

Vampire!Hermione Fractured

by Amita

The second version shows more ignorance than that which has been mentioned, and it is more marvelous to tell – Herodotus

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 3

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Chapter 1

Just a few turns are needed. I'll go back and set everything right. I'll escape this curse.

Flip, flip went the time.

Maybe my mistake was earlier, all the events leading up to my being bitten. I'll go further back.

Flip, flip went the scenery.

Why be selfish? I can set a lot of things right. I know so much more now. I'll let my fingers be the guide.

Flip, flip went the surroundings.

At last, time for corrective action.

Flip, flip went her world as she wondered onto the platform and surveyed the unfamiliar faces. The train hadn't changed.

"You look lost, miss," said a voice behind her. "Have you just arrived from the colonies?"

"Excuse me," she said, turning.

"It's your clothes, not that there's anything wrong with them. They're just different." His eyes swept over her. "Modern. You must be from the States. I can show you where to put your luggage for loading."

"I don't have any luggage," she blurted out.

He shook his head. "It's the war. Confusion reigns. You arrived safely, no mean feat these days, and the castle elves will be happy to provide you with some threads. Is that how the American say it?" He paused. "Amusing. The elves can't take clothes, but they can make them."

"And you are?" she asked.

"Tom Riddle, fifth year. Are you fifth year, too? I hope so."

A flash of resentment shot through her; certainly, she looked more mature than that; but something in those dark eyes made her want to nod yes.

"Hermione Granger," she said.

"A very English name," he said. "Perhaps your family only recently migrated to America, and that's why they've returned so soon. Their English blood hasn't been diluted, and they're quick to do their bit, nicht wahr?"

A man of sound reasoning and sense of humor, thought Hermione. *Either that, or he's making fun of us.*

A witch was striding toward them. Tom obviously wanted to introduce the two ladies to each other, but the new arrival had other things on her mind.

"Did you behave yourself, Tom? You promised you would."

Tom started to say yes.

"You'll break my heart if you didn't."

Tom started to say something.

"Don't lie to me, Tom."

Tom sighed.

"You'll break my heart if you lie to me."

"While you're still intact," said Tom, "let me introduce you to Hermione Granger. Hermione, this is Minerva."

Minerva gave Hermione a glare that said, "What new evil are you bringing to us."

"Hermione may need your help," said Tom.

Minerva appeared to soften.

"Her family's come over from the States to help in the effort, but there are problems with lost luggage and maybe with currency exchange. Her family's heart is in the right place, and Hermione made it to the station, but through no fault of her own or her family, she's almost a stranded orphan."

Having conveyed that to Minerva, Tom caught his breath and said, "She's fifth year."

"We're glad you're not really an orphan, my dear," said Minerva, "but in these terrible times, we're prepared for students who are."

Hermione thought Minerva was saying that like she believed Hermione could become an orphan at any time. Then she realized Minerva and Tom could become orphans at any time. Perhaps they already were. Something was nagging at the back of Hermione's mind, and later, she berated herself for not recognizing it immediately, but for now, her mental efforts were focused on Minerva settling her on the train and promising to return and furnish her with a school uniform and to brief her on the opening ceremony where she would be placed in a house.

"We haven't had a foreign student before," said Minerva, managing to look prim and sympathetic and disapproving all at once, "but I suppose we may have to get used to it."

The train of students began its journey as did Hermione's train of thought. Were Tom and Minerva who she thought they were? She had trusted her instincts in going back in time, but she had thought it would take five or six months to reach the root of her predicament, not five or six decades. Or did she go back in time? She had begun in her London flat and ended up on the platform. She had moved sideways in space. Had she moved sideways in time? Was this another world? What would happen if she tried to return? Could she disguise herself as a transfer student rendered nearly an orphan by the storm of some conflict until she had sussed out the situation? She had the wry thought that it was lucky she had the figure of a student. So, a great rack wasn't the end all and be all after all. In the meantime, she would have to feed on emotions to stay healthy, but she had landed amidst late adolescents. Maybe fate wasn't totally unkind.

Darkness descended on the train as it moved across a vast landscape to its mysterious destination.

Hermione was thinking that once she was sorted, she would be in more familiar surroundings, and she would be able to sort things out.

"It better be Ravenclaw!"

What?

Hermione walked numbly to the Ravenclaw table.

"But I'm as brave and courageous as I always was, I think," she had protested to the hat.

"Yes, you do think," the hat had replied. "Now, on your way. Other students are waiting, and we haven't got all night."

Now, she was walking past the first years to where a group of girls were waving to her and making a place for her. As she seated herself, she glanced at the Gryffindor table. Strange, she hadn't noticed before that they were a rowdy bunch. The girls were telling her there was a place in their dorm room for her since one of their friends had vanished over the summer. There was a quiet pause before they added that they hoped she and her family had moved to Egypt or somewhere to help with the war effort. There were some comments about how exciting it must be to be in Egypt before they mentioned that the Slytherins were spreading the rumor that the new arrival must be a German spy.

"Ridiculous, nicht wahr," said Hermione.

The other girls gave her a stunned look and then laughed. *Yes, she's one of us.*

There was Mary who liked Charms, Draupadi who liked Herbology, and Elizabeth who liked Potions. They didn't think much of the instructors, but who needed professors. They wanted to know if Hermione had a favorite subject, and she had to admit not really although she was partial to Transfigurations. The girls thought Hermione might soon run into Minerva, Head Girl, who was the school's star in Transfigurations. The professor, however, was another old man, not that it mattered to Minerva since she wasn't interested in boys. Hermione almost protested that she appeared interested in one boy, but perhaps she was trying to protect his innocence not take it. Hermione did offer that professors paced the studies so that the students didn't try to accomplish everything all at once.

The unattached girls surveyed the room for prospects. Their conversation kept returning to a Slytherin who appeared interesting but who seemed too intense. Mary said she might enjoy a one-night stand. Elizabeth said she might enjoy a one-week stand. Hermione was thinking it would be entertaining to arrange it for them and how satisfying it would be to feed on the resulting emotions.

"Look, her eyes are shining," said Draupadi.

As Elizabeth and Mary joked about fixing her up, Hermione was thinking the observant Draupadi could be first in line. Her aura in passion would be a savory aperitif. Besides, her silence regarding Tom might indicate real feelings, and bringing them together might be easier than one might think.

Classes began the next morning with Hermione surprised at the variety of courses available. She had decided to take something new: Introduction to Mundane Literature. It began with the Iliad, and the instructor was preparing the students for a three thousand year-old tale. It included the opinions of Herodotus describing the origins of the wars between the East and West. Apparently, the conflict began in the mists of prehistory with the two sides making off with each others' women. About the Trojan War, Herodotus stated the Greeks were much to blame. Everyone knew you didn't kidnap a queen unless she wanted to be kidnapped, and no matter what, you didn't go to war over a woman. The instructor mentioned the alternate story that Paris and Helen had visited Egypt on their way to Troy where the Egyptians had insisted he leave Helen with them until she could be returned to her husband.

"Stealing another king's wife isn't done, old bean," the Pharaoh had said.

The professor then acted out the resulting opening scene of the war before the city walls: the Greeks yelling up, "Give her back!" and the Trojans yelling down, "We ain't got 'er!"

Elizabeth leaned over and whispered, "The farce that launched a thousand ships."

The first Potion class occurred late in the week. Hermione had heard that Tom, whoever he was, was a loner, and she contrived to arrive just after Tom but before her roommates. She approached him, remarked that she had heard he was talented, and asked if she could work with him. After he recovered, he replied that of course she could and proceeded to describe the assignment and how he planned to prepare it. Then he asked Hermione's opinion on how to proceed. Hermione was so struck by his grasp of the basic principles and by his graciousness that she almost missed the arrival of Draupadi who she waved over while gushing to Tom about her roommate joining them, but Draupadi waved back and joined Mary and Elizabeth.

Get your arse over here, raged Hermione, but Draupadi and her friends only gave her a knowing smirk.

Hermione was discovering it was easy to be brave on behalf of someone else, but not so easy on behalf of oneself. She was fretting about how to relate to Tom when he reminded her they were supposed to crumble the oak leaves, not grind them into powder. She was waiting for his outburst when he stated he didn't know why they used crumbled instead of ground. Did she know? He supposed crumbled released its essentials slower, but was that a good thing and why? For someone rumored to be a loner and especially for someone Hermione suspected of becoming an evil overlord, Tom proved to be a flexible and good-natured partner. Hermione began to have thoughts about him herself. Is this the same Tom? Where am I, anyway?

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 3

And see thy blood warm when thou feel's it cold - Shakespeare

Chapter 2

Tom and Hermione were putting the equipment away after their first Potion class. The instructor had examined their effort and pronounced it excellent.

Buoyed by success, she asked, "Do you want a coffee, Tom? We can go over the next assignment."

"Wow, you Ravenclaws have stamina," said Tom. "I need to recover from this session."

"Of course ... recover ... have a coffee to recover," stammered Hermione. "We can have another coffee later ... for planning ... if you like."

Planning? wondered Hermione, *I'm making plans?*

They strolled out to a patio where Tom remarked that he was quite plebian and preferred the ordinary coffee the elves brewed. Hermione quickly agreed with him although she added cream and sugar to hers. She was glancing around and thinking this generation with its patios and with the gazebos she could see and with its coffee service was doing a good job of countering the gloom of the old castle. Or was this a gilded age with students part of a privileged class? Speaking of class, or the lack of it, was Minerva spying on them?

"There you are," said the other three girls, joining them.

Mary leaned forward and whispered, "Is it just me, or is Minerva giving us the eye?"

"She's jealous of Tom," suggested Elizabeth.

That old hag? fumed Hermione.

Tom shook his head. "I'm one of her suspects, along with the Potions professor she considers dodgy. You've incriminated yourselves by being seen with me."

When Hermione looked confused, the others jumped in with an explanation. There was a rumor that a gang of wizards was illegally supply potions to the non-wizards. Not only that, but the trade was carried out during the school terms and was nonexistent during the summer. Most students thought it was a mom-and-pop enterprise that flourished when the youngsters were away.

"If it's a pain killer, then during these times it would be a mercy," offered Draupadi.

"If it is, we would expect the chivalrous Gryffindors to be the source," said Mary.

"I suggested that to Minerva," said Tom, "and once again, I discovered our Head Girl has no sense of humor. Rules are rules."

"Could someone be disguised as a faculty member and using a secret chamber in the castle?" asked Hermione.

"Disguised as a faculty member? Secret chamber? I never thought of that," said Tom.

"Could one flush out the gang by pretending to be disguised as a professor and pretending to know about secret chambers?" asked Hermione. "The gang would reveal themselves when they tried to eliminate their competition."

"A cunning plan and obviously a job for our bravest house," said Tom, jabbing his finger into the air for emphasis. "I shall recommend it to Minerva."

"Wouldn't it break the rules?" asked Elizabeth.

"I'm certain Minerva's rules allow duplicity," said Draupadi.

They all nodded agreement.

They all also agreed that the gang behind it was brilliant in both Potions and clandestine operations. Hermione was thinking that such brilliant people might find a cure for her affliction. Was that why she was here? The more she thought about it, the more reasonable it seemed. She hadn't noticed it at the time because it was an absence, but the Potions class had proceeded without a hitch no accidents, no botched concoctions, just quiet competence. She had landed among one of the most talented generations in centuries where Tom Riddle was merely above average. She brightened. Feeding on their auras would be incredible.

The next day, after classes were over, the four girls were having tea and comparing notes when they heard a commotion. They looked up to see Tom swaggering in, wearing an eye patch and earrings, and singing lustily

Oh, I'm a jolly good smuggler

As smug as he can be.

So, bring me all your potions

I'll sell them for a fee.

"That should lure the potion gang out into the open," said Draupadi.

"Cleverly done," said Elizabeth.

"Subtle," said Mary. "They'll never suspect we're on to them."

"Why didn't we think of that?" Hermione asked the other girls.

Tom plunked himself down at their table. "A fifteen year-old witch on a hairy man's chest. Yo, ho, ho, and a bottle of rum."

"It'll take more than one bottle," said Draupadi.

An elf appeared. "Did you wish a rum, sir?"

A gilded age, thought Hermione.

Tom managed a stage whisper out of the side of his mouth. "Avast, me heartie, a weak tea will do, but bring it in a flagon. Gotta keep up appearances."

The girls were not happy. His little drama had scuttled any chance of a sting operation. He admitted he had ruined the chance for a group of students to risk life and limb by taking on a gang of professional criminals. Hermione's brighter side was wondering if there was more to Tom than met the eye.

Hermione's darker side was wondering if there was more to Tom than met the eye. Late night searches for an illicit potion lab would have given her a perfect excuse to roam the halls and sample the emotional passion of couples. He hadn't deliberately thrown a spanner into her plans, had he? She hadn't given herself away, had she? Well, she would just have to hunt unencumbered by pretense.

She soon discovered the reason for Draupadi's indifference to Tom. There was a Hufflepuff, a humorless soul, but one with family connections and business plans. He factored everything through the lens of his own advancement, but Hermione was certain he wanted to advance with Draupadi.

That Friday night after dinner, fantasies were racing through Hermione's mind when she followed the pair as they wandered outside. What would he do? What has he already done? Has he already unbuttoned her blouse? Before she could spy on his doing so? That inconsiderate cad. She could see his fumbling fingers, hear Draupadi's mild protests. But Draupadi would see his shining eyes, eyes eager to feast on her, eyes that would say she was beautiful, eyes that she had dreamed about, eyes only for her, and she would let those eyes see what they wanted and her excitement as her blouse opened and her breath as his lips grazed exposed skin and her confusion as his lips moved over silk until she sighed and ran her fingers through his hair and pressed into him and the wild feeling of something new and wonderful and dangerous.

Hermione came out of her reverie long enough to realize she wanted to position herself to see Draupadi's face as she felt hands roaming over her, but an appraisal of Draupadi shattered this prospect of refined feeding. That feisty lady was going to skip down to the shore, kick off her shoes, and wade in the water. Her beau would glimpse her legs up to her knees as she stepped gingerly through the ripples, rippling higher and higher as she went deeper and deeper, her skirt higher and higher, returning to shallow water, her skirt not lowering, her legs dancing, rippling with the rhythm, golden skin in the moonlight, twirling, her skirt twirling, the drops of water flashing, legs flashing, flexing, Draupadi flashing, shape of her legs, roundness, smoothness, firmness, Draupadi caught in her dance, moving, teasing, rippling, promising.

Draupadi would be the very devil. She would come out of the lake and haul the boy behind the bushes and pull him down to the soft grass. Her leg would drape across him, her leg with the drops of water, glistening in the starry night, smooth as he had imagined. All of her pressed against him. Legs, breasts, warm breath, warm Draupadi. He wouldn't have a chance. Arousal. Her thigh on him. Moving. All of Draupadi moving. The boy under her no longer resisting anything. Her hand snaking down. Gripping him. Stroking him. He couldn't stop her. Couldn't get away. Not wanting her to stop. Irresistible. Spurring in his trousers. Draupadi's eyes gleaming. Triumph.

Hermione's nostrils flared. She would watch.

"I can't figure it out," said a voice behind Hermione. "I thought you were looking for secret chambers, but Draupadi and her boyfriend aren't going to lead you to them."

"You've been following me," said Hermione, turning to face Tom.

"Whatever you're doing, you're dragging me into it," said Tom.

"How is that, pray tell?"

"Easy," said Tom. "Minerva has noticed you skulking about, and she's concluded that you and I are pulling a double bluff. After my smuggler's performance, no one would believe we'd be stupid enough to search for a secret potion lab. Hence, that's what you must be doing, and I, of course, am your accomplice."

"Well, you're not, so you can just leave," said Hermione.

"Would you rather watch another couple than be with me?" asked Tom.

"It's not that simple," said Hermione.

Tom was about to ask what she could possibly get out of watching a pair snogging when the moon came out and shone on Hermione's face. He gasped as he saw the hunger. He stepped back when he saw the yellow eyes.

"I've never met a vampire before," he said. "Did you intend to bite them?"

"I don't bite," she said. "I need their emotions."

"A vampire," said Tom. "What'd you become a vampire for?"

"It was an accident."

"Are you really immortal, except for accidents?" asked Tom with a feverish gleam in his eye. "Is that why you became a vampire?"

"I told you it was an accident. I didn't want to. I don't want immortality."

Tom was giving her a funny look.

As Hermione wondered what was going through Tom's mind, he appeared to recover. The feverish gleam left his eyes and was replaced by another funny look. It might have been affection except Hermione wasn't familiar with that look.

He took her hand. "What kind of emotion?"

"I think it has to be the emotion of others. I'm a parasite. Vampires are parasites." She took a breath. "Go ahead, run away in disgust."

"Could you generate your own emotion?" he asked. "Could someone spark your emotions?"

"I don't know."

He was still holding her hand. She wasn't letting go. He told her that her hunger was still visible, but it was no longer desperate. She said she felt calmer. He asked if Ravenclaw Tower had a good view of the lake in moonlight, if it had comfortable couches and a warm fire, if she could sneak him in if he put on a glamour. He had always envied the Ravenclaws for their view of the world.

"I wondered why you were making nice to me," she said.

"You found me out," he replied, "but it may not matter since you will want to show off your magnificent view and enjoy my frustrated envy."

Well, now that he mentioned it, that was tempting, in fact, irresistible. And thus it was that Hermione snuck Tom into Ravenclaw Towers, plied him with hot cider, and, in exchange, insisted he act like a boyfriend and listen to her as she sat beside him on the couch and prattled on about everything that had happened to her last week, all the things she had been dying to tell someone, till at last she had unburdened herself and she sat quietly holding his hand into the wee hours, whereupon he had to sneak back to the dungeons while she retired, feeling at peace with the world and dreaming of dancing for him in the rain.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 3

No man should carve runes/Unless he can read them well – Egil's Saga

Chapter 3

The three were walking toward the village with Tom waxing enthusiastic about a ritual he wanted to perform, Minerva protesting that it was a dark and dangerous rite, and Hermione telling Tom he should be careful. As they entered the village, three thugs barred their way.

"Pretty girls," said the first.

"My, don't they look prim and proper," said the second.

"We'll take the starch out of them," said the third.

"I'll run and get the dark chocolates," said Tom, disappearing into a nearby alley.

"Tom, you weasel!" shouted Minerva, but then she and Hermione were too busy with counter spells to think about their cowardly companion.

Minerva and Hermione were backing up and putting up a desperate defense when Tom appeared behind the three thugs and quickly dispatched them.

Now. I could do it now, thought Hermione. I could save the world. I could get away with it. Everyone will think he went down in the scuffle.

Tom looked at Hermione, her wand poised to strike at him. He nodded, and his thoughts came through clear. *Save the world?*

Minerva interrupted. "Tom, you weasel." She was giving him an admiring look.

Back off, you old hag, thought Hermione.

"You've redeemed yourself, Tom," said Minerva.

"Redeemed?" asked Tom. "I don't want redemption. I'll live with what I am."

"You don't mean that, Tom. Nobody can do that. The weight is too much."

Tom smiled. "Should I travel to Jerusalem? Or London? Or merely dunk myself in the lake?"

"You mock what you should receive graciously," said Minerva.

Hermione took his hand, saying, "You promised me dark chocolates," thinking, *I'll save you. Let me in. I will dispel your burden.*

"Dark chocolates or not," said Minerva. "Those ruffians shouldn't have dared to appear so openly. Something's going wrong."

This rest of the weekend went quietly enough, and Monday began with Potions, but Tom's and the class's usual skill seemed to desert them.

"It's the week before the Holidays," the instructor said by way of explanation.

When no one was looking, Tom passed his hand over the cauldron. Hermione felt a chill as something forbidden slipped in. Tom, looking around to check if anyone had seen him, stirred the solution as it coalesced into its proper form. The potion by Tom and Hermione was the only successful one. Later, in the hallway, she could no longer contain herself.

"You juiced it up."

"Is that an Americanism or a bad pun?" asked Tom.

She was thinking that his use of the Dark Forces would grow and grow until he was dependent on them and then they would consume him. She noticed they were alone. She braced herself for the ultimate act. It was up to her to save innocent lives by taking one. She brought her wand up for an unforgiveable, but found herself staring into a pair of knowing eyes.

"For some reason, you occasionally consider killing me," said Tom, "but you're afraid that if you do so, your soul will fracture and you will leave part of yourself in this world."

Hermione was backing away.

"This world? What does that mean?" asked Tom. "Splitting one's soul? An interesting concept."

Hermione was petrified. What had she done? What would he do?

"We can explore all that later," said Tom. "If we don't hurry, we'll miss a Transfigurations class, and Minerva *will* kill me."

Later? Explore? We? wondered Hermione as Tom took her hand and they dashed to the second floor.

Later in Transfigurations, after the instructor's initial demonstration and while the other students sat baffled, Hermione watched as Tom folded a piece of paper, waved his wand over it, and turned it into a butterfly. It flew around the room to everyone's delight before landing back on his desk. Tom evinced sadness as his wand turned it back into folded paper as the assignment required.

"Can't have too many beautiful butterflies in the world," he said looking at her.

This man is terrifying, thought Hermione. She took a deep breath. *I'm wet.*

When the class had ended, the hunger in her grabbed him and pulled him to a remote alcove where she plastered herself against him. He told her she was lovely. Her lips plundered his. Her tongue probed for his. Fire ran through her. She came up for air. He told her she was sweet. She clung to him.

"What are you doing for the Holidays?" he asked.

"Anything," she said.

He nodded. He liked that answer. "Want to stay with me at the Grim Old Place?"

"Yes."

That Saturday, during the train ride, he assured her that he was welcome there and that, as his guest, she would be welcome too, although she should brace herself for Walburga who was quite the character. There was no way out of introducing her to Walburga, and she would have to be taken in stride. Late that evening, Hermione entered the bastion of pureblood privilege, ready for whatever reception she might receive. Everyone was asleep except for the keeper-of-purity who was keeping vigil.

"Filth. Filth. I can smell her from here."

Tom put his arm around Hermione's shoulder. "She's a vampire. She's staying with me."

"She's more than that. Tom, what have you done?"

"Pleased to meet you," said Hermione. "You have a lovely home."

"Harrumph," went Walburga.

"Wasn't she fun?" asked Tom as they climbed the steps to his room.

"Not as much fun as I'm going to be," answered Hermione.

And it was only a little while later that Tom was deep inside his vampire, a vampire not caring whether or not he was inexperienced or clumsy, only caring that he was her Tom, a vampire crying out his name.

Later that night, Hermione sat bolt upright as she sensed the familiar icy fingers reaching for her. Tom, too, sat upright. His wand illuminated the room before he waved it and sleepily said something like, "Be gone." He paused, only half awake, and in the glow of his wand, it struck Hermione that the room was cozy, not grim at all. Tom flopped back down, followed by Hermione who cuddled around him. For the first time in a long time, she felt as though her heart was pumping real, warm blood.

She woke the next morning, sprawled across her lover. She kissed him awake, almost feeling guilty about it until he rolled over on top of her. Her legs opened, and Tom took in all the little noises of Hermione Granger. Later, as they were descending to the kitchen, Hermione was deciding she had spoken the truth last night. It was a lovely home, quaint but lovely.

When they reached the kitchen, Walburga and two wizards had finished their breakfasts. Tom introduced them as Jack and Griswold who were brothers.

"All hail Tom," said the two wizards, rising their tea cups.

Hermione looked puzzled.

"Hasn't he told you?" asked the two wizards.

They all agreed it was better if she knew. Tom had concocted a pain-killing potion and the two brothers were selling it to the non-wizards. They regarded it as a temporary

windfall because of the war, and they were saving and investing the fabulous profits. They had heard that Hermione was smart. Perhaps she could help them invest wisely. They were discreet, waiting until Tom was back at school before engaging in risky transactions with the non-wizards. Tom remarked that Minerva was suspicious despite the precautions.

"What a witch," said the two brothers.

"You profit from other peoples' pain?" asked Hermione.

"We profit from relieving their pain," said Jack.

"Others profit from causing them pain," said Griswold.

Since Tom was secretly wealthy, he and Hermione could enjoy the delights of London if they were careful. They strolled through the streets full of Holiday preparations and crowds although they hardly noticed any of it. They returned that evening to find the two brothers in a strange humor.

"Potions today were a bust," said Griswold.

Jack raised his hands in mock protest. "It wasn't us, I swear. It wasn't too much Holiday cheer."

"It's her," said Walburga.

Jack cocked his head at Hermione. "Hmmm."

"It's the two of them," said Griswold, "too much sexual energy. I wouldn't have believed it possible."

"Are you daft, man?" asked Jack. "Look at that lovely vision before you."

"Do you two always carry on so?" asked Hermione.

"It's her, you dunderheads," screeched Walburga, storming out of the room.

Tom offered to assist with the potions, but Hermione, remembering his use of Dark Forces, protested, and to her surprise, the two brothers supported her, declaring it was better to ride out the current rough patch by giving over to the season's celebration. Later, Hermione wondered if Walburga was correct and she was disruptive, but Tom replied that Walburga regularly confused upsetting her with upsetting the universe.

The no-time, other-world existence in London continued until no time had them boarding the train back to the other world. But this trip, the train stalled, and the students arrived late and disgruntled. The next day, several stairways stuck in mid transit, and people had to be rescued.

Tom, standing by a wall that was crumbling, looked around and said, "It's like our world can't hold it together anymore. I don't know why. Nobody can do anything. If we make enough money from the pain-killing potion, we might be able to set things right, but we don't know how much longer that business can thrive."

"The war will last two more years," said Hermione, wanting to help Tom, "but there will be a long period of slow recovery and more wars after that."

She stuck her fist in her mouth. *Omigod, what have I done?* She saw realization dawn on Tom.

"How do you know that?" Her strangeness fell into place. "You're from the future, aren't you?"

Hermione nodded.

"Are you trying to change things? You know that can't be done. You'll crack our world. It'll only turn out for the worse. Look what's happening around you. Why didn't you heed all the warnings?"

"There were no warnings," said Hermione.

"You're kidding me. No one told you. That's not possible," he said.

He looked at her. "You're telling me the truth. No one warned you. What kind of shoddy education did you get?"

Tom had a moment of insight. "The future is terrible, isn't it?"

Hermione was silent, trying to find a way to tell her Tom why it was terrible.

"Yes, it must be, otherwise why would you take such a risk, such a personal risk, even not knowing the damage you would cause." Tom paused. "What has the school come to? What has wizard kind come to? Someone needs to rescue us from what's going to happen. How long would it take? We dare not jump to the future. How long would one have to live to set things right?"

"Tom, don't talk like that."

"What, not try? Not try to do everything I can? I thought more of you than that, Hermione."

He looked into the distance. "What must I become?"

"Tom, please, don't think like that. Desperate solutions only make things worse."

"Like you did?" asked Tom. "But I'm not going to time travel. I'm going to do it naturally. No harm will come."

She heard the castle clock fall, banging and clattering to the stone floor. She saw an orange streak in the clear, blue sky.

"I think I know how this thing works," said Tom, placing the chain around her neck and twirling the mechanism, "Have faith, my love. Whatever it takes, I'll be there for you."

Hermione was thinking "Wait, aren't you going to kiss me goodbye," but the earth under her feet rumbled, and before she could get it out, she was in another place.

Tom regarded the now empty space before him.

Hermione looked around at her flat. Was it the right flat? Was it the right time and place? She wandered around the places she knew. She visited her friends and checked and rechecked the date. All was the same as when she had left it.

A year later, Hermione was looking at a display of the dark chocolates that Tom had bought her for a distant Christmas when she thought she caught a glimpse of him walking past outside the shop. She dashed into the street and ran through the crowd. She searched until everyone had gone home and the stores had closed and everything was empty.

END