

Ways and Means

by curikitten

Hermione is about to discover that life is never simple—not even when it's over.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Note: This is the super-revised version of the story written for lestrange_love during round three of HSEX (The Hermione Smut Exchange on LJ) using the prompt, "Nothing can ever come between them...not even death."

Credit where it's due:

- the talented and clever Max Barry for providing the world with the novel *Company* (and *Jennifer Government* and *Syrup*, and the fun game [NationStates](#)). The Way-Station's resemblance to Zephyr Holdings is purely intentional.
- bloodcult_of_freud's brilliant HG/SS epic, *Tyger! Tyger!* Readers who haven't memorized that fic may not see the connection. It exists.
- my lovely friend scifichick774, whose feedback is always welcome.

"What the fuck is this?"

Perhaps it was not the most eloquent statement in the history of Utterances Upon First Seeing The Way-Station, but it was certainly among the more direct.

It had also garnered a fair amount of attention from the others sheltered in the vast hall. Already a few Guests were becoming agitated, muttering to themselves and beginning to pace the marble floor.

The smartly attired wizard decided it was time to intervene. It was a good thing these difficult cases didn't turn up often. He had never been known for his abundant patience, after all, and accidents *did* happen...

He checked his clipboard, raising his eyebrows as he read the newcomer's name. He'd never Greeted someone he recognized before. Management delegated incoming cases to unfamiliar Hosts, in order to provide a less stressful transition.

Was this a mistake? He looked around, searching the throng for Leonard. The other Host was busy with a case of his own, and *he* didn't seem to notice that something unprecedented had occurred.

It couldn't be an accident. Management was infallible. It was in the Handbook.

There were no special notes with this case as there had been with a few others he'd handled, so the Host resolved to proceed with business as usual. No reason to be anxious. He was the one with the power here, and it was unlikely that she'd even recognize him. It wasn't as though they'd spent time in company Before.

He'd seen her in person only twice, though her image had been everywhere toward the end. Wanted posters advertised hefty rewards for information on the fugitive witch and her grubby companions. A number of the Host's associates had speculated on which of them might petition their leader for possession of such an important asset...after she had served her purpose to their cause, of course. The Host himself had fantasized more than once about that remarkable hair draped over his cock and...

And nothing. Such thoughts had no place here at the Way-Station. Who knew what Disciplinary Action the notoriously creative Management might deem appropriate for the Host who stepped out of line?

The Host breathed deeply, determined to present his customary aloof professional persona to the new arrival. He strode toward her, using the short journey to catalogue the ways in which maturity had altered her. As he neared, he was surprised to note that the witch seemed to have hardly aged at all.

Her breasts were still high, her hair still wild, her figure only moderately more full than it had been in the midst of war. Considering that she had been half-starved then, the Host suspected that slight change was due to achieving a healthy weight rather than any significant advance in age.

The observation made his brows and mouth tighten in disgust. It was hardly fitting that such a young thing...so full of power and potential...was here. *Here*, instead of exploring the world that should have belonged to her. What a fucking joke.

And then there was the unwelcome discovery that he had grossly overestimated the amount of time he'd been here. Evidently a year at the Way-Station felt like ten.

He started to make some calculations, then stopped and shook his head to clear the bitter thoughts. There would be time enough and more for regret after he dealt with *her*.

It was a large hall. A *huge* hall, even. She was more than a bit put out by the way it hinted at infinity, in truth.

Physics ought to apply even in the afterlife. It was unseemly to flout the rules.

There were hundreds of people milling about, many of them wearing nightclothes and looks of shock or confusion on their aged faces. From her location she could see only a handful of adults who appeared to be younger than sixty (at least by Muggle aging standards) and two children. The latter didn't seem to find anything unsettling about the surroundings; they had made a game of exploring the place.

She wondered if she might follow their example. A few people near her whose arrivals she'd witnessed had already been escorted away by various official-looking individuals, but those travelers had all looked traumatized in a way she couldn't quite describe. She could be in for a long wait.

A sudden tap on her shoulder caused her to shriek and spin into the dueling stance that had become a reflex after months of self-defense training with Harry and Neville. Although Tom Riddle had been defeated, his violent ideology lingered in small pockets of escaped Death Eaters and their sympathizers. They may not have had a great force on their side, but what they did have...fanatic devotion and nothing left to lose...was terrifying enough.

Especially when used to detonate the new and devastating Reducto Grenades in Diagon Alley while families were shopping for school supplies.

The face beyond the tip of her wand betrayed only the smallest hint of surprise before its owner reached up with a single finger and carefully began to nudge the point so that it no longer aimed at his nose. The action prompted Hermione to hastily relax her pose.

"Sorry about that," she offered. "Habit, you know. Or maybe you don't."

"I do know. And it's no harm done. If your wand were here, it wouldn't work, anyway," the unfamiliar man responded.

He was quite handsome, with eyes blue as a Mediterranean sky, prominent cheekbones, and clear, pale skin. His thick russet hair was bound at the nape with a ribbon, consistent with the businesslike tone of his attire.

Engrossed in studying her companion, it took Hermione a moment to process what he'd said.

"My wand?" she repeated, confused. She felt her sleeve where she'd placed the thing out of habit, but the length of wood was no longer there. "What's happened to it? Where is it?"

The man smiled at her patiently. It was the same indulgent expression Hermione had seen bestowed upon an American tourist who loudly asked a tour guide in which state London was located. The reason for the tour guide's forbearance became clear when she glimpsed the hefty tip he received; either the tourist had very deep pockets or she was unfamiliar with, among other things, the concept of an exchange rate.

In any event, it was not a look Hermione wanted to see directed at her. Her panic was rapidly turning to ire. Perhaps the man wasn't so handsome after all.

As if sensing the dangerous turn to her mood, her companion sobered.

"Management has determined that conduits for magic and/or magical effects...e.g. wands, rings, pendants, brooches, crowns, gloves, boots that allow the wearer to traverse a distance of roughly seven leagues in a single step, trousers, tomes, mirrors, coins, hats, combs, bracelets, and beans that enable the growth of very large beanstalks...are a disturbance in the Way-Station and destinations Beyond. The use of conduits unsettles those Guests who are unfamiliar with such things and prevents the peaceful co-post-Existence many deserve. As such, conduits not supplied and/or utilized by Management are strictly prohibited. Any conduits Imagined by Guests or Staff are without power and cannot be sensed in any way by those Guests unfamiliar with their Previous Existence."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. She'd been accused of reciting textbooks before, but Snape obviously had never heard *this* arse speak.

"That's in the Handbook," the man said. "Management has determined...oh, bloody hell...that in order to maintain clarity in communication, Staff members are required to impart any desired information to Guests as it appears in the Handbook and any subsequent Revisions, Appendices, and Staff Memos. *Verbatim.*"

"That's a nasty charm," she said with some sympathy. If its effects were anything like Veritaserum, the Arse had her pity.

"It really is," the Arse agreed. "Though I'm almost certain it's not a charm. More like a geas. Almost an *Imperius*. Leaves a nasty taste in the mouth, too. But I can say what I like after I get it out of the way the first time."

"This is going to be as tedious as trying to get a straight answer out of a Ministry official," Hermione muttered.

The man nodded. "Quite. If you've no further objections, let's get it over with." He cleared his throat before gesturing around them. "Welcome to the Way-Station, your One-Stop Connection Between Existence and All Points Beyond (excepting certain locations reserved for Special Cases, though you needn't worry about this). I am your Host. It is my task to Greet you and ensure that you understand where you are and why before transferring you to your Guide, all with Minimum Disturbance."

Her Host spoke in a lot of capitals. Probably Management's doing. It seemed like Management's Kind of Thing. Bloody hell, now she was doing it.

"If you could please state your name for the Record," the Arse continued, preparing to transcribe her answer to whatever form his clipboard held.

She rolled her eyes. It really was the Ministry all over again, right down to the falsely convivial tone. Besides, she was certain that clipboard held all of her vital information

and more.

"My name is Hermione Jean Granger."

The Arse scribbled on his clipboard before looking up. In his movement, there was a flash of something she recognized. Then it was gone.

"And do you remember what it was you were doing before your arrival?"

"I was waiting for the Knight Bus. I heard a noise and an animal darted past me and I stumbled out of the way and then there was more noise and then... Well, and then nothing, I suppose. I guess dying, if you want to count that, but I don't really *remember* it." Then she added as an afterthought, "With the way Ernie drives, it's no wonder he couldn't stop before he hit me."

It was strange. She knew that she would normally be quite a bit angrier about the accident, but there was a distance between her and the event, as though she were a casual observer. It was easy to be objective about things and recognize that, although tragic, it really *was* an accident. She didn't even feel much grief over what she'd left behind.

Shock. That was all. She was obviously traumatized.

Shock or not, she was currently a great deal more invested in her surroundings than she was worried about everything still in Existence, as the Arse had put it. She walked to his side and attempted to get a look at whatever he was scribbling on his board.

He shifted before she could really see anything. He was much taller than she was, after all. She tried again, with similar results.

"This is private information," the Arse snapped.

Hermione stared at him, incredulous. "My personal history is *private* from *me*?"

"Standard Operating Procedural Protocol 403. The Host must ensure that the Guest at no time sees the Guest's Private Way-Station File. Guests are not to question Management's authority in this decision," he recited solemnly.

She had actually spent a lot of time in the last year learning to control her temper. Made real progress, too. Later, she decided that what she did next could be blamed on the stress of the moment.

"I'll question..." she managed to shout before the Host clapped his hand over her mouth. He held it there as he looked around them and scowled. Hermione observed what she could with his large hand not only blocking her mouth but also preventing her moving her head.

Nearly every entity in the Way-Station was silently gawking at them.

"Mind your business!" the Arse barked, and the observers quickly averted their gazes.

When he removed his hand, Hermione wiped her face with the sleeve of her robe before directing her glare at him. "I'll question whatever I sodding well like!" she hissed in outrage.

"No surprises there," he sneered. "But you can do your questioning with someone else. It's time to hand you off to whichever unfortunate has pulled duty as your Guide."

Before he had even finished speaking (and without giving her the opportunity to make a very dignified face at him), the Arse had a grasp on her upper arm and was hauling her across the vast hall. Though she couldn't discern any probable destinations in the sea of people, she trusted that her companion knew what he was about. It was probably part of that geas he was under.

After he loosed his grip, the Arse strode along with Hermione trotting briskly behind for what she estimated to be ten minutes. Then, without warning, a series of mid-sized grey canvas walls appeared no more than two meters before them. The Host must have sensed her surprise because he turned and sniggered, "Welcome to the Cubicle Farm."

"The Cubicle..." she began to repeat, incredulous. but her Host had already started off again, this time headed for the entrance to the depressingly drab structure.

He waited for her to catch up, then navigated a path through the halls of tiny workstations, the walls of which were composed of the same grey canvas panels Hermione had seen from outside. Each alcove held a desk overflowing with paperwork and a filing cabinet in roughly the same shape. Some workstations were occupied with harassed-looking people who would not have stood out in an identical Extant setting.

She was so occupied with taking in the sights that she failed to notice when her Host stopped abruptly. She bumped into him and, thrown off-balance, tripped backwards. In the process of steadying herself, she managed to knock a stack of papers from the nearest desk, behind which sat a small man with an unsuccessful toupee. Her sincere apologies to the man as she knelt to gather the mess were overpowered by his screeching.

"No, just leave it! Leave it! There's a certain order...you'll only make it worse!" He hurried around the desk and swatted her hands away. His singularly awful toupee flapped about on his head as though miraculously granted life. Hermione swiftly retreated and stood, looking to her Host for assistance.

The Arse stood not two feet away, guffawing his handsome head off. She glared at him until he gained his composure, at which point he offered an apology on her behalf to the other man, whose name turned out to be Norbert.

"I'd say not to let it happen again," Norbert grumped in reply, "but Management knows you'll do it next time anyway, same as always. You Hosts are all alike; sadistic bastards the lot of you."

"Can't argue with that," the Host replied cheerfully, starting off again. "Come along, Hermione."

Yes, Master. Right away, Master. Shall I fetch your slippers, Master?

She gave him back an evil look. "I really am sorry," she offered to the small man again, but he simply grunted and waved her off.

She followed the arse (it wasn't bad to look at, despite the personality of its owner.) around a corner and saw that they had reached what appeared to be the Cubicle Farm's interpretation of a corner office. The workstation was minutely larger than the others they'd passed, and two faux leather-upholstered chairs were set before the desk. A thin woman whose blonde hair had been arranged into a beehive sat behind it.

"Hello, Kitty. I've got another one for you," the Arse greeted her.

The blonde looked up. Her lips curled into a flirtatious smile. "Well, hey yourself, handsome!" She spoke with a drawl that Hermione was certain originated in the American South.

Kitty glanced at Hermione before returning her attention to the Arse. "So what did you bring me this time?" she asked, reaching for the precious clipboard.

The woman scanned the paperwork before reaching into a desk drawer and pulling out another file. As she compared information, her smile quickly slipped into a frown.

"This is quite unusual, but Rabby," Kitty said, handing the clipboard back, "I think we have a problem."

Rabby?

Hermione's mind raced as pieces began clicking into place. The Arse knew about magic and wands and the *Ministry*, said he understood her reaction to being startled, looked familiar...from the research she'd done!...and "Rabby"?

She shot out of her chair, brandishing her wand.

"Bugging fuck. You're Rabastan Lestrangle!"

When Rabastan arrived at the Way-Station a year earlier, he found himself Greeted, Oriented, and then directed to an important looking Door.

If asked, he would not have been able to say how he knew this was a Door and not a door. It was formed of wrought-iron designs, but that was not unusual in this place. Perhaps it was simply that the Door emanated power. His Guide, a forgettable fellow with an equally forgettable name, had said one thing that Rabastan did not forget. This was the Door to Personnel Resources.

He looked about to see if anyone was watching, but the crowded Way-Station had emptied into a neutral expanse of what he supposed was Nothing. Satisfied that there were no witnesses to his foolish behavior, he hesitantly reached for the Door. His fingers were scarcely a hair's width from it when it creaked outward, causing him to leap backward in surprise.

As soon as he regained his feet, Rabastan peered into the corridor that now lay before him. Only the smallest bit wider than the Door itself, its high walls reminded him of the hedge maze at his great-grandmother's estate in France.

He hated hedge mazes. He hated not knowing what lay around the corner, he hated feeling powerless in the shadows of the tall shrubberies, and he hated the frustration of a dead end.

As he made his way through the passage, he found some comfort in its straightforward nature. Instead of attempting to confound him with false starts, the thing's creator had chosen directness, an approach Rabastan had favored during his Existence for its simple elegance. (Not to mention that it unfailingly caught other Slytherins off-guard.) There was something horrific waiting at the other end of this journey, but at least it didn't toy with him.

That was more than could be said for some of the monsters he'd known.

Just when he was beginning to think he would be walking this path for eternity...he wondered whose file they'd swapped for his that they thought this would be an effective punishment...the high walls to either side of him stopped, and he was abruptly confronted with *white*.

It was similar to the infinite neutral space he'd seen just before the Door opened. Where that place had been unformed potential, however, this white space was shaped into authority, organization, and impatience.

While he peered into the blinding expanse, a table and chair appeared. When they remained unoccupied, he made an educated guess and seated himself.

RABASTAN LESTRANGE.

His buttocks had barely made contact with the chair's wooden seat when the sudden noise had him back on his feet, prepared for action. His surroundings reverberated with the frightening voice's booming. He was unsure how he knew, but the voice, he was certain, had the power to determine his eternal fate.

And how right he was. A thick stack of paper...not parchment, but Muggle *paper*...sandwiched between two covers of a shiny folio bearing the designation LESTRANGE, RABASTAN JANUS SEBASTIAN (19611998) appeared on the table before him.

RABASTAN LESTRANGE, THIS IS YOUR LIFE.

The folder was before him and open before he had the opportunity to question the wisdom of touching it. The top sheet contained the bare facts of his Existence, including his birth and death dates and the location of each. He was in the process of turning to the second page when the papers began shuffling themselves, which earned him a paper cut.

"Oi!" he protested. There was no response. Personnel Resources obviously needed training in modern customer service.

When at last the documents settled, Rabastan saw that the new top sheet was titled "Violations of Existential Policy: Minor." That put the paper cut (which stung, but did not bleed) in perspective. If the heavy sensation in his stomach was accurate, he was about to be met with much worse.

RABASTAN LESTRANGE. DURING YOUR SHORT EXISTENCE, YOU COMMITTED 9,997 ACTS THAT FALL UNDER THE CLASSIFICATION "MINOR VIOLATIONS OF EXISTENTIAL POLICY". WE ARE CONVINCED THIS COUNT WOULD BE HIGHER HAD YOU NOT SPENT THE FIFTEEN YEARS FOLLOWING YOUR TWENTIETH INCARCERATED IN THE PRISON FOR MAGICAL HUMANS KNOWN AS AZKABAN ON THE ISLAND OF THE SAME NAME.

Rabastan's mouth had gone dry. He swallowed audibly with little result. A flimsy translucent cup filled with a clear liquid popped onto the table. He picked it up and sniffed at it.

RABASTAN LESTRANGE, YOU ARE NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE. THE CUP IS AN IMAGINARY CONSTRUCT, WHICH CONTAINS AN EQUALLY IMAGINARY LIQUID RESEMBLING THE FLUID FORM OF THE COMPOUND H₂O. ITS PRESENCE IS FOR YOUR COMFORT ONLY.

JUST DRINK THE DAMNED THING!

A new, somehow more impatient booming assailed his ears. He wondered if the voices were imaginary, too, and drank the cup's contents. The water had a strange secondary taste, and he wrinkled his nose.

I TOLD YOU THE FLUORIDE WAS A BAD IDEA. VOTED AGAINST IT, BUT NO. YOUR SILLY PET IDEAS...

NOT NOW. I CONCEDE THE CONCEPT MAY REQUIRE SOME FINE-TUNING, HOWEVER. IT IS ON THE AGENDA FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

Rabastan listened to the dispute with amusement. It reminded him of a Death Eater planning session he'd once attended with Rodolphus, Lucius Malfoy, Barclay Avery, and Frederick Nott. Each of the men was intent on displaying his power and authority to the others, and the meeting had quickly dissolved into a series of petty squabbles.

RABASTAN LESTRANGE.

The first voice boomed his name again, and the clenching in his gut returned.

THE POLICY FOR DISCIPLINE IS QUITE CLEAR REGARDING MINOR VIOLATIONS OF EXISTENTIAL POLICY. BECAUSE THE COUNT OF MINOR INFRACTIONS RECORDED IS UNDER 10,000...

BARELY! the other voice hissed.

...**YOU ARE INELIGIBLE FOR DISCIPLINE OF ACTS IN MINOR VIOLATION OF EXISTENTIAL POLICY UNDER CURRENT GUIDELINES.**

He breathed a sigh of relief. Who knew what mad punishments they had in this place?

Then another page in his folder turned, and the voice continued speaking.

IN CONTRAST, YOUR TALLY OF 1,016 ACTS IN MAJOR VIOLATION OF EXISTENTIAL POLICY MEETS THE MINIMUM 1,000 REQUIRED BY THE POLICY FOR DISCIPLINE.

YOU ARE HEREBY SENTENCED TO 1,016 EARTH YEARS IN SERVICE TO THE WAY-STATION IN THE ROLE OF HOST. SHOULD THE PLANET EARTH CEASE TO EXIST PRIOR TO COMPLETION OF THE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED SENTENCE, YOU WILL BE APPOINTED TO A NEW POSITION.

His thoughts flashed briefly to another sentencing nearly two decades earlier. This was the price to be paid for following. He'd followed his father, then Rodolphus, Rodolphus' friends, Bella, and ultimately the Dark Lord without ever truly committing to their radical beliefs. The arrogant second son of an impoverished French pureblood aristocrat in exile, Rabastan had been determined to *belong* in his family's adopted country.

Being accepted into a group had its perks. For example, one might be freed from Azkaban ahead of schedule. Of course, if the group one belonged to was made up of people who themselves belonged in padded rooms at St. Mungo's, the benefits lost a bit of shine. After two years outside of Azkaban spent trying to stay on the good sides of both the Dark Lord and Bella, Rabastan had been certain there existed no escape from the madness outside of death. He had met his end calmly, comforted by thoughts of the blissful peace to come.

He always *had* been a bit of a dreamer.

RABASTAN LESTRANGE, YOU WILL NOT ESCAPE THIS ARRANGEMENT EARLY. THERE IS NO ESCAPE. YOU WILL LEARN IMPORTANT LESSONS DURING THE NEXT MILLENNIUM. AND DON'T WORRY; WE ARE TOLD TIME PASSES QUICKLY AFTER THE FIRST 500 YEARS.

STUDY THE HANDBOOK. WHEN YOU ARE READY, HOST LEONARD WILL FIND YOU.

At those words from the voice, the file containing his life's accumulated data faded away and was replaced by a thick hidebound text with the words **THE HANDBOOK, vol. 01** embossed on its front cover. It was quickly followed by a bookshelf that popped into place just behind his chair. According to their spines, the bookshelf held volumes 02 through 63 of **THE HANDBOOK**.

There were worse things than extensive revision. He knew, because he'd done them.

Silence had descended upon Kitty's corner cubicle. Hermione's senses were alert as she studied the dead Death Eater before her. The Arse...*Rabastan Sodding Lestrangle*...ground his teeth in frustration as he stared back.

"If it's all the same, maybe y'all could deal with your issues once we're done here? Some of us have work to do, after all," Kitty's annoying voice had cooled considerably.

The interruption brought some clarity to Hermione's thoughts. Sighing, she realized how absurd she must appear, holding an Imaginary wand on someone already dead. She looked at her empty hand, exasperated at the speed with which the wand had vanished, then darted a glance at Lestrangle, who assessed her in turn. Resigned, she dropped back into the green faux-leather-upholstered chair beside the Arse. He hadn't tried to hurt her thus far, after all. She made sure to situate herself so that she could observe him discreetly.

Kitty hummed in approval. "Now, Rabby, I declare I'm surprised you didn't get the Memo."

"What Memo?" Lestrangle snapped in response. Hermione could see him flipping pages on his precious clipboard. She almost expected what came next. Her Host froze, staring at one of his papers.

"Ah, *this* Memo, I suppose," he offered sheepishly.

Unsurprised but outraged all the same, she turned to stare at him. He shifted uncomfortably beneath her glare.

"As you can see, our little Hermione *almost* slipped through the system." Kitty sounded as though the word 'almost' had done her a personal wrong.

Lestrangle, whose eyes were still scanning the Memo, inhaled sharply. "Fuck me," he whispered in amazement.

Kitty snorted. "Precisely."

Hermione snatched the clipboard from the Arse's unresisting hands and huffed as she began to read. The document was mostly nonsensical bureaucratic babble, disclaiming responsibility and casting blame elsewhere for the "potentially devastating near-miss."

"*What* near-miss?" she shouted in frustration.

It was Kitty who was forced to reply, perhaps because they were currently in her office. The Guide glared at Lestrangle as she recited, "The Soul Twin phenomenon is beyond Management's power to explain. Soul Twins often Bond Before the arrival of one or both at the Way-Station, which creates minimal disruption of standard procedure."

Hermione stared. "And?"

Kitty shifted her look of disgust to Hermione. "In the event that a Soul Twin is sentenced to a disciplinary period in service to the Way-Station, that period ends when the second member of the Bonded pair arrives at the Way-Station, so that the Bonded pair may journey Beyond together...unless the second Soul Twin is also sentenced to a disciplinary period in service to the Way-Station."

"What?! Whatever things I did, I had very good reasons!" Hermione was horrified. Rabastan Lestrangle really should have read that fucking Memo. She was going to make sure he regretted his oversight for a *very* long time.

Kitty expelled a humorless laugh. "Didn't we all?"

Lestrangle's hand on her arm was a steady, comforting pressure. *Comforting?* "Just listen, please. She's not finished."

"Although there is no precedent, in the event one un-Bonded Soul Twin is in service at the time the second arrives in the Way-Station, the pair will have a limited time to Bond and journey Beyond. If they do not Bond within the given time frame, both will remain in the Way-Station until the first Twin's sentence is complete."

Finally finished with her script, Kitty sighed in relief and rubbed at her jaw.

"So that's us?" Hermione asked.

Kitty's head jerked up and she focused her glare on Hermione. "Yes," she said through her clenched jaw.

"You said there's a time limit. How long do we..."

Kitty interrupted. "Rabby, fill the little dear in on the rest of the details before we find I've done something drastic," she advised with a brittle smile.

Something drastic? She'd show this Kitty person something drastic if she didn't get answers.

Lestrangle reached for Hermione's hand as they both glared at the other woman. "We've just over an hour left," he said quietly.

"And this Bonding, it's..." Hermione trailed off.

"Sexual intercourse, yes," her *Soul Twin* filled in.

She looked at his hand in her lap. Just over an hour in which to Bond for eternity with her *Soul Twin*...something she had no idea existed thirty minutes ago...who happened to be one of the more notorious Death Eaters in Voldemort's ranks.

She sighed. "We'd best get it over with, then. I'm not sitting around here for the next..." she glanced at Lestrangle.

"1,015 years," he offered.

Her eyes widened. *That was a big number.* She leapt to her feet, tugging on his hand.

"Where's your room? We're going to shag *now!*"

Hermione steadily avoided meeting his eyes. Her gaze took in his unmade bed and the otherwise bare room before she sighed and shook her head resignedly.

Rabastan felt sick to his stomach. This was his *Soul Twin*, the one entity that was meant to accept him without first expecting the completion of impossible tasks, and even she was disappointed in him.

He wished he could offer to let her go on without him...*to spare himself the pain of an eternity with someone who would never want him.* but the Memo made it clear that wasn't an option.

If only he had a love potion...even a lust potion...to give her, the experience would be easier for them both.

"We should probably get started, then." Hermione's brisk tone startled him from his thoughts.

"You mean now?"

"Of course I mean now. We've an hour left to *Soul Bond*...here she made strangely sarcastic little gestures on either side of her head..."before I'm stuck here serving out the remainder of your sentence with you. That is, unless you'd prefer a millennium in this paradise to shagging a *Mudblood*." She spat the last word as though it tasted foul in her mouth.

He'd never thought about it before, but it probably did.

Then he processed the rest of her words.

"No...I mean, yes...I mean, I absolutely agree," he managed.

His *Soul Twin* nodded decisively, still staring at the bed. "This isn't the setting I would have chosen for such an important event, but it will suffice." The distaste in her voice was audible, belying her words of acceptance.

Rabastan blinked. *An important event*, she'd said. If *that* was the reason for her disappointment... His lips curved into a smirk. *That* was something he could fix.

In the next instant, Hermione issued a breathy, awed "Oh!" and turned to him in astonishment.

"Is this more to your taste, my only?" he asked, taking a step forward. The smug smile on his face spread as his soon-to-be-lover nodded slowly, eyes wide.

Standing at the center of a lavishly furnished suite, she looked positively edible in the imagined filmy garment.

"Is this... *your* room, Rabastan?" she queried. Evidently she hadn't noticed the attire straight out of an erotic fantasy.

He took another step forward. "It's *our* room, my only. This is a place for only us as our souls Bond for eternity."

His ego deflated a bit as she snorted. "Laying it on a bit thick, aren't we? Red velvet, silk, and satin? Not to mention *this*," she added, picking at her negligee.

"I can turn it back," he snarled, stung.

Her soft expression stopped him from following through. "It's lovely," she offered. "Very...thorough!" she continued, clearly attempting to placate him. As her next step brought her close enough that she laid her hand on his upper arm, Rabastan decided she had been successful.

He followed her suddenly heated gaze down his body and was shocked to notice his own attire...or, rather, its absence. He gaped at the little hellcat, who let out a sultry chuckle that streaked to his libido.

"I'm a fast learner," Hermione said, her voice honeyed with lust. Her rapid mood change caused a brief moment of doubt in which he wondered how much of her arousal was the product of their unique connection...and then rational thought fled as she squeezed his cock for a too-short moment.

He moved quickly, stalking her toward the bed until she bumped into it. He lifted her with ease, and her hands weaved themselves into his hair as she threw her legs around his hips. Just as he'd intended, the position brought his arousal flush with her cunt. His hands gripped her arse as he claimed a first savage kiss from her mouth, grinding their pelvises together.

Whether the result of imagination or the strange magic of the Way-Station, her center was burning heat against him. For a long moment, while his body worked without his conscious input, he could think of nothing but that wet heat.

Then the woman in his arms moaned, and being *near* heaven wasn't enough. Breaking their frantic kiss, he dropped her onto the thick mattress his imagination had created.

Hermione only just had time to release a needy whine of protest before he was on top of her again, shredding the thin material keeping her skin from his. Once her breasts...lovely and small, with areolae whose color matched his own hair...were bare to him, he hungrily suckled each in turn, taking greedy mouthfuls of her skin. He was gratified by her reaction as she writhed beneath him, moaning and grasping at his shoulders, his hair, and his bum.

With reluctance, he shifted so that his cock was no longer cradled between those perfect thighs. Hermione's hips continued thrusting upwards, seeking him, until he pressed down on them with one hand. Once she was still, he peeled the remaining strips of gauzy fabric from her.

When he finally brushed his fingers against her, tangling them in her wiry curls and coating them in her moisture, Rabastan found it impossible to contain a groan of satisfaction. How long had it been since he'd had a woman who hadn't been paid in some way? He couldn't remember. Long before Azkaban, he was sure.

He found and began to manipulate the hard bead of flesh that would bring his soul twin ecstasy. When he started to slide down her body, however, Hermione reached between them and pulled his hand to her breast.

"Later," she murmured breathlessly. He looked at her without understanding. "No time, remember?" she huffed, tugging at his hair, which had escaped its binding.

Now he remembered.

"I'll make it up to you," he promised. Hermione's only response was a low moan as he reached between them and guided himself home.

Home. He buried himself within her and stilled, dropping his face to rest against her neck. This was the elusive something he had sought throughout his existence. The irony brought tears to his eyes...though the fingernails Hermione buried in his arse cheeks helped with that.

"Move," she hissed with impatience.

So he moved. He moved in and out, alternately kneading a breast or fingering that amazing little clit, thrusting to the rhythm of his Soul Twin's breathy gasps.

As he moved, he told her what he thought about her grasping lava-hot cunt and her sweet clit and her perfect breasts. Her upward thrusts gained strength when he mentioned how hard her bossy mouth made him and how he'd fantasized about her hair Before.

When Hermione began to emit the sexiest little squeaks, he ceased his commentary and increased his tempo, rutting hard against her and pinching at her clit. He sucked a breast into his mouth and pulled hard, savoring his partner's spasm.

When she shuddered in completion beneath him, he experienced a moment of smug pleasure before the walls of her greedy cunt unexpectedly drew an orgasm *(and with it something inexplicably more)* through his cock.

He had barely slumped against her side, replete, when a voice he had hoped to never hear again assaulted his ears.

RABASTAN LESTRANGE, YOU ARE HEREBY RELEASED FROM YOUR 1,016-YEAR SENTENCE AS HOST IN SERVICE OF THE WAY-STATION. THIS PARDON IS GRANTED BY VIRTUE OF THE UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL OF YOUR SOUL TWIN, WITH WHOM YOU HAVE BONDED.

Pressed against her as he was, Rabastan couldn't help but notice that as the voice spoke, Hermione became nearly as tense as she'd been before their shag.

This could become very bad very quickly indeed.

HERMIONE GRANGER, PLEASE ACCEPT MANAGEMENT'S BEST WISHES FOR YOUR JOURNEYS BEYOND.

Given his experience with his Soul Twin's volatile temper, Rabastan fully expected an outburst from Hermione that would result in the revocation of his pardon and see the both of them working as the Way-Station's equivalent of Argus Filch for eternity.

Unsure if Hermione's surprising silence in the situation constituted cause for alarm, he pulled back to better observe her reaction. She met his eyes with a gaze that betrayed irritation and introduced a new fear. Did she blame *him* for all of this?

REMINd THEM ABOUT THE FORMS!

AH, YES.

A thump on the mattress drew his attention from Hermione to two black folders beside him. They had narrowly missed his head. His eyes narrowed and then darted back to Hermione's face.

AS A COURTESY, WE REQUEST THAT YOU COMPLETE THESE FEEDBACK FORMS BEFORE YOU LEAVE US. YOUR INPUT WILL HELP US IMPROVE THE WAY-STATION EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHO MAY FIND THEMSELVES IN NEED OF OUR SERVICES AT A FUTURE TIME.

Rabastan decided that the spreading smirk on his Soul Twin's face wasn't too distressing.

No, it was the inspired glint in her eyes that made him worry.

THANK YOU, AND HAVE A PLEASANT ETERNITY.