

Books and Wrackspurts

by ArtemisofEphesus

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Chapter 1

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Disclaimer: The Harry Potter world does not belong to me, and I am making no money by writing this story.

A/N: This has been lying around for a while. I found it the other day and patched it up a bit (it was in quite poor condition), then decided to post it here. There's also a half-written second chapter which I will finish soon, and there will be one more chapter after that.

Hermione Granger was curled up peacefully against the cold stone wall of the Astronomy tower. It was summer; for once it was warm even inside Hogwarts castle. Hermione had hoped to find a cool spot to read during her lone wanderings of the near-empty castle and had finally settled on the tower: usually full of snogging couples, but now blissfully empty. A light breeze drifted through the tall, open arches, playing with the wisps of Hermione's bushy hair that had escaped from its severe plait.

The book she was reading was a Muggle one. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Although Wizarding literature had brilliant non fiction texts, there was a scarcity of quality fiction; and to be completely truthful, Hermione simply preferred Muggle literature to its few Wizarding counterparts. Although she had read it several times now, being the bookworm she was, the heart-breaking story never ceased to reduce her to tears. She had used to think this quite strange, she remembered, pausing her rapid reading to look out of the tower's arches and into the courtyards below. She had never thought herself to be an overly emotional person: quite the opposite really. She had thought to be more steadfast and grounded to be so moved by the tragic plight of a character in a book. For Hermione, emotionality meant weakness and distraction. But that wasn't the only thing that had been bothering Hermione in the recent months. No; far more worrying was the preoccupation she had with the one thing she least wanted to be preoccupied with at the moment. Love.

It wasn't that Hermione was in love. She hadn't ever been, not even with Viktor Krum in her fourth year. In fact, Viktor had turned out to be an asshole of the highest degree. What had meant to be a casual stroll through the dark Hogwarts grounds after the Yule Ball would have ended in near disaster, had it not been that Viktor was too intent on various other parts of her body while pressing her up against a tree that he had not paid attention to her wand hand. She was many things, but naïve was not one of them. A stunning charm from a thoroughly outraged and slightly panicky Hermione had finally ceased his groping. She shuddered with the recollection and curled up closer to the cool stone of the wall. No, a relationship was not something Hermione wanted in the least.

But that didn't stop the strange thoughts that constantly flitted through her mind. Everyone around her seemed to be under love's spell, Harry and Ginny, Ron and who was it this time? Yes, Lavender Brown.

With a sigh she reminded herself of the reason why she was so alone in the castle today, and not in Hogsmeade. Placing her book aside, she stood up and leaned against one of the arches. Below, she could see a group of girls walking through the grounds towards the village, giggling and chattering merrily. There were Cho and her friend Marietta, along with a few other Ravenclaws, making their way through the grounds and past a menacing Filch. Even though Hermione had a new book waiting for her at Scrivenshafts and needed some more school supplies, she really hadn't felt the urge to go. She simply had no-one to go with. The boys were avoiding her after their latest

bout of arguing, over homework and silly things, and even though she liked being by herself, it was nice to have someone to chat with while in town. Ginny had left early in the morning, Parvati and Lavender didn't make good company unless one were interested in gossip and clothing. She was quite alone.

The door of the Astronomy tower opened with a creak, making Hermione jump slightly. Luna Lovegood, a Ravenclaw and one of the founding members of the DA, walked into the room, nose buried deeply in a book undoubtedly on a strange or mysterious topic. She was humming quietly, completely adrift in another world, and didn't notice Hermione at all.

"Hello, Luna," Hermione said with a smile. Luna jumped and dropped her book, hastening to retrieve it and brushing the dirt off its cover.

"Hermione! Oh, I'm sorry, am I intruding...?" The other girl asked, slightly flustered; a contrast to her usual serene exterior.

"Oh, no, Luna, it's all right. I was just about to leave anyway, I was only reading." Hermione looked puzzled for a moment. "Why aren't you in Hogsmeade with the rest of the school?"

Luna smiled, but the other girl could see that it was forced. "Oh, no one would go with loony old Luna Lovegood. 'She's insane, that one,' they all say. I thought I'd just stay here and read this new book on Transfigurational Theory by Horatio Dogsboddy. It's quite fascinating, really; however, he's made a couple of mistakes about the chapters on Transfiguring magical creatures. I'll have to write to the editor..." she rambled on.

Hermione was amazed at Luna's choice of book. She hadn't expected to find her reading something like that at all. It seemed almost unlike her. But then, Hermione didn't know the younger Ravenclaw that well. She said nothing and went to leave.

"Well, I'd better..." Hermione broke off. If Luna had no-one to go to the village with her... "Luna, do you want to come to Hogsmeade with me?" She asked quickly. "Just as friends, of course. I need some school supplies, and I wanted to pick up a book I'd Owl-ordered."

Luna's eyes shone and she blushed, though Hermione didn't notice. "I'd love too, Hermione," she replied dreamily. "Just as friends, of course."

"Oh, that's great then! I just have to go and get my things. I'll meet you in the entrance hall in ten minutes, ok?"

Hermione rushed off, leaving her book behind in her haste and without noticing the other girl's fierce blush and her dreamy expression. Perhaps today wouldn't be as lonely as she had thought.

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Fifteen minutes later, an impatient Hermione was waiting near the huge doors of the Entrance Hall, irritated at Luna's lateness. What on earth was taking her so long? Surely she couldn't have forgotten already that they were going to Hogsmeade together. It had only been fifteen minutes, after all. She sighed and rummaged through her bag for a book to keep her occupied while she waited. Just as she had become deeply immersed in the story, Luna popped around the corner.

"Shall we go?" the Ravenclaw asked brightly.

Hermione snapped back into the real world with a start.

"What-"

She cut herself off just in time to avoid shouting at Luna. She stared at the other girl and her jaw dropped. Something seemed different about Luna. It wasn't just that her usually messy white-blond hair had been pulled back and was held by a gorgeous star-shaped barrette, which shimmered and sparkled in the sunlight filtering in through the windows. She looked radiant, as if her usual shyness had been replaced with a quiet confidence. With her hair pulled back from her face, she looked different, almost eerily so. Her hairstyle wasn't her only change. Her strange orange earrings and Butterbeer-cork necklace had been replaced by tasteful earrings and a necklace of the same design as the barrette, and just as beautiful. They were like tiny clusters of sparkle hanging from her earlobes and around her neck that made her seem to glow. She looked like she was going out on a date, Hermione thought to herself, not simply to Hogsmeade for the afternoon. But she did look absolutely beautiful now that Hermione could see her face. Absolutely beautiful.

Hermione tore her gaze away, shaking her head as if to clear her mind of her strange thoughts.

"What took you so long?" she finally asked, irritated, but more at herself now than at Luna. The other girl's brow creased slightly.

"Sorry," she muttered. "Peeves thought it would be funny to water-bomb some second years. They found me and asked me to help."

Hermione looked curious. "How did you manage to get Peeves under control?" She asked. "No-one can do that except for the Bloody Baron, in my experience."

"Oh, that Charm Professor Lupin taught us in second year works wonders on Peeves." Luna's face brightened, and she grinned mischievously. Hermione laughed.

"Come on," she said, grabbing Luna's hand and beginning to walk through the grounds and down to the gates, puzzled to see that the girl turned red at her touch, but not saying anything. "Did I mention that I adore your earrings? They're absolutely beautiful!"

Luna beamed, and the two began to chatter away as they walked down to the village hand in hand.

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Two hours later, Hermione and Luna were sitting at a cosy table in a small café off the main street of Hogsmeade. Hermione had never been there before, but Luna assured her that they had the most wonderful iced chocolates in the whole of Britain. And it was beautifully quiet, surrounded by flowers and interesting magical plants Hermione had never seen before. Three shopping bags lay haphazardly at their feet, one carrying Hermione's new eagle-feather quill, ink, a copious amount of new parchment, and some monogrammed letter-writing paper. Another held her new book as well as an array of potions ingredients from the apothecary that she had been running low on. Now that Hermione had been allowed to finish her sixth and seventh year of schooling in the one, she ran out of things much faster. The third bag contained Luna's things: some rainbow-coloured ear-warmers (for next winter and for keeping the Wrackspurts at bay, she explained), a box of Honeyduke's best fudge, and a book she had found for half its usual price.

Luna was absentmindedly playing with her necklace with one hand and holding her iced chocolate in the other when Hermione broke the peaceful silence.

"What are you thinking, Luna?"

"Oh, nothing much," Luna replied. "Just how nice it is to have a friend like you, Hermione... I was feeling quite lonely this morning." The other girl smiled, thinking of how lonely she had been. Luna glanced at her watch and jumped.

"Merlin!" She exclaimed. "It's nearly four!"

Hermione yawned, content with the things she had completed. "What's the big rush? We've got until four-thirty at least."

"I just wanted to get one more thing before the shops close..." Luna grabbed her purse and made to rush off. "Be back in a minute!"

Hermione's eyes followed her rushing figure, and she felt like a befuddled lamb. "Yes, Luna," she mumbled, as she dozed off in the late sun's rays.

Five minutes later, Luna returned, slightly out of breath, clutching a small, gift-wrapped box to her chest. Hermione woke and smiled at her, stretching out her arms. Luna

grinned back and sat down. Shyly, she pushed the box across the table at Hermione and gazed at her expectantly.

"Is it... for me?" Hermione asked, tentatively. When Luna nodded, she picked it up delicately and carefully unraveled the ribbon around it. Luna shifted in her seat nervously. Unwrapping the gift further, Hermione found a navy-blue jewelry box. She flipped the clasp open and gasped.

Inside the box lay a pair of the exact same earrings as Luna was wearing, the ones Hermione had so admired earlier; an exquisite, shimmering cluster of stars hanging from a delicate golden chains. Simple, yet breathtakingly beautiful.

"Luna..." she breathed, "these are beautiful. Why ever did you buy these for me? They must have been terribly expensive!"

Luna's eyes shone at her friend's delight. "I... I..." she mumbled, "I... You're my best friend, Hermione. I just wanted you to know it."

Hermione jumped up and hugged Luna warmly, a little teary at the other girl's impromptu (or was it quite prepared?) speech. They paid for their drinks and left the café, walking hand in hand up to the castle, Luna's words echoing in Hermione's head and Luna enjoying the other girl's hand in hers.