over the luscious contours of the once forbidden territory of his best friend's body.

Hermione's face was bright red again, but her eyes sparkled as she pressed close to kiss his cheek and whispered, "I think I'll take that as a compliment."

Harry's arm had found its way around her waist again and he pulled her even closer. "I meant it that way."

Her heart pounding, Hermione frantically searched for something to say. "Doesn't that hurt?" she blurted out.

"What?" asked Harry, clearly perplexed.

Hermione gestured downward. "It's been hard for nearly half an hour. Doesn't that get uncomfortable?"

Now it was Harry's face's turn to be bright red. "Ahh, um, I'll probably deal with that later."

Hermione was giddy with these new feelings of desirability. Her self-esteem had taken a real beating during the fiasco with Ron, but was now soaring. As a result, her imagination was recklessly ignoring all the flashing lights and warning bells her mind had created marking the 'off limits' designation for Harry Potter. "And just what might you be thinking about while you're dealing with that particular problem?" she asked coyly.

Harry just gaped at her as the remaining barriers in his mind shattered. He was not thinking about Hermione Granger like this. He could not think about Hermione Granger like this. It didn't work. He was, in fact, thinking about Hermione Granger like this. With a supreme effort he cleared his throat once more and mumbled, "I think we better get back to this ritual before one of us does or says something we might regret." Hermione agreed, but if anything, their faces showed that 'regret' was an apt description of how they felt about *not* pursuing that line of inquiry.

The tension, however, was not abated in the slightest by the intimate positions required by the ritual they were rehearsing. First Hermione positioned herself in front of Harry and had him place his hands *there*. Then she reached down and put her hand *there*. Unfortunately, each of them could not resist ... adjusting ... their hand positions a little, and the pressure kept increasing. Finally, Harry moaned.

"Hermione, I'm afraid I'm enjoying this way more than I should be."

"I ... I am, too." Suddenly she gasped. "H ... Harry! I don't think you should be moving your fingers like that!"

"My fingers! What about your hand! Hermione, you'd better stop ... Aaaahhh!"

Harry fought to get his breath back while Hermione turned to face him, gazing wonderingly at the messy fluid coating the palm of her hand.

"Oh Hermione, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to ... I just ... I ..." Hermione reached out and wiped her hand on Dudley's shirt, while pressing one of the fingers on her other hand to his lips. Then she put both of her arms around his neck and pulled herself tightly against him.

"Don't be sorry. I'm not." Then she kissed him. And he kissed her back. Some time later they pulled away to breathe.

"Are you sure we should be doing this?" Harry asked hesitantly. The part of his brain that was screaming *Yes ! Yes!* was gradually beating down the part that was still objecting.

"I think so. It feels right to me," Hermione replied with a bright smile.

"I think you're right," Harry admitted, as a beaming smile lit up his own face. "Of course, you always are." He leaned forward to kiss her again. He couldn't believe what he had been missing. Why had it taken him so long to figure this out? His hands roamed up and down her bare back, eventually coming to rest on her bum, where he gave it a squeeze. He was rewarded by a little squeak of delight from Hermione, and she let her own hands wander.

Eventually they pulled apart again for more air. Harry sighed and asked the question he had been trying not to think about. "What about Ron?"

Hermione smiled back at him. She refused to waste any more time worrying about that, and her heart felt lighter than it ever had in her life. "He made his choice. I've made my choice. You've made your choice."

Harry tightened his arms around her back and hugged her into him for all he was worth, and Hermione did the same. Then he pulled his head back and grinned.

"Good choice."

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The Ritual

Part 2

The Ritual, Part 2

Ron Weasley was sitting at the kitchen table engaging two of his favorite activities. Eating and feeling sorry for himself. He had just finished off the chocolate chip cookies that Hermione's mum had sent them a few days ago and was now starting on the treacle tart that his mum had sent over that morning.

I knew it. I knew they would end up together. She always liked him better. She's always been more worried about him than about me. Half of the conversations we have are about him. Probably more than half. He's so lucky. He always gets everything I want.

Ron's mind quickly catalogued all of the things that Harry had been favored with over the years.

Quidditch – Ron had lived and breathed quidditch all his life, and Harry had never even heard of it when they met. So who got to play on the quidditch team? And as a first year, something which wasn't supposed to be allowed? Harry Potter of course.

Fame – Harry was one of the most famous wizards in the world even before he had started Hogwarts and Ron was a nobody, living in the shadow of six older brothers. And then of course Harry got to be in the Tri-Wizard Tournament. Ron would have killed for the chance at that kind of fame (and money), and Harry got in without even trying!

Money – of course Harry had so much money that he didn't even know how much he had, and could spend it whenever he wanted and on whatever he felt like. (The fact that he mostly spent it on his friends didn't enter into this internal tirade.) Ron, on the other hand, never had enough money to do what he wished or buy the things he wanted.

Girls – Girls were always falling all over themselves to get Harry to notice them. He could have had his pick of any girl at Hogwarts. So who was he with now? Hermione, the girl that Ron wanted.

They're probably up there shagging right now. That's what happens when a guy and a girl get naked together, right? That whole naked ritual thing was probably just an excuse for her to get naked with him. She's probably wanted him all this time. She probably even got him to dump Ginny so she could have him. He always gets everything I want!

On the other hand, Ron knew he'd had his chance if he really wanted her. Yet he had hesitated. He wanted her and yet he didn't. He just wasn't sure. She wasn't exactly his type. It would have been better if she had been more of a girl. Worn sexier clothing and taken more care with her appearance. Like she had at the Yule Ball. Why couldn't she look like that all the time? A guy wanted a girl who looked good, after all, because that made *him* look good.

And she was really nice to him at times, but really nagged him a lot too. He would have wanted her more if she didn't argue with him so much. Helping him with his homework when he wanted her to, but not getting on him about it when he didn't feel like doing it – that would have been perfect.

When it came right down to it, the main reason he wanted her was because then Harry wouldn't have her, and he would finally have something that Harry didn't have.

Well, he has her now so I don't really want her any more. So what if they're up there shagging? I wouldn't want to shag her anyway. It would just be too weird. And she'd probably criticize me and tell me I wasn't doing it right. Like she's any great prize. She's not exactly hot. Not like Lavender. Lavender would have been a good shag. Maybe I should try to have another go with her.

Ron suddenly noticed that the treacle tart was gone. Pushing the plate away he leaned forward and rested his head in his hands. He had just about been able to convince himself. If he kept at it, he probably could. Now that his stomach was full, and his initial emotional surge had passed, he began to attempt to rationalize his feelings. Despite how jealous he felt sometimes, he knew Harry was a great friend. If he really wanted Hermione, he was welcome to her. It probably wouldn't work out anyway.

Hermione, despite all her faults, was a great friend too. It would be best for Ron if she just stayed as his friend. Anything else would be too awkward. Even thinking about any more with her made him too uncomfortable. It would have been nicer if they all had just stayed as friends, but if something had to change, it was probably best this way. Let the two of them deal with the awkwardness of changing from friends to lovers.

Ron got up and went over to the cupboard to see if there was anything else to eat.

-ooOoo-

"Now what?" Harry and Hermione had spent a good ten minutes hugging and kissing, and now they were standing with their arms around each other, Hermione's head resting comfortably against Harry's chest. Still naked, too, a part of Harry's mind noted as he ran his hands up and down her bare back.

Hermione leaned back and gave him one of her half smirk/half smiles. "Well, we really ought to finish what we came in here to do, hadn't we?" Harry cocked his head to the side as if pondering the question, causing Hermione to laugh and punch him on the arm.

After they stopped their teasing, Hermione turned back to the table and repositioned them in the intimate posture stance required by the ritual. As she grasped him once more and he curled his hands over her impossibly soft breasts he had a different idea, and his fingers became more adventurous.

Hermione caught her breath. "Harry! Stop ... Oh! ... You're not supposed to ... Oh! ... be doing ... OH!!!"

Since she wasn't exactly complaining, Harry moved on to the second part of his plan, and his left hand slid down to Hermione's navel and continued right on past, while his right continued to play with the hardened nub that it had raised.

"Harry, what are you ... ooohh ... doing?"

"Well, I just figured it was only fair." His left hand, having reached its target, had begun to lightly stroke the patch of curly hair it rested on. Hermione gasped again but said nothing.

"Hermione?" Harry was waiting for some signal as to whether he should move forward. His eyes were mesmerized by the rise and fall of her chest, and it occurred to him that she was breathing more heavily than normal. Another gasp was followed by a breathless, but simple response.

"Down farther."

She reached down with her free hand and guided his to where she wanted it, then moaned loudly when he began stroking again. Harry felt Hermione's body begin to go limp, and with one hand on her breast and one between her legs he wasn't sure he would be able to support her, so he guided them over to the armchair and sat down with her on his lap. She immediately leaned back and spread her legs, giving him the all the access he needed. For the next several minutes, Harry paid close attention to the moans and gasps emanating from his now much-more-than-a-friend, adjusting his manipulations whenever he received a particularly positive response. Finally he found a spot that really set her off.

"Harry! There! Yes! YES!! OH HARRY!!!" Hermione's back arched so that her body seemed to get airborne momentarily before collapsing back down on him. Her mouth formed a perfect 'O' and her body bucked several more times while small whimpering sounds escaped her lips. Concurrently, he observed that goosebumps broke out all over her body, and the nipple on her left breast, which he had not stimulated at all, had swelled and hardened. Since it was right in front of his face he couldn't resist leaning forward and teasing it lightly with his tongue. This elicited another shudder and a loud moan.

"No, stop!" Hermione gasped. That's too much ... too intense." Harry obediently pulled back and simply watched in fascination as her chest continued to move up and down rapidly, and also noticed a light sheen of moisture coating her skin. He was sure he had just witnessed the most erotic sight he would ever see.

"That was the most incredible thing I've ever felt," she declared fervently. Harry couldn't agree more. He was still having trouble wrapping his mind around the fact that it was his supposedly platonic best friend that was generating these wondrous sensations in him. One thing was certain, though. The word 'platonic' most definitely no longer applied here. When her breathing approached normal levels he began to remove his hands but was immediately stopped when she clamped her legs shut on his left hand while covering his right with both of hers.

"No, don't move," she pleaded. "It feels so good having you touch me there." Harry was, of course, perfectly willing to comply with this request, since it felt pretty good to him as well. A little too good actually, he decided as he noted that he was now quite hard again. "I wish you could hold me like this all the time," Hermione continued breathlessly.

Harry quirked his eyebrows at her as she turned to him with an expression of sheer bliss on her face. "All the time?"

"All the time," she confirmed with a soft smile.

"That might make eating and sleeping a bit difficult," he pointed out with a grin.

"Eating maybe, but I don't see why sleeping should be a problem," she returned saucily with a gleam in her eye. Then she giggled at the gobsmacked expression on Harry's face that this comment had generated and wiggled naughtily. This, in turn, caused her to notice something hard pressing against her bare hip.

"I see that got your attention," she teased.

"Trust me, it's been like that for quite a while," Harry admitted. "You have no idea of how incredibly hot you looked just now."

This made Hermione beam even more brightly if that were possible. She was sure that the word 'hot' had never, ever been applied to her. In fact she was experiencing so many things she had never, ever felt before that it was overwhelming. And the most unbelievable part was that it was Harry Potter who was making her feel these things. Her Harry, who she had loved for so long as a friend, was now so much, much more. And she was doing things and saying things to him, things that she could not possibly have imagined being able to do or say to anyone, and yet they came so easily, so unreservedly. It was a comfort level based on complete trust.

All those people who had thought that she and Ron belonged together because they 'fought like an old married couple' were utterly delusional. You had to be insane to think that quarreling with each other and saying hurtful things could be the basis for a healthy relationship. Loving each other unreservedly, being able to look past each other's faults and care so deeply for the other that all you wanted was their happiness – that was the essence of a union that would last forever. And that, she now saw, was exactly what she had with Harry. How could they be so good together, so right for each other and she had never realized it before?

A good example of this newfound openness, trust, and desire to please him was the fact that she was about to do something she would not have thought herself capable of. She twisted around so that she was facing him and rubbed her leg against his throbbing member, giving him a wicked smile. "I suppose we need to take care of that before we can get back to that ritual. You need to be able to focus on the spell." She leaned forward and pressed her chest against his, then slid slowly down until she was kneeling in front of the chair. Then she leaned forward and ran her tongue lightly up his length.

Harry's eyes widened and he found himself unable to speak. As she took him in her hands and began alternately stroking and kissing him, he had one last thought before he lapsed into incoherence. *This day cannot possibly get any better.*

Despite the fact that it was his second time in less than half an hour, it didn't take too long for Hermione to relieve Harry's problem. She got to her feet and stood before him with her hands on her hips and a big grin on her face. Now it was his turn to be a little unsteady on his feet.

Come on, we should finish this before either of us get too turned on again," she announced impertinently. Harry groaned and extended his hand, allowing her to pull him up out of the chair and lead him back to the table. This time, neither of them flinched at the intimate hand locations required for the ritual, as both of their hands had become quite familiar with those particular areas of the other's bodies. Hermione merely smiled and smacked Harry's hands lightly as he attempted to make her nipples hard again.

"They feel better that way," he protested with a grin. He immediately desisted when she adjusted her hand position and pointed out that she might decide she wanted to give him a little squeeze as well. After a few quick run-throughs they both thought they had the spell down solid.

Hermione turned to face him again and put her arms around his neck, while he wrapped his arms around her back and they shared another kiss. Pulling away, she gave a happy sigh and nestled her head in his chest. "This has been amazing," she offered. "I can't believe what happened to us in one day. She leaned back and smiled. "I suppose I don't have to tell you how much I enjoyed it."

Harry grinned back. "Perhaps we should get together like this again some time."

"Well, I'll have to check my schedule but I think I have tomorrow free at the same time," Hermione teased.

"Good, it's a date, then," Harry declared. They both chuckled briefly, but fell silent as they recognized the hurdle looming before them for their new relationship.

"Are we going to tell Ron about this?" Harry asked.

"I don't see how we can avoid it," Hermione reasoned. "What else are we going to do? Sneak around, slipping into each other's room in secret, stealing kisses, trying to pretend nothing's changed when we're all together. It would be like a bad soap opera. And even if we tried, we couldn't keep it up forever. Sooner or later we'd have to tell him. And the longer we wait the more betrayed he'll feel. And justifiably so. So what's the point in waiting?"

"Well, I think we might wait a day or two," Harry countered. "He was pretty unhappy about us doing this nude ritual together. It would be pretty insensitive to come out and immediately tell him that because of it we've decided we're madly in love with each other. Maybe tomorrow morning or evening we could sit down calmly and tell him we've decided to try being a couple."

Hermione's heart had practically leapt out of her chest at Harry's casual use of the words 'madly in love', but she managed to keep her composure. "All right," she agreed. But we aren't going to lie to him either. I think he'll be too embarrassed to ask us about any details of what we did this afternoon. But we need to respond truthfully to anything he does bring up.

-ooOoo-

Ron looked up as his two friends entered the kitchen, after they had returned to their rooms and dressed. Since he was looking for evidence that something had happened between them, he decided that they were standing more closely to each other than usual. (Actually, they were, but he would have imagined it even if they weren't.)

"I suppose you two are together now," he commented with a challenge in his voice.

Harry and Hermione turned and locked eyes for an uncomfortable moment. So much for finding a time to break it to him gently. Harry wondered if there had been some expression on his face that Ron had read as *'I just got off with my best friend!'* He fought to keep a grin off of his face at the memory, and he noticed the corners of Hermione's mouth twitch as she was apparently having the same thought. In fact she was. She also decided that they had better break this eye contact before they both ended up grinning at each other like a pair of love-struck fools. She nodded to the implied question in his eyes.

"Actually, we have decided to try taking our relationship in that direction, yes," Hermione replied as diplomatically as possible.

Diplomacy was lost on Ron. "Seeing each other naked do that for you, huh?"

"Well, it did force us to look at each other in a whole different way," Harry offered with a smirk. Since Ron seemed to be going for a grumpy response instead of the angry one they had expected, he took a shot at some humor. It earned him a dirty look from his best mate.

"Well, if that's what you want I reckon you might as well go for it," Ron muttered. "Just make sure you use silencing charms because I don't want to hear you shagging."

"Ron!" Hermione was both shocked and hurt, and not a little surprised. She had imagined several possible responses from him but this had not been one of them.

"What, you're not gonna be shagging?" Ron persisted.

"Well, actually we ..." Harry considered trying to explain that the ritual required them to be virgins, but Hermione silenced him with a look.

"I mean, otherwise what's the point?" Ron continued, relishing the uncomfortable position he had them in. Keeping them off balance was a good way to avoid having to confront his own feelings on the matter.

"Honestly Ron!" Hermione snapped. "There is certainly more to a romantic relationship than that!" Even though so far the new aspect of Harry's and her relationship had been mostly sexual, he didn't need to be so crude about it. And she was certain that they would be sharing plenty of other sorts of intimate moments.

Ron shrugged. "That's pretty much all I did with Lavender."

"Ron!!" was all the response Hermione could manage.

"Yep, snogging and shagging. It's not exactly like we spent a lot of time talking." Inwardly Ron gloated at his victory. He had succeeded in

rendering Hermione Granger speechless. No matter that he hadn't been entirely truthful. Turning to Harry, he decided to turn it up a notch.

"Isn't that what you did with Ginny?" But suddenly Ron paled as he realized, too late, what he had just said. In an attempt to put Harry on the defensive he had broached a subject that he desperately did NOT want to think about.

"No, not at all," Harry denied quickly. Hermione's head had spun instantly toward him, her shocked look changing to hurt betrayal and he knew he needed to quash this line of inquiry immediately. "After all, we were only together a few weeks. We didn't really even do all that much snogging." To his relief, Hermione relaxed immediately and shot him a smile of approval.

Ron was relieved to hear that too, but also felt the need to justify his accusation. "Well, that's good to hear," he mused. "I'm not so sure you could say that about Ginny and Dean. Remember that time we saw them in the corridor. It sure looked like they were about to ..."

"Ron, stop it," Hermione broke in. "I'm certain that Ginny never did any such thing. She surely would have confided with me about something like that. And I don't believe you and Lavender had sex either. She would certainly have made sure I knew about it, if only to rub my face in it."

Ron, having been caught out, went on the offensive again. "What about you and Krum then, Hermione?"

"Ron!" Hermione stamped her foot this time. She was getting fed up with this. "I never even went out with him! I was with Harry every night studying and helping him learn spells."

"You didn't snog with him?" Ron challenged.

"No! He only kissed me one time, and you interrupted that!" she proclaimed, referring to the blazing row Ron had started after he caught Viktor saying good night to her outside the Gryffindor common room the night of the Yule Ball." Harry couldn't help the grin that suddenly sprouted on his face at that revelation. Fortunately, neither Ron nor Hermione noticed.

"Honestly Ron," Hermione continued, having regained the upper hand. "There's a lot more to a relationship than snogging. What about all the other things – holding hands, walking around the lake, talking about your day, sharing your feelings?"

Not about to let her win this one, Ron snorted. "Only you Hermione. Only you would go on a date with a guy and spend the whole time talking."

With that he exited the kitchen chuckling to himself, as Hermione teared up in his wake. *Why did he always have to get mean when they argued? Harry didn't resort to saying nasty things when he disagreed with her.* As this thought went through her mind, Hermione realized yet again that she had made a good choice. Being respectful of the other person's feelings during a dispute was very important in a loving relationship.

And so was comforting her when she was upset, she thought happily as Harry's arms enfolded her into a hug. "Don't listen to him," he said softly. "Even though he's trying to tough it out, he's got to be hurting a bit. He's just lashing out." Hermione began an objection but Harry shook his head. "I'm not saying that it's right. It's just the way he is."

Hermione began to calm down, as the blissful feeling of being in Harry's arms overcame the stress of the previous conversation. "And I want you to know that I agree with what you said," he continued. "That first time I walked around the lake with Ginny, we did our share of kissing but mostly held hands and talked." He pulled back and smiled at her. "And I'm very much looking forward to doing the same thing with you on lots of occasions in the future."

Hermione teared up again, but this time they were tears of happiness. *How did he know exactly the right thing to say like that?* She backed him up until they got to a chair, then sat him down and settled herself on his lap.

"Thank you Harry," she whispered. Then she proceeded to kiss him thoroughly. As their mouths hungrily explored each other her feelings for him built up to an overwhelming level. Finally she pulled away and looked deep into his eyes.

"I love you."

She regretted saying it as soon as the words were out of her mouth. It was too soon. She didn't want to pressure him like that. It was just that ... she did love him. She had loved him in the non-romantic sense for years, and now that their relationship had turned physical – now she could see the two of them sharing their lives together. She dropped her head in embarrassment and heard his startled gasp.

"Hermione! You ... you don't ... I mean ... you really? ... I don't ... I don't know what to say." Even though Harry accepted the fact that his feelings for her had undergone a dramatic change in the last several hours, he had not dared to consider that things between them had progressed this far.

"I'm sorry!" she pleaded, burying her face in his chest. "I didn't mean to say that – it just slipped out." She relaxed a bit as he pulled her even tighter to himself, relieving her fear that what she had said would make him pull away from her. "Don't worry; you don't have to say anything. I know it's too soon."

Harry kept silent for a time, then leaned back and waited while she slowly lifted her head to look at him again. "I'm not upset," he reassured her. "It's just that no one has ever said that to me before." Hermione's eyes widened as she realized the implications of that statement. Her mother and father had said 'I love you' to her nearly every day while she was growing up. While she knew that his relatives hated him and would never have done similarly, she hadn't really considered seriously what that would mean for him, and how he would react to her saying it.

"Did you really not mean it or did you just not mean to say it?" he asked.

Hermione searched his eyes, seeing in them his yearning to be loved by someone and couldn't deny it, even if she wanted to. "Actually, I did mean it," she replied softly. "In one way I've loved you for quite a while, and now I think I love you in every possible way. But I didn't want to put pressure on you if you weren't ready to decide it for yourself." She paused to gauge his reaction to this declaration. "You should only say it if you mean it too."

Harry swallowed hard. "I ... I'm not sure. I guess I don't exactly know what that means. I know I feel things for you I don't feel for anyone else. Can you explain what you think being in love means?"

Hermione lowered her head to rest it on his chest again and tightened her arms around him, which caused him to reciprocate. Taking a deep breath she began, "Love means caring about someone, doing things for him, trusting him enough to share your innermost thoughts with him. You truly enjoy being in his company. It's not just about snogging, although that's even better when it's with someone you love. It's that you're happy just to be around him, even if you're sitting quietly together. When he's away you look forward to when you can be with him again. When you love someone you want what's best for him even if it's not necessarily what you'd like for yourself."

Harry responded so softly Hermione almost didn't hear him. "I guess I've loved you for a while then." At that assertion she felt her heart swell up so much she thought it would burst. "I think everything you just said describes how I feel about you," he continued. "And I also agree that the snogging's brilliant." She smiled as he gave her a little squeeze. "But there has to be more to it than that, if you're talking about being 'in love' with someone," he protested.

"Well, that combined with physical attraction," she clarified. "A lot of people mistake just the physical attraction for love, but that's just lust. Romantic love is a combination of the two." She thought for a moment. "It develops differently for different couples, I think. Some people are attracted to each other and gradually fall in love. With us the affection came first, and now we've added the attraction. It was the same way with my parents. They were friends first and then fell in love." She raised her head from his chest again and looked back up at him. "Here's another way to think about it. If you try to picture your future with a wife and kids how does it feel to think of me in that role?"

Hermione bit her lip nervously while she waited for his response. Harry closed his eyes. "It may take a while," he confessed. "I've never really allowed myself to think that far ahead. I didn't think it would ever happen." Hermione felt her eyes tearing up again at that thought, but held her tongue. The important thing was that he was thinking about it now.

After several seconds a smile began to grow on Harry's face, and Hermione felt the tears, now ones of happiness again, begin to trickle down her cheeks. Finally Harry opened his eyes and gazed at her in wonderment.

"I think I love you."

The kiss that followed was one they would remember for the rest of their lives.

-ooOoo-

Two days later they met again in the first floor drawing room, this time with the Horcrux present. Hermione had suggested, with a sly look, that they needed another practice session before the actual attempt to destroy the dark object so they had repeated their first session the day before, with the same results. (Except this time Hermione had gotten Harry off intentionally, rather than accidentally.)

As he had the day before, Harry stopped to watch Hermione pull the tee shirt over her head before removing his. She hadn't objected at all, since that way she got to see him remove his as well. Once again his physical reaction showed his appreciation for what was displayed before him

Hermione let out a mock sigh of exasperation. "I suppose I'm going to have to take care of that *again* before we do the ritual." Harry grinned sheepishly and shrugged his shoulders, although both of them knew his actual answer was YES! Instead of taking him in hand as he expected, Hermione moved over to the desk and bent over it to flip a few pages forward in the book. "Just a minute, there's something else I want to check," she explained.

Harry didn't mind, since this permitted him another magnificent view of her bum. He moved up behind her and tentatively put a hand on her back and began stroking it, gradually lowering the range of his ministrations, giving her the opportunity to tell him to stop at any point. For her part, Hermione was delighted with his forwardness, and even wiggled her bottom a bit to get him to move along a little faster. With that encouragement he was soon fondling her arse in earnest and she gave a moan of approval.

Feeling emboldened by her response, and temporarily forgetting the reason they were there, Harry moved a finger down between her legs where he was surprised to encounter some dampness. This elicited an even louder moan from Hermione and she unconsciously moved her legs apart in invitation. This encouraged him even more and he slipped his finger between her folds.

"OHHHH! Oh Harry!" she gasped, and the wetness increased dramatically. Torn between the desire for him to continue what he was doing and the need to finish a rather serious task, Hermione managed to pull herself together. "No ... stop," she finally managed. "I mean ... perhaps you could continue that later upstairs."

This invitation caused even more blood flow into Harry's lower regions and he stopped, noticing her small wimper of disappointment, and slowly withdrew his hand, enjoying the effect he was having on her. But just as he was about to wipe off his finger on his shirt Hermione stopped him.

"Wait," she said, checking a passage in her book once more. "Wipe it on the Horcrux. It says here that these fluids are beneficial in completing the process.

"Oh, so that's what you were checking?" he asked in surprise as he complied with her instruction.

"Yes," she said with a smirk. "Now let's add some of your fluid to it."

He lasted a bit longer this time, but not much. It was quite strange to be wanking off onto a Horcrux, but if he closed his eyes and concentrated on the vision of the naked Hermione before him, and her breasts where she was pressing them against his side, and most of all the wonderful things her hand was doing to him – well, she finished him off in less than a minute.

With that accomplished, they moved once more into the intimate position required for the ritual. Once their hands were in place (with neither of them resisting the temptation to give a little squeeze) Harry began his part of the incantation. When he finished, there was a glow where his hands were holding her breasts, with a very unexpected result. For Hermione, it began as a very pleasant tingle that immediately hardened her

nipples, then grew into an all out throbbing that suddenly shot down to her inner core. Her eyes unfocussed for a moment and she shuddered all over as the orgasm hit her without warning.

For his part, Harry immediately noticed her body go limp, and pulled her closer to himself to keep her from falling. He also noted the tell-tale signs that he had observed before – the goosebumps, the sheen of moisture, and her panting. “Did you just ...”

“Yes,” she gasped before he could finish the question. “Now I understand where the fluids were supposed to come from.” Indeed, she was quite damp between her legs again, and she reached her free hand down to collect some more secretion to add to the locket on the table. Her other hand had never released its grip on Harry, and she hoped she hadn’t squeezed him too hard in her excitement just now.

“I suppose the same thing’s going to happen to me when you say your part of the spell?” Harry surmised.

“I imagine so,” she replied with a grin. Think you’re up to it?” They both looked down where she had been lightly stroking him without realizing it. “Yes, I’d say so,” she answered unnecessarily. “Don’t worry,” she teased, “I’ll make sure it’s aimed in the right direction.”

As predicted, when Hermione spoke the next section of the incantation, another glow flared up where she was holding his now very erect member, and he orgasmed as quickly as she had. Hermione added this sample of fluid to the others, and as soon as he had composed himself again they jointly spoke the final phrases, with their hands still in place.

This time Hermione had her wand in her free hand, pointing it at the Horcrux. Since his hands were full, Harry’s wand was on another table right behind him, where he could grab it and quickly put up a shield if necessary. As they finished the incantation, a golden beam of light burst out of her wand and enveloped the locket. The glow was so intense that they could barely see the locket, and they heard a faint scream from within which they knew from Harry’s adventure with the diary represented the final destruction of the soul fragment.

Within seconds it was over, and they both spontaneously wrapped their arms around each other and shouted in triumph while hugging for all they were worth. They stayed in this embrace for quite some time, each enjoying the warmth and closeness of the other, before they finally pulled away and prepared to leave the room.

“You know,” he commented as they put their tee shirts back on. “That wasn’t really all that enjoyable. It was just too fast.”

“I agree,” she responded as she slipped her arm around him and leaned her head against his side. “Let’s go upstairs and take our time and do it right.”

Harry’s eyes widened and a big grin broke out on his face. He nodded vigorously as he took her hand to hurry from the room, causing her to laugh in amusement at his eagerness.

They stopped by the front room where Ron had been waiting, to tell him of their success before continuing up to their rooms. There they found him looking at some parchments that had just been delivered.

“Wedding invitations,” he announced. Then he looked up at them hesitantly. “And Mum wants to know how things are going here.” He paused and glanced at their still joined hands. “So does Ginny.”

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The Ritual

Part 3

Chapter 3, Ginny's Reaction

Weddings were nice in a lot of ways, Hermione thought to herself, but there was at least one annoying thing about them. They refused to acknowledge the concept of the single girl. It was as though the bride was rubbing every unattached girl's face in the fact that she now had a man and they didn't. Perhaps a more charitable way of viewing it was that the bride was so happy with her guy that she wanted every other girl to experience her happiness and have a guy too. In any case, it was apparently not permissible for a girl over a certain age to attend a wedding by herself – she had to have an 'escort'. Hermione wasn't sure exactly what that age was, but at seventeen she was clearly over it.

Now, ordinarily this would not be a problem, as Hermione had acquired a boyfriend in the last few days (the most perfect boyfriend in the world, of course) who would make a fine escort for her to this wedding. Unfortunately, the people planning this particular wedding (i.e. – Mrs. Weasley) had other ideas on who was to escort whom. The invitations that had just arrived made it very clear that she was expected to be escorted by Ron, and that Harry was expected to be the escort for Ginny.

This had temporarily put their plans for the rest of the afternoon on hold, while the trio debated on how best to resolve this problem. In addition, the word had come from the Burrow that Ron's presence was needed there for the rest of the week, to help them prepare. They eventually came up with a plan. Ron would find a time to talk with his mother and let her know that he and Hermione had come to a decision that they were not going to be a couple, and therefore it would be awkward for him to be her escort to the wedding.

This naturally led to the next question.

"Should I tell Ginny?"

Harry started to say yes but was stopped by a look from Hermione. "Harry, that's not fair to Ron. She'll kill him."

Harry shrugged. "Better him than me." Hermione's eyes narrowed and Harry hastily added, "but more importantly, better him than you." This softened Hermione's look into a slight smile and she was about to respond when Ron interrupted.

"Oy, thanks a lot guys. It's so nice to be useful." Everyone shared a laugh before deciding that Ron shouldn't have to say anything to Ginny about Harry and Hermione. That would be their responsibility when they arrived at the end of the week. That still left the escort question up in the air. Hermione decided that she and Harry would send an owl to Fleur (it was her wedding, after all) explaining that in case she didn't know, Harry and Ginny had broken up a month ago, and despite what she may have heard, Hermione and Ron were not dating. Therefore, to avoid any potential awkwardness, and since the two of them were both unattached, Harry would be escorting Hermione for this occasion. This would lay the groundwork for the conversation the two of them would need to have with the younger girl. Hermione knew that Fleur was rather fond of Harry and would most likely go along with their request

So Ron had packed up and left for the Burrow, leaving Harry and Hermione temporarily alone in the house. This had led to the current situation Hermione found herself in, namely naked and lying stretched out on her stomach on Harry's bed. She paused to reflect on what an incredible statement that was. If the idea of her being in that situation had come up just a week ago, she would have dismissed it as preposterous. And even more incredible was the reason she was lying in this position. It was so that Harry could finish what he had started downstairs in the drawing room. To be more precise, so that he could give her a mind-blowing orgasm.

Unbelievable. She, Hermione Granger, the girl guys never took a second look at, was now with the most sought after boy in the wizarding world. She couldn't help inwardly gloating a bit. Take that Lavender Brown! Lavender Watch-Me-While-I-Snog-The-Daylights-Out-Of-The-Boy-You're-Interested-In Brown. And take that Ginny Weasley! Ginny I'm-So-Beautiful-I-Can-Have-Any-Boy-I-Want-So-I'll-Just-Toy-With-Some-Other-Guys-While-I-Wait-For-Harry-Potter-To-Notice-How-Beautiful-I-Am-And-Become-Smitten-With-Me Weasley.

And to make matters even better, Harry was turning out to be an incredible lover. When he was pleasuring her he paid attention to how she was reacting and tried to make the experience as good for her as possible. No Wham Bam Thank You Ma'am for him. He wasn't interested in just getting it over and done with, he took his time. He had just spent several minutes running his hands all over her arms and legs and shoulders and lower back and was only now focusing all his attention on her bum to begin working his fingers into position to pleasure her. This attention caused Hermione to abandon all her other thoughts as her mind became overwhelmed with the feelings he was generating inside of her.

-ooOoo-

"OK, what's going on here?" Ginny demanded as she cornered her brother coming out of the parlor. First he had showed up and immediately huddled with their mother, and then the two of them got together with Phlegm.

"I was just straightening Mum and Fleur out on some things," Ron answered evasively. Ginny's glare and the hand that was fingering her wand let him know he wasn't going to get off that easily. "All right, I just let them know that I'm not going to be escorting Hermione to the wedding."

"Why not?" Ginny demanded. Then a look of realization came over her face. "Oh, Ron, you two didn't get into another argument again, did you? Look, she'll get over it – she always does. Just give her a few days and ..."

"No Ginny, it's not that simple," Ron interrupted. "She and I aren't together and we aren't ever going to be, so just drop it." With that he pulled away and ran up the stairs to his room.

Ginny stood there thinking about what she'd just heard. That sounded suspicious. After the way Hermione went after Ron all last year she wouldn't have given up on him that easily. Unless ...

"Mum," Ginny called out, hurrying through the house before finally tracking her mother down in the kitchen. "Ron just told me he's not escorting Hermione to the wedding."

"That's right, dear," Molly answered somewhat hesitantly, not looking up at Ginny.

"So, is Hermione not coming then?"

"No. Fleur just got an owl from her and Harry. Harry's going to be escorting her."

"What!" Ginny just stood there, stunned. Despite her suspicion, she still couldn't believe that she had been right. Sure, it could be innocent, they could be coming just as friends, but Ginny didn't think so. She had known for years that Hermione was completely smitten with Harry but either didn't realize it or had deluded herself into ignoring it. So long as both of them just looked at each other as best friends nothing would come of it, though. Had something happened to open their eyes?

"I'm sorry sweetheart," Molly consoled her, interrupting Ginny's train of thought. "Why didn't you tell me you and Harry had broken up?"

"I ... we ... er, that is, it's only temporary," Ginny stammered. "It's just until ..."

"That's all right, dear." Molly continued, coming over to give her a hug. "There are other boys out there and you're still young. We'll find you someone else to ..."

"No!" Ginny shouted, pulling away. "No, you don't have to. We'll work this out. I'll get him back. I'll figure something out." She dashed out the door to the garden, thinking furiously. *What am I going to do? They probably expect me to throw a tantrum and start throwing hexes around. But I'll show them ...*

She had stopped using the love potion after Harry had finally kissed her and they started dating. She knew from her mother's stories that you should only use a love potion to get the guy's attention in the first place – real love had to develop without it. But this separation that was messing up their relationship had happened too soon. He hadn't had a chance to really fall in love with her in the short time they were together before Dumbledore's death. And with them apart now, there was no real chance to use it again. If she slipped it to him when he arrived for the wedding, and he suddenly started lusting for her out of the blue again like last time it would be too suspicious. Besides, it would just wear off again when he left.

She would have to find some other way to get his attention this time. She began pacing back and forth, pausing occasionally to kick a garden gnome, considering her assets. She was much better for Harry than Hermione. She was prettier, she was more athletic, she was great at quidditch. She was wittier, too, and fun to be with. Everyone thought she had a great sense of humor. She was especially good at taunting, humorous insults, and clever putdowns. She smiled at the memory of the zinger she had got off at Hermione last term. *'Don't start acting as though you understand quidditch. You'll only embarrass yourself.'* It had been one of her proudest moments. Right behind the time Harry kissed her in front of the whole common room. By contrast, Hermione was boring. She did nothing but nag Harry and Ron to do their homework, or anything else they were supposed to do. A plan began to form in Ginny's mind and she smiled. She decided that she had just the thing. Something that was sure to get a teenage boy's attention.

Meanwhile back in the kitchen, Molly sighed and returned her attention to the wedding invitation list. *Hmm, let's see*, she thought. *That Longbottom boy seems nice*. She pulled out a piece of parchment and began to write a note to Augusta Longbottom.

-ooOoo-

Harry and Hermione arrived at the Burrow at the end of the week somewhat anxiously. They had received a note from Fleur acknowledging their owl and informing them that it was just fine that they were coming together, and that she was delighted for them. They hadn't received the Howler they had been half expecting, or any other communication from Ron, Molly, or Ginny. They decided that they would walk up to the house holding hands, but not making a big deal out of it. Just as they got to the ramshackle structure the back door opened and Ginny and Ron came out.

"So," Ginny asked in a sweet tone of voice. "Are you two together now? How nice for you." Harry and Hermione shot astonished looks at Ron, but he just shook his head in an 'I didn't say anything' gesture. "I can understand that, though," Ginny went on. "It must have been dreadfully lonely for you, cooped up in that gloomy house all alone."

Hermione's eyes narrowed as she realized what Ginny was doing, discounting their relationship as though it were just an unfortunate matter of circumstance, and they would get over it when things got back to normal. But Ginny breezily continued.

"It's so hot today. Let's go for a swim in our pond." And with that she flipped her long flowing red hair back and slowly pulled her tee shirt over her head, revealing a form fitting swimsuit. Unfortunately for her, Harry didn't notice.

"You have a pond?" he asked in surprise. "Why didn't I ever know that before? I mean, Hermione and I were here for six weeks last summer and you never mentioned it?"

Ron scratched his head. "I don't know mate, I guess it never came up. We sort of skipped over that six weeks pretty quickly, didn't we? All I remember doing was playing two on two quidditch every day."

Harry shot a look at Hermione but she was just as confused as he was. As far as she was concerned, swimming in the pond would have been far preferable to playing quidditch. Meanwhile, Ginny had removed her shorts and stood before them in just her swimsuit. Hermione's eyes narrowed again. She knew exactly what Ginny was trying to do. The small redhead shot a sultry smile at Harry and turned and walked down the path, her hips swaying seductively. Ron gave the two of them an uneasy look and turned to follow her, pulling off his own shirt as he went.

Hermione noticed that Harry's gaze was locked on the spot where Ginny had been and elbowed him. "Harry, stop staring at Ginny!" she hissed.

Harry turned to look at her in surprise. "I wasn't staring at Ginny," he protested. The look on Hermione's face expressed her disbelief. "She's not even here any more," he pointed out. Hermione was forced to concede that the other girl was, in fact, out of sight now.

“Actually, I was just thinking that you have a much nicer figure than she does – I mean you’re curvier and all,” Harry explained. This brightened Hermione’s expression considerably. “And besides, that suit really didn’t show very much, did it?”

Hermione laughed and gave him a hug, and decided his compliment about her figure deserved a sound snogging. Since no one was around just then to object, she gave him exactly that. Once that was accomplished she took his hand and they followed the path that the two Weasleys had just taken. Ginny’s plan was about to backfire spectacularly. Since wizarding fashions were years and years out of date, the one-piece suit that Ginny was wearing was dreadfully old-fashioned. Hermione didn’t even think her mother would have worn something that covered her up that much. An idea occurred to her that would turn the tables on the younger witch.

When the pair arrived at the pond, Ginny was stretched out on a small platform a little ways out, apparently having got herself just wet enough to make the suit cling to her body, and was now displaying the result. Hermione thought she looked rather like Esther Williams in *Million Dollar Mermaid* or one of her other movies from the 1940’s and 50’s. As it happened, her suit also resembled one that Esther Williams would have worn fifty years ago. Meanwhile, Ron had waded in and was standing in waist deep water waiting for them to arrive.

“Oh Harry, you don’t have a suit, do you?” Ginny called out. Don’t worry, I brought along an old one of Ron’s. It might be a little small,” Ginny paused to give him a sly wink, “but I guess it will have to do.” Then she appeared to suddenly come to another realization. “Hermione, I’m sorry, I don’t have a suit for you. I don’t think any of mine would fit you.”

“That’s all right Ginny, perhaps I’ll just swim in the nude,” Hermione shot back. There was a moment of complete silence, then Ginny laughed uproariously. The thought of her conservative friend doing something so daring was unthinkable. Ron joined her laughter, but shot a nervous look at Harry first. He knew that Hermione being nude wasn’t as unthinkable as Ginny thought, but he couldn’t imagine that she would do it here in front of all of them. Harry sent Hermione a look of surprise, but then smirked and chuckled along with the others. Hermione paused for a few moments and then burst into laughter herself, acknowledging the joke. Then she pulled out her wand.

“Actually, I’ll take care of the suits for Harry and me,” she announced. With that, she transfigured a snug pair of swim trunks for Harry that went down to about mid-thigh, showing off his muscular legs and nice bum, and followed that up by transfiguring her own clothing into a string bikini. A very small, sexy, white string bikini that displayed assets that only Harry had ever seen before. (She considered making the bottom a thong, but decided that would be overkill.) After Ron had left Grimmauld Place earlier that week, Hermione had taken Harry up to the roof to introduce him to the joys of nude sunbathing. As she had expected, Harry had taken to it in no time. While he had only picked up a slight bit of color in the few days they had indulged themselves, Hermione tanned relatively quickly and the white bikini set off the golden tone of her skin wonderfully.

The reactions of the others were amusing, at first. Harry smiled at her and nodded his appreciation, running his eyes lovingly up and down her body. Initially, Hermione ignored the other two, since his approval was all she cared about. In one case that was fortunate, in the other it may have been a mistake.

Ron immediately was very glad that he was in waist deep water. A part of his body just below the surface of the water instantly reacted to Hermione’s near naked condition, and he had to consciously will himself to ignore it. Another part of his mind was loudly berating him. ‘*You idiot! You could have had that! How could you not have noticed?*’ He had spurned her advances in no small part because he’d thought her not very attractive, and because she didn’t wear revealing clothing that made her look good. How wrong he had been!

Meanwhile, Harry and Hermione had joined hands again and moved out into the water, where Harry had finally given in to his impulse and taken Hermione into his arms. Just as he lowered his head to kiss her a wave of water crashed over them. They looked up to see Ginny with her wand in her hand, sputtering with fury. To her dismay, Hermione’s bikini looked even better soaking wet. The now semitransparent top molded itself completely to the curves of her breasts, with the cool water hardening her nipples and the darker skin around them into a prominent display. The three of them ignored the groan that came from Ron’s direction as Ginny shouted out another spell.

“*Diffindo !*” However, this was just not going to be her day. The cutting curse, which she had intended to slice through the straps of Hermione’s top, embarrassing the older girl into running shrieking out of the water and back to the safety of the house, had quite the opposite effect. As her top slid into the water, freeing her breasts, Hermione put her hands on her hips and glared at the scheming little witch. But before she could say anything Harry grabbed her and spun her around, pressing her bare breasts into his chest in order to cover her. (And from his point of view, it felt pretty good too.)

Ginny was horrified at this result, as she could see from the way he held her that this was quite a familiar position for them to be in, as though having their bare chests in contact was an everyday occurrence. (Actually, she was right about that.) She screamed again and raced out of the water, running back to the house where she flew up to her bedroom and flung herself sobbing into her bed.

Meanwhile, Ron had moved into deeper water. The part of his brain that was still functioning was relieved that his two friends were ignoring him, because the part that was controlled by his other head had directed his hand to slip into his swim shorts and start stroking frantically.

Eventually the higher parts of his brain prevailed and were able to convince him that yes, this was Hermione, and yes, she did have a lovely pair of breasts, and yes, he had never seen a naked pair of breasts before but really, Lavender’s were probably better (he resolved to confirm that as soon as possible) and really, this was his best friend, and really, you don’t wank off while lusting after your half naked best friend, who also happens to be the girlfriend of your best mate.

To his relief, said best friend never noticed because she was busy thanking her boyfriend for protecting her modesty by seemingly trying to remove his tongue from his mouth with her own. From the writhing she was doing and his response to it, she might also have been planning on mutually engaging in the activity that their red-haired friend was performing solo. Fortunately for all three of them, they all managed to bring themselves under control at approximately the same time, and any more embarrassing revelations were avoided.

The rest of the weekend was rather tame by comparison. Bill and Fleur got married, Ginny sulked, Harry and Hermione held hands most of the time and kissed whenever they got a chance, and Ron ate a lot. Then the trio returned to Grimmauld Place to continue their mission.

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The Ritual

Part 4

Chapter 4, The Final Ritual

“We’re going to do WHAT!”

Hermione reflected that it was somewhat ironic that Harry’s response had been almost exactly the same as Ron’s had been back when this whole ritual thing had started. That had been long ago, during the previous summer, before Bill and Fleur’s wedding. Before Hogwarts had opened for the school year without the two students who were supposed to be Head Boy and Head Girl, as well as the seventh year Gryffindor boys’ prefect. Before they had searched across the British Isles for the Horcruxes. Before she and Harry had become a couple, moved into the same room together, slept together every night, and become intimately familiar with every square inch of each other’s bodies. They had grown closer than most married couples and really, had become virtually husband and wife themselves in many respects. But not in two important areas. They weren’t married. And they’d never had sex.

Not that they didn’t want to. It was just that the ritual they had used to destroy the Horcruxes had required both of them to be virgins. It was probably more accurate to say that they hadn’t had sexual intercourse, since they had certainly engaged in other sexual practices that had been extremely satisfying. In a few months the current American president would come to suffer a lot of grief over the precise definition of ‘having sex’. Hermione would have agreed that the president hadn’t ‘had sexual relations with that woman’ just as she hadn’t had sex with Harry. She and Harry *had* engaged in the practice that he would be revealed to have engaged in with that intern though. And while the president apparently hadn’t returned the favor with his partner, Harry certainly had with Hermione. And he was *very* good at it, as far as she was concerned. But – they hadn’t ‘had sex’. At least not yet. Which brought them to the subject at hand.

They had finished destroying all of the Horcruxes. With each one the procedure had been the same. They returned to Grimmauld Place, Ron disappeared into the kitchen, they took the Horcrux to the drawing room, removed their clothing, coated the object with the appropriate body fluids, and performed the ritual to destroy it.

The last one, Nagini, had been the trickiest. It had been a bit of a challenge to focus on getting each other off while a gigantic snake had been coiled up on the table right in front of them. Sure, it was stunned and petrified, and tied up to boot, but it still looked like it might take a bite out of one of them at any second. Harry had been particularly squeamish about that – quite understandably, Hermione thought. She had no more desire for him to lose that particular appendage than he did. It had been the only Horcrux they destroyed for which they hadn’t taken the time to pleasure each other a bit before speaking the incantation. They just rushed through the words of the ritual, slimed the snake, hit it with the beam of light, listened to the muffled scream that signified that it was destroyed, and got the heck out of there.

“We’re going to do WHAT!”

Harry knew that Hermione had been fervently studying the spell books with a single-minded obsession these past several weeks, and knew by the look in her eye that she had found a spell she thought they might be able to use against Voldemort. He was aware, obviously, of the existence of sex-based rituals now, but hadn’t considered such a thing remotely possible in this case. So he was more than a bit taken aback by her revelation.

“I think I’ve found a ritual that we can use to defeat Voldemort,” Hermione repeated slowly.

“And ...” Harry was certain that she was deliberately stretching this out to get him back for his original reaction.

“And it involves us having sex,” she finished with a ‘and what part of that don’t you understand?’ tone of voice.

“OK, that’s what I thought you said,” Harry acknowledged. “But Hermione, can’t you see how ridiculous that sounds? I mean, I know Dumbledore said love was the ‘power he knows not’, but I don’t really think that’s what he meant.”

Hermione shrugged. “It could be, though.”

Harry still wasn’t convinced. “So you really think we can destroy Voldemort by shagging? Have you every heard anything more absurd? If you read that in a story you’d never believe it.”

“Well, Harry, don’t you think you could say that about a lot of things that have happened to us during these past six years?” Hermione pointed out.

“Well, yes, but ...” Harry searched for some example to get her to see his point. “Look, what if it had turned out that Luke and Leia had defeated Darth Vader by shagging each other?”

“Ewww, Harry that’s disgusting!”

“My point exactly.”

“No, it’s disgusting because they were brother and sister!”

“Oh.” Harry thought for a moment and frowned. “Well, that part was just stupid. I mean, they didn’t look anything like each other at all. And they were supposed to be twins? Come on, give me a break!”

“What do you mean?”

“I think the writer just put that in the third movie to justify why Luke and Leia didn’t get together. I mean, they were perfect together. You can’t tell me you didn’t want them to be together after part one.”

Part four," Hermione corrected reflexively.

"What?"

"The first movie was really part four. The third movie was part six."

"How the heck can that be?"

"Harry, there are going to be three more movies, starting next year. Don't you pay any attention to that sort of thing?"

"Hermione, I never even saw a movie until we visited your parents last summer."

"OK, never mind. Why does it matter so much to you?"

Harry wasn't sure he wanted to answer that, and muttered, "Forget it."

"Harry ..." Harry recognized her 'I'm not going to drop this until you tell me what's bothering you' tone of voice.

"I sort of identified with him," he mumbled.

"What?"

"Luke. I identified with him."

"All right, that makes sense," Hermione mused, thinking aloud. "He's a hero, you're a hero. You were both orphans, raised by your aunt and uncle. You were both taken away and introduced to a whole new world, and told you had powers you didn't even know existed. You both watched your mentor die before your eyes. I guess that would make Darth Vader Snape and the Emperor Voldemort ..."

"Hermione please stop before you get to the 'I am your father' part," Harry interrupted desperately.

"Oh, right. I guess that would be rather disturbing," Hermione agreed quickly. "But anyway, why does it bother you if they're brother and sister?"

Harry shuffled his feet nervously. "Well, if I'm like Luke, you're like Leia. You know, always knowing what to do, bailing the hero out when he gets in trouble."

"And Ron is Han Solo," Hermione finished for him, catching on now.

"So it really bothered me that Luke didn't end up with Leia," Harry admitted. Hermione stepped up to him and wrapped him up in a hug.

"Oh Harry." Finally she stepped back and regarded him with a soft look of sheer affection. "I love you."

Harry grinned. "I know."

Hermione's face fell for an instant, clearly expecting a different response than that. Then she caught on and hit him on the shoulder. "You prat!"

Harry pulled her into another hug, glad that she hadn't been bothered by his little joke. But he also knew that he should make the correct response.

"I love you too, Hermione."

Her eyes twinkled with amusement. "I know."

After a long, passionate kiss they finally got back to the original subject. "OK, let's say you're right and we can do a ritual where we have sex to destroy Voldemort," Harry began. "How exactly would that work?"

"As far as the ritual itself is concerned, there's not much to it," Hermione responded, then continued, trying to keep it as clinical as possible. "We have sex and I say the incantation at exactly the moment you orgasm. More specifically, when you ejaculate inside me."

"What if you orgasm too?" Harry countered. "You might mess up the incantation." He had always been impressed by Hermione's ability to concentrate and ignore distractions, but this seemed a bit much.

"Harry, I don't think that will be a problem," she replied dismissively. "It's pretty rare for a girl to orgasm when she loses her virginity." His puzzled look indicated that he still didn't understand. "It hurts quite a bit the first time," she explained. She decided that they would need to discuss this later. "Anyway, we don't need to worry about that now."

"OK, but I still don't see how that can affect Voldemort," he went on.

"Well, the key is the connection you have with him through your scar," Hermione explained. "The tricky part is that it would have to be done while the connection was open. You know, like when he's trying to send you a vision or mentally attack you or something."

"Well how are we going to arrange that?" Harry challenged. "Are we just going to sit around for weeks waiting for him to try to break into my mind and then jump each other?"

"Well, obviously I don't have all the details worked out yet," Hermione shot back, wondering why he was objecting so much. It seemed to her that he wasn't very eager to do this. "You know, if you have a problem with the idea of having sex with me ..."

Harry immediately saw the hurt in her eyes and realized what was bothering her. "Hermione," he said softening his voice and wrapping his arms around her waist to pull her close. "I very much want to make love to you. I think that would be obvious by now."

Hermione wiped an eye with the back of her hand, trying to keep her emotions in check, while leaning her head against his chest. "I know." She gave a small chuckle as she felt the part of him under discussion stiffen against her. "But I thought you'd be more receptive to this idea."

Harry hesitated, and Hermione immediately noticed it. "What is it?" she asked.

"It's just that you said you wanted to wait for marriage before having sex," he pointed out after a nervous moment.

Hermione smiled and hugged him again, relieved that this was the only thing giving him pause. "Well, we all have to make some sacrifices," she admitted. "Not that it wouldn't be an enjoyable sacrifice."

Harry pulled back and looked her directly in the eye. "You know, there is a way around that."

Hermione frowned slightly as she tried to decipher his comment, then her eyes went wide. "Harry!" she gasped. Struggling to bring the surge of emotion that had just flooded through her under control she continued in a somewhat shaky voice. "You don't have to do that. Defeating Voldemort is the important thing. We can just ..."

"No," he interrupted firmly. "Marrying you is what I want to do more than anything else in the world. Defeating Voldemort would just be a bonus."

"Oh Harry!" Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck in a fierce hug as tears began streaming down her cheeks. While she had hoped they might eventually come to this point she had never dreamed it would be so soon.

After a long, loving embrace Harry pulled away. "I think I ought to do this right," he resolved. Picking up his wand he pointed it towards his bedroom. "Accio engagement ring!"

Hermione's eyes widened again as a small jewelry box came flying into the room and was snatched out of the air by the natural born seeker, and her amazement continued as she turned to see Harry down on one knee before her. "What ... how ... when ...?" Harry's only response was a grin before he opened the box and offered her the ring.

"Hermione, will you marry me?"

By now Hermione had completely lost the power of speech and could only nod her head as she covered her mouth with her hands and looked at the most beautiful diamond ring she had ever seen. Finally she managed another single word query. "Where ...?"

"I saw it in the Potter vault the last time I was in Gringotts and picked it up just in case I managed to get up my nerve to ask you," he revealed. "Your suggestion just now seemed to be a perfect opportunity, so I did." He grinned again, very proud of himself, both for getting up his courage and for managing to take her completely by surprise. Hermione only nodded, still in a daze, so he continued.

"Now, I think word of this can help us out with the ritual, too." This got her attention, and she raised her head and frowned.

"I don't understand. Surely you want to keep this secret, don't you?" she objected. "If the press gets a hold of this they'll be all over us."

"True," Harry agreed. "But if we let it leak out without making it look like we're letting it leak out ... look, we need to do the ritual while he's attacking my mind, right? Well, when would he be almost certain to attack my mind?"

"In order to ruin a happy occasion for you," Hermione answered, catching on. "Oh Harry, that's perfect." She wrapped him up in yet another hug. When she pulled away, there was a familiar gleam in her eye. "Oh, there's so much to plan. I better get my notebook and start writing things down." Harry just sat back and smiled, watching his future wife do the thing she was best at.

-ooOoo-

Harry had once heard a muggle comedian on the telly do a routine where the audience listened in to one side of a telephone call. The call that Hermione placed to her mother to let her know what they were planning had that beat hands down.

"Hello, Mum? Hi this is Hermione ..."

"I know, I'm excited to talk to you too ..."

"Yes, I know it's been too long since you heard from me. Yes, I suppose it ~~was~~ last summer." She looked over at Harry and rolled her eyes. "I'll try to do better ..."

"So, how have you been? No Death Eater attacks or anything?"

"No Mum, sorry, you're right that wasn't very funny ..."

"Well, actually I do have some good news. Do you know that project I told you I was working on?"

"No, not that one! I'm not interested in him at all anymore ..."

"Yes, you did. Go ahead and say I told you so ..."

"Thanks Mum, I appreciate your concern. What I really meant was the other project. You know, the one where we're fighting against an evil magician?"

"No, actually it hasn't been as dangerous as we thought it would be. Some parts have really been quite pleasant ... Er, never mind, I'll explain that later. Anyway, remember that there was a preliminary phase where we had to accomplish four things? Well, we've finished that phase! Isn't that great?"

"Well, yes, there's still the final part where we have to destroy the dark lord ..."

“Yes, that’s what he calls himself. Anyway about that ... “

“Look, the reason I called was that I’m getting married and ... Mum? Mum, are you still there?”

“Hi Dad. Is Mum all right? ... She didn’t hurt her head or anything?”

“Good ... No, I guess I gave her a bit of a shock ... Yeah, I told her I was getting married and ...”

“Dad? Dad are you still there?”

Hermione paused and shot Harry a look of chagrin, and waited impatiently for her parents to get back on the phone.

“Oh good, Mum, you’re back. Sorry for the shock ...”

“Yes, I know it’s rather sudden ... No, it’s not him!”

“No, I’m not pregnant either! Honestly Mum ...”

“Well, yes, I suppose it was a reasonable assumption ...”

“Well, actually it’s Harry. Harry Potter ...” She couldn’t help the smile that broke out on her face when she said this.

“Yes, the boy I’ve been writing to you about for six years ...”

“What do you mean it’s about time?”

“Mum, that’s not funny!”

“You mean you’re serious? Since first year? You and Dad had a bet?”

“So which one of you bet on Harry?”

“I don’t get it, how could both of you bet on Harry?”

“Oh. Well, technically you might say that Dad won then. I mean if you bet that it would be while we were still in school and he bet that it would be after we left school ...”

“Well, I guess maybe I never mentioned that we didn’t go back to school this fall ...”

Harry decided that it would be a good time to take his leave, and moved quietly out of the drawing room and down to the kitchen.

-ooOoo-

In the end, Hermione and her mother compromised on the wedding. She and Harry would have a wizarding wedding now, but would have a full-scale muggle wedding the following summer at the church that Hermione and her parents attended. Since it was the Christmas holidays a group of their friends from Hogwarts were able to attend, along with the obligatory Ministry representative. Hermione promised her mother that she wouldn’t get pregnant before the ‘real’ wedding, but she knew that she wouldn’t be able to guarantee that. The ritual they planned to use to destroy Voldemort through his connection with Harry’s mind precluded the use of any other spells, including a contraception spell, and she was in the wrong time of her cycle to begin using birth control pills.

That was not among her chief concerns today, though. After all, they were expecting Voldemort to attack and they were planning a counterattack with the sex-based ritual. If it succeeded the dark lord would be destroyed and their whole world would change. She and Harry would be able to relax and live their lives without that awful specter looming over them. The worry over an unwanted pregnancy would be minor by comparison. If it didn’t succeed they would have an enraged dark lord on their hands, which she considered to be a far more pressing thing to worry about.

They were counting on the Ministry representative to be the subtle leak their plans required. The wedding of Harry Potter would be the news story of the year, if not the decade, and the temptation to leak it to the press would be overwhelming, since the payoff would probably be worth more than a Ministry employee’s annual salary. And they were also confident that Voldemort had plenty of information sources in the wizarding press.

-ooOoo-

“Are you ready?” Hermione was glad that the wizarding world didn’t have that stupid ‘groom can’t see the bride on the day of the wedding’ custom as she managed to get Harry alone for a moment before the ceremony began. They had rented a room for the ceremony at the Ministry building, both for the convenience of the Ministry rep but also because they didn’t want to expose any of their friends’ homes to a possible attack, and she and Harry were waiting in an antechamber.

“I think so,” Harry responded, checking that his robes were straight and his hair looked ... well, as good as it ever looked, and that he had the rings.

“No,” Hermione purred in a lower voice as her hand reached down to grasp him. “I mean, are you ready?” She felt a twitch in her hand that indicated that this part of him was firming up.

Harry fought to stifle a moan before he could respond. “Hermione! Surely you don’t expect me to stay hard all through the ceremony?”

“Why not,” she continued in that same seductive voice. “I remember a certain time when you stayed hard for at least a half hour.”

Harry recalled that first nude encounter with her very well. "Well, it helped that the sexiest witch in the world was standing naked right next to me the whole time," he responded with a smile at the fond memory. Hermione giggled and gave him a quick kiss for the compliment.

"Would it help if I told you I was naked under my robes?" Harry shot her a puzzled look and she leaned closer to his ear and whispered. "I'm not wearing any underwear."

Harry's eyes shot wide open and he stared at her. She was wearing a nicely fitted white gown, with a fairly low neckline and he could see that it was indeed possible that she wasn't wearing a bra. Then she tugged on her robes to reveal that they were slit up the side, ostensibly for a witch to conceal her wand in a leg holster. She took his hand and put it on her thigh, then nudged him to slide it upward. When he reached the area between her legs he got another shock as he encountered only smooth skin.

"I decided to shave for the occasion," she explained with a saucy wink. "Do you like it?" With a dazed expression on his face he only managed a nod. Her other hand had still not released him, and she noted that he was now extremely hard. "So, now do you think you can stay ready all the way through the ceremony?"

"Merlin, with thoughts like this in my mind I should say so!" he managed to gasp. "But I sure hope this ceremony doesn't require anything more than one word responses." He squirmed a bit to adjust himself after she released him. "And it's a good thing these robes are so loose."

"I don't think that's a coincidence," Hermione replied, still in that maddeningly sultry tone. "I doubt that you're the only wizard who has those thoughts during this ceremony. Haven't you noticed how the bride's robes are designed to encourage that thinking?" She leaned forward and her neckline moved away from her torso to reveal that she was indeed not wearing anything beneath (and that her nipples were also quite hard). Harry groaned loudly.

"Now, one more adjustment, I think," Hermione declared, and to Harry's amazement she pulled his robes up, pointed her wand at him, and vanished his underwear as well. Harry was just able to stifle a 'Yipe!' while Hermione replaced her wand in its holder on her own bare thigh when a door opened and the Ministry official beckoned them out to begin the ceremony.

The pair had practiced beforehand exactly what they were going to do when Voldemort attacked, and were able to apparate from the wedding site to the master bedroom at Grimmauld Place, remove their clothing, and get into shagging position in ten seconds. With the 'wardrobe enhancements' Hermione had just made she was certain they could cut that time in half. They moved through ceremony quickly, as Hermione had thoughtfully provided a slip of parchment with all of Harry's responses written out. Throughout ceremony Hermione frequently shifted position, wriggling her hips slightly and nudging up against him. To anyone watching it looked innocent, as though she were a bit nervous, but for Harry it kept his attention focused on the promised land.

Finally they got to the end. "Hermione Granger, I pledge to you my heart, my soul, my magic, and my love," Harry recited while raising his wand. Hermione repeated the vow and raised her own wand, touching its tip to Harry's. A golden light flared from the joined wand tips and spread to their hands, where their rings likewise glowed.

Harry felt a sensation much like those he had felt during the ritual shoot up his arm and down to his groin. If he hadn't already been hard, this would definitely have done the trick. Hermione experienced the same thing and she couldn't help squirming a bit. This sensation would have certainly made her knickers damp, she decided, if she had been wearing any.

The Ministry official nodded at them and disappeared. It should only be a matter of time now, they thought. The newlyweds began greeting their friends who had attended, many of whom were giving Hermione knowing looks and smirking at Harry. The young couple began to wonder if they were expected to consummate the marriage right there on the spot. Hermione recalled that Fleur had immediately dragged Bill up to a bedroom as soon as their ceremony had concluded last summer, but had assumed that it was some Veela thing. Just as she was about to decide to grab Harry and follow the French witch's example, it happened.

"Ahhh!" Harry threw his hand to his forehead and staggered against Hermione, who tightened the arm that had been wrapped around his waist since the end of the ceremony. She quickly turned to the group she had been talking to.

"Sorry, we think we'll just be going now. Bye!" she announced in a rapid-fire voice. Then she side-along disappeared Harry and they were gone.

They reappeared on the bed and with one tug on her robes Hermione was naked, then she reached down and stripped Harry similarly. This was it. Harry still had his eyes closed so she straddled him on the bed and reached down and began to stroke him with one hand to bring him fully erect, while fingering herself with the other. Since this was her first time, she knew she needed as much lubrication as possible. After a moment's thought she took one of Harry's hands and brought it up between her legs to use his finger instead.

After the initial burst of pain in his scar, Harry fought to drive Voldemort back. He didn't want to knock him out of his mind completely, but was aiming at more of a standstill. When he felt his hand touch the smooth skin of Hermione's newly shaved pubic area he instinctively began stroking her and inserted one finger between her folds. Her gasp caused him to open his eyes, and the sight managed to briefly throw Voldemort's presence to the back of his consciousness. There was his lover in all her naked glory, leaning back and moaning as his hand and finger worked their magic on her sex. Between this and her efforts he hardened instantly.

Now that they were both ready, Hermione moved back a little and raised herself up to position Harry's now throbbing member at her entrance. Realizing her intention, Harry removed his finger and placed both hands on her hips. She nodded at him and impaled herself, as he tightened his grip on her and thrust upwards.

Both of them screamed out in pain!

'*Damn, that hurts!*' Hermione managed to keep this exclamation to herself, but she froze momentarily as the sharp sting of the torn piece of tissue inside her ripped through her insides. Meanwhile Voldemort had seized this moment to attack again and Harry's hand flew back up to his scar as he fought against this new wave of agony. Right now pleasure was the furthest thing from each of their minds.

'*Come on, Hermione,*' she berated herself. '*This is nothing compared to what Harry's going through. Suck it up and get moving.*' She

mentally reproached herself for not having anticipated this and done something to tear her hymen beforehand. She had read plenty of stories where the virgin's initial pain subsided if her lover remained motionless for a few seconds, then began to move slowly inside her. They were all a pack of lies, she decided. It still hurt like hell. In most of these fictions the girl went on to orgasm, sometimes twice, even before the guy did. They were probably all written by clueless males, she was certain, or starry-eyed young girls fantasizing about sex. But she began to move anyway, sliding up and down on Harry's now somewhat softened manhood, trying to bring it back to fully erect, and also trying not to wince. While she was doing this she took Harry's hands and raised them to her breasts to help him with his own struggle.

Initially she succeeded. Harry had managed to turn back Voldemort's latest blast, and the feeling of Hermione's delightful breasts in his hands, and the way her nipples hardened at his touch, combined with the incredible sensation of her warm, tight, wetness enveloping his erection as her motion slid it in and out of her began the familiar tingling sensation inside him. But now Voldemort switched tactics. Through their link he was aware of exactly what Harry was doing and whom was doing it with, so he began to send images to Harry of Hermione captured, bound, and bleeding, screaming under a torture curse.

"Hermione, no!" Hermione immediately knew this wasn't good. In addition to the obvious fact that he should have been shouting '*Hermione, yes!*' at this point, his face was screwed up in horror, not pleasure. She had no difficulty figuring out what was happening. She quickened the pace of her bouncing on him and moved his hands down to her hips.

"Harry, open your eyes!" Harry complied and gasped at the vision of the writhing woman astride him that dissolved and replaced the writhing figure he had been witnessing. Hermione had reached her hands up to grab her own nipples and was pinching and pulling on them sensuously (knowing from experience that this really turned Harry on). Her head was thrown back in apparent bliss and she began to moan loudly. At the same time she tightened her pelvic muscles around Harry's swollen organ. For the first and only time in her life Hermione Granger (now Potter) faked an orgasm.

"Oh! ... Oh! ... Harry! ... Yes!! ... YES!!"

It was easily enough to send Harry over the edge. Clutching her hips tightly he pulled them down as he plunged himself into her over and over. It only took a few times before he exploded.

"Hermione! I love you! Ahh! AHH!" Each declaration was accompanied by another thrust as he unloaded himself into her. As soon as she felt him begin to spasm Hermione ignored the searing pain from the frayed and bloody bits of tissue that were being rubbed raw inside her and grabbed her wand from where it lay beside her, pointing it directly at Harry's scar as she shouted the incantation.

A dazzlingly bright golden light streaked out and hit him right between the eyes. For Harry, it sent an electric surge of pleasure all through his body and caused him to try to bury himself even deeper into Hermione. But for Voldemort it had quite the opposite effect. In a dimly lit room in an unplottable house in a hidden corner of the British Isles, the dark lord's head literally exploded. (It would be some time later before a nervous rat-faced man discovered the body, became violently ill, and scurried away in terror. It would be a few days later before Ministry Aurors, following an anonymous tip, raided the house and confirmed that the dark lord was, indeed, gone for good.)

Inside Harry's mind it was as though someone had suddenly shut an alarm off, and he knew instantly what it signified. Reaching up to grab Hermione he pulled her down onto himself in an overwhelming embrace while shouting, "Hermione! We did it! We did it!"

For her part, Hermione was finally able to relax and stop rocking her hips, keeping Harry inside her but motionless so as to allow the sharp burning feeling to begin to subside into aching soreness. At the same time she felt Harry's euphoria and knew that they had succeeded. She wrapped her arms around him in turn and buried her head into his shoulder.

"Is it true?" she sobbed, tears streaming down her face from a mixture of relief, elation, and the no longer suppressed pain. "Is it really over?"

"It's really over," he assured her as he hugged her to himself again. "We did it. You were incredible."

"*You* were incredible, Harry," she corrected. "The way you were able to keep him out and keep your mind on ... well, on me."

"That was only because you looked so ..." Harry paused and remembered something. "So, did you come?"

Hermione only fleetingly considered lying about it. She knew she didn't need to worry about his ego, though. "No, I was only pretending. I thought it would help by getting you more excited."

"Oh," Harry considered this for a moment. "Well, you were sure right about that. God, you looked hot. Great idea. Brilliant actually. I knew there was a reason I married you." He smiled down at her and she lifted her head and stuck her tongue out at him. "Well, that and because you're beautiful, sexy, brave, loyal, caring ..."

"Oh stop!" Hermione laughed. "I get the point Harry."

"I love you Hermione," he replied softly.

"Oh, I love you too, Harry," she answered. And that, really, was the entire point.

-ooOoo-

Hermione had read that men often fell asleep after sex, and so she wasn't surprised when Harry dozed off as they lay there in each other's arms. He had a right to be exhausted after battling Voldemort in his mind on top of everything else. She had lain awake a bit longer simply pondering what they had just accomplished until she also nodded off.

She awoke some time later to see him returning to the bed.

"I just sent Hedwig to Scrimgeour," he reported with a satisfied grin. "I wrote, 'Merry Christmas. I just defeated Voldemort. Now maybe you can take care of the rest of the Death Eaters. So leave me alone and don't bother me any more.'" He flopped down onto the bed beside her and began to run his fingers along her back, over her bum, down her leg, and back again.

"Harry, you can't do that," Hermione admonished, despite shivering at the lovely sensation. "Don't you think you have a responsibility to"

"No, Hermione, I don't," Harry interrupted firmly, sitting up and pulling her into a sitting position beside him. "I've been controlled by other people and that damned prophecy all my life. I've done what I needed to do and now I can live the rest of my life for myself and my family, and do what I want for a change."

"Oh," Hermione responded in a small voice as she processed the implications of the last part of his declaration.

"And what I want to do right now," he continued, "is make love to my wife."

Hermione's heart started beating rapidly, but she hesitated. "We did that already, Harry," she demurred.

"No, we had sex," Harry corrected. "Now I want to make love to you."

Hermione was torn. On the one hand, she had been dreaming of hearing those words from him and making love to him for months. On the other, she was still very sore and knew she wouldn't enjoy it. *Honestly*, she thought to herself, *if a woman's first time hurts so bloody much why does any woman ever do it a second time? Why on earth didn't the human race die out ages ago?* She knew the answer, of course, but she was feeling particularly uncomfortable right now.

Harry noted her hesitation and realized the reason. "It hurt you a lot, didn't it?" he asked softly, taking her into his arms. Hermione nodded sadly against his chest. His concern for her and what he wanted to do for her made her heart swell so that she thought it would burst. "But can't we do it a bit differently so that it doesn't hurt so much?" he suggested. "I want you to feel what I did."

"Oh Harry, I love you so much," she replied as she raised her head and kissed him softly. "I'm just not sure it will work today." She almost wanted to cry, he looked so dejected. Then an idea occurred to her. "There is *something* I can try, I guess."

She moved a little away from him and spread her legs wide. Then she took her wand and inserted it into herself, moving it carefully in to the place where it hurt and cast very small, localized numbing charms. She definitely didn't want to numb certain other important areas closer to the surface. Every so often the side of her wand brushed against a particularly sensitive nub, and she twitched at the pleasant sensation. As she worked the wand in and out she 'accidentally' bumped this nub more and more often, and was soon breathing more quickly.

"There," she announced as she withdrew the wand and looked up at Harry. "That should help to ..." She stopped at the lustful look of desire on his face and swallowed. That look all by itself made her insides squirm in ways that the wand hadn't.

"That ... was ... so ... hot!" Harry gasped. "I think that's the most ..." he broke off and shook his head, not sure what was more erotic, watching her appear to be getting herself off with her wand or watching her orgasm. It was a tough choice. At any rate, he was hard and throbbing again, a condition which had definitely caught Hermione's attention. Now she realized what it looked like she had been doing.

"Oh," she stammered as she blushed bright red. "Well, I guess that *is* something that the younger girls do sometimes."

"Only the younger ones?" Harry mumbled, trying to wrap his mind around the idea of Hermione (or his other classmates) doing this in their dorm rooms.

"Well, after we learn enough in transfiguration we don't need to use our wands anymore," she explained. "We can transfigure something more lifelike." She glanced around the room looking for something to transfigure. A stapler would have been perfect, but there was no chance of finding one of those in a pureblood house. Finally she summoned a quill off the desk. "Here, let me show you." Taking a good look at his still solid erection she waved her wand several times over the quill, and it soon became a reasonably accurate replica of Harry's most private part. She placed it at her entrance but didn't push it in. "See?" she finished with a saucy look. She now knew very well the effect this was having on him, which he confirmed with a groan. Then she leaned forward and grabbed the original, stroking it once. "But I don't need it now, since I have something better." This tease earned an even louder groan.

"So you ... you did this too when you were at Hogwarts," he gasped. To his surprise this caused her to blush fiercely again. "What?" he demanded.

"Oh ... well, I was just thinking of a particular time ..."

Having gained the upper hand in this pleasant teasing contest, Harry wouldn't let up. "Come on, spill," he demanded.

"OK, I guess I can tell you now. Do you remember at the end of third year after we saved Sirius? Well, riding behind you on Buckbeak and wrapping my arms around you and pressing up against you got me, er, excited. Even after everyone left and Madame Pomfrey turned out the lights I was still aroused and wide awake, so as soon as it sounded like you and Ron were asleep I used my wand to, um, relieve the tension."

Harry's jaw had dropped halfway through the story, and he had to force it closed before he could speak. "You ... did that ... right there ... while Ron and I were ...?"

Hermione blushed again in a mixture of pride and embarrassment. "Yeah, pretty daring for a boring bookworm, huh?"

"I swear I'm never going to think that about you again," Harry declared. "Well, actually I haven't thought that for several months now." He paused. "Wait a minute, you said I got you excited?"

"Oh Harry, surely it must have been obvious that I was totally smitten with you. It was worst during third and fourth year." Harry's only response was to shake his head slowly so she went on. By fifth year I had decided to ignore it and after that I placed you firmly in the 'best friend only' category in my mind. It was obvious that you didn't see me that way. I mean, you started lusting after Cho and she was everything I wasn't ..."

"Hermione, stop," Harry interrupted. "You are so much more than Cho could ever be."

"Thank you Harry," Hermione smiled as she stroked his cheek. "I know you feel that way now but back then ..."

"I was a complete idiot," Harry finished.

"You were a teenaged boy who was attracted to a pretty, athletic girl," Hermione corrected. "Don't be too hard on yourself. It wasn't as if any other boys were interested in me either."

"Except Krum," Harry pointed out.

"Yes, but Viktor was overwhelmed with fan girls and more importantly, he was seventeen and had enough experience to be able to look past the surface."

"But still, I knew you better than he did and ..."

"And you were fourteen," Hermione insisted. "And now you're seventeen and I'm eighteen and here we are. See, it all worked out."

Harry nodded that she had a point, and reached out to take her in his arms. She settled herself on his lap and wiggled her bum against his erection, making sure it stayed hard. After another groan Harry retaliated by fondling her breasts and giving her nipples a little pinch. This got the desired moan out of her and he grinned and gave her a little kiss.

"Third and fourth year, huh," he mused. "I thought maybe you fancied Ron back then." Hermione scowled and pushed him away, but stayed on his lap.

"How could anyone think I fancied Ron then? He wouldn't even speak to me the last half of third year. Then he insulted me those times during fourth year. What kind of idiot would fancy someone like that?"

"But the Yule Ball ..." Harry objected.

"I wanted *you* to ask me, you git!" she sighed. "But you only had eyes for Cho so I gave up and said yes to Viktor. And then after the second task ..." she sighed again.

"What?" he insisted, but this time she just shook her head and leaned it back against his chest. He began running his hands over her again, making her shudder. He diverted one down between her legs and began stroking the smooth skin there, allowing his experienced fingers to slide down to just the right spot. Soon he had her moaning her pleasure.

"So, my dear Miss Granger," he began.

"Mrs. Potter," she corrected with a contented smile.

"So, my dear Mrs. Potter," he continued without skipping a beat. "Is there any particular fantasy you enjoyed back then that you might wish to reenact this evening?"

"Hermione thought a moment, then turned red again. "As a matter of fact ..."

"Yes?"

"Well, what I was about to say just now, after the second task I used to fantasize that you saved me instead of Viktor. That I was your most precious thing." She paused to sigh. "I know," she continued before he could say anything. "You did try to save me too. But in my fantasy it was a bit different."

"OK."

"In my fantasy I was under the water chained to the pillar, but totally naked. And I was awake so I could see you swimming toward me. And you were totally naked too. And I was hoping you would get there first before anyone woke up and saw us because none of the other hostages were naked and neither were any of the other champions." Harry was fascinated and hanging on her every word. She paused and smirked at him again. "And it's my fantasy, so don't go thinking about a naked Cho or a naked Fleur."

"I wasn't," Harry whispered as he pulled back a bit and let his eyes roam up and down her body, causing her to shiver delightedly.

Hermione closed her eyes and moved her hands to her breasts, beginning to fondle herself as she continued. "You came swimming up to me and when you saw me floating there naked you got hard like you are now and then you kissed me and gathered me up in your arms." Harry took the cue and knelt on the bed, scooping her up into his arms. She smiled but kept her eyes closed. "Then you swam to the surface but instead of coming up in the middle of the lake we were by ourselves in a tropical lagoon. You waded ashore with me still in your arms, both of us naked and dripping wet."

She dropped one of her hands down between her legs and began stroking there. This freed up one of her breasts so Harry leaned down and kissed it, then licked the rock hard nipple. Hermione moaned loudly at this and squirmed, but still didn't open her eyes. If anything, the smile on her face grew even broader. Harry had an idea and slid off the bed and walked slowly toward the bathroom. Stepping into the large, ornate shower, he flicked the lever and water came cascading down onto them, soaking them thoroughly in a matter of seconds. Hermione yelped loudly and her eyes flew open in surprise, but then she just buried her head into Harry's chest and laughed heartily.

"I wanted to make it as realistic as possible," Harry claimed with a grin.

"Harry Potter, you are incorrigible!" Hermione shouted between her laughter.

"And you, Hermione Potter, are very wet." Harry retorted, joining her laughter. Hermione rubbed her head against his chest to get the wet hair out of her eyes, then looked up at him lovingly.

"Do you want to know how the fantasy ends?" Hermione purred in a low voice. Harry nodded. "You lay me down on a bed of tropical flowers and make love to me."

"If I carry you back to the bed do you think you could conjure up some flowers? Harry whispered into her ear. Hermione nodded eagerly and her heart began pounding.

Back in the bedroom, Harry stooped by the side of the bed so Hermione could reach her wand, and when she had covered the surface with brightly colored tropical flowers he laid her down and crawled alongside her, waiting while she performed a contraceptive charm. Then he began running his fingers through her wet hair, fanning it out behind her on the bed, while kissing her face. He moved from her forehead to her eyes to her nose and then lingered for a while on her lips. All the while Hermione kept her eyes closed and smiled broadly.

He began to work his way down, kissing down her neck to her shoulders, and then to her breasts, as she began making little whimpering noises. Here he brought his hands into play, fondling and kissing simultaneously, and ended with a little nibble on each nipple, causing her to squirm again and moan loudly. He continued down her smooth, flat belly and then repositioned himself between her legs. Again he brought his hands into the action, sliding a finger into her while his tongue flicked the sensitive little nub that he knew so well by now. Hermione cried out and her hips bucked against him, and she grabbed his head with her hands, weaving her fingers into his wet hair.

"Harry!" she gasped between moans. "Do it! Put it in now!" Harry smiled and moved back up and hovered over her on his hands and knees, then lowered himself. Hermione grabbed him and guided him into position at her entrance, then whispered. "Just go in slowly this time."

Once again she enveloped him with her warm tight wetness, and this time he was able to appreciate it fully. For her part, Hermione shifted her hips a bit, trying to find the most comfortable position, then moaned again as he filled her and she wrapped her arms around his back. It still ached a little, but nothing like before.

"Oh Harry, this is so ... so right." She sighed contentedly. "It's like, I feel completed. Like fitting the last piece into a puzzle." She finally opened her eyes and gazed lovingly into his.

"I love you," he responded simply. Then he silenced her with a long kiss.

"OK, you can start to move now," she told him after it had ended. First slowly, then building up the pace, with as much tenderness as he could manage Harry began sliding in and out of her. The sensations were delightful, but some of the soreness was still present, and the direct stimulation was no longer there. After a while she said softly, "You go ahead and finish. I don't think it's going to work for me today. We can try to do me again tomorrow." She could tell from his breathing that he was nearly there, and wanted to feel him release inside her again.

Harry leaned up and rested on his elbows. He could tell that she had been enjoying having him inside her, but had realized she wasn't getting close and still wanted to make it happen for her. "I have another idea to try first, OK? Hermione nodded and hugged him, thinking he had to be the best lover in the world.

"No, don't!" Hermione whimpered as Harry moved away and began to come out of her. "I like having you inside me."

"Don't worry, it's only for a few seconds," Harry reassured her. "Roll over on your side." Hermione complied, realizing now what he had in mind. Harry moved up behind her and pressed his hips up against her bum. She reached down between her legs and guided him again and once more he slipped into her.

"Hey, it gets easier every time," he teased. In response, she tightened her pelvic muscles, which made him jump.

"Oooh, this is a little different," she breathed as he settled in. "I think you can go in deeper this way." She rocked herself back against him in illustration, and he gasped as he felt himself push in even farther.

"Now, hold on," he instructed. He rotated them so he was on his back and she was above him, with her back still to his chest, exposing the whole front of her. He arranged some pillows under his head and shoulders so he could lean up, then wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her tightly to himself. "How's this?" he asked.

"Oh, this is nice," she acknowledged. "Just like the first time we ... well the first time you gave me an orgasm. Only this is better," she added, "because you're inside me."

Harry nodded and moved one hand down between her legs again and the other to one of her breasts, and proceeded to replay the original scene in the drawing room, but with one important difference. As he stroked her he kept still inside her at first, listening to her mounting excitement. As she neared her climax he began moving in and out slowly, and he could feel her getting more moist inside, enabling him to slide within her more easily.

"Oh! ... Oh!" she called out. "Don't ... no ... yes ... oh yes ... do that ... OH! OH HARRY!!" She screamed, arching her back and rising so far into the air that Harry had to raise his hips off the bed to stay inside her. "Oh! Oh!" she continued as he felt the pressure rise up inside him and he began thrusting in earnest. Once more, the sight of her orgasming and the pressure of her pelvic muscles tightening around him excited him so much that he followed her a short time later, exploding into her again and shouting out his love for her over and over. For Hermione, the feel of him swelling inside her just prior to his release sent her over the edge again, and another wave of pleasure surged through her body.

They collapsed, sweaty and exhausted, and very, very satisfied. "Oh God, Harry, you are the absolute best ... oh that was prefect," Hermione gasped. Harry just wrapped her up as tightly as he could. He could feel her still throbbing against him, as he was still inside her, and he could tell that he wasn't going to soften any time soon. He shifted below her to try to get more comfortable and Hermione's hands immediately shot to his hips.

"Don't move," she ordered, still breathing hard. "Stay right where you are."

Harry grinned. He didn't mind this kind of bossiness from her a bit. "How about if we roll back onto our sides?" he suggested. Hermione considered a moment and nodded.

Once on their sides, Hermione reached behind her and grabbed his bum, pulling him into her as far as she could, while pushing herself back against him. Harry reached his arm over her and cupped his hand around her breast. Hermione nodded her approval. "Now, stay like this," she insisted sleepily. "Stay inside me like this forever."

"That might make eating and sleeping a bit difficult," he teased, repeating his comment from that first day in the drawing room.

"Sleeping, no problem," she countered with a yawn. "We're going to do this every night for the rest of our lives." She paused and seemed to ponder the other problem. "Eating is highly overrated," she decided. Harry chuckled and just hugged her to himself again, nuzzling her hair away from her shoulder and kissing her lightly on the neck. Soon he closed his eyes.

Hermione lay there a bit longer before joining him in sleep. They had done it. She and Harry had destroyed Voldemort together. They were married. Her husband had just made incredible love to her. Life was perfect. And it would get even better.

-xox-XOX-XOX-xox-