

An Unsurpassable Distance

by JackieJLH

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body." ~Elizabeth Stone

'What time is Hermione leaving?' John asks as he grabs a piece of toast and shrugs his coat onto his shoulders.

'She said they're expecting her around nine tonight.'

'You'll talk to her before then?'

I nod, and he smiles and kisses me goodbye. Normally, we would leave together, but it's our daughter's last day at home and I want to spend it with her. John took the day off yesterday for the same purpose.

I hear the car door close and the engine start, and go back to my breakfast. Only a few moments later, I hear doors opening upstairs, and then footsteps. The kitchen door swings open to reveal my daughter, her wand and an open book balanced in one hand. This is the first time she's been able to use magic at home since we bought her that wand, and I can only assume that her excitement over that fact is the reason it never seems to leave her hand these days.

'Morning, Mum,' she says through a yawn. After pouring herself a cup of tea, she sinks into the seat opposite mine and slathers jam onto a piece of toast. A flick of her wand has her book hovering beside her plate, and she focuses her attention on it, blinking sleepily.

'You look exhausted. Didn't you sleep well?'

Hermione shakes her head, her eyes never leaving the page before her. 'No, only about an hour. I was up late last night studying and wanted to get my things packed before going to bed. And then I just wasn't that tired, so I got up and showered this morning and went back to studying.'

The book seems to have no title on the cover, something that I find to be more than a bit disconcerting. It's the fourth such book I've seen in as many days. Even though school is out for nearly another two months, Hermione has done nothing but study since she came home.

Frowning, I reach out and grab the book, closing it and placing it on the table. 'You'll have plenty of time to study at the Weasleys', I think. How about paying attention to your mum for a change, hmm?'

'Sorry.' She smiles weakly and takes a sip of her tea, looking like she wants nothing more than to go back to reading. 'We'll just be really busy, with the wedding and all.... I want to make sure I'm prepared.'

'With as much as you've been reading, you could probably teach your classes. Passing them shouldn't be a problem,' I point out, smirking. 'Hermione... your father and I discussed it last night, and... well, we think maybe it would be a good idea for you to come home after the wedding.'

She sits silently for a moment, and I can almost hear the protests echoing inside her mind, but outwardly she remains composed. Finally, she says, 'Mum, I really wish I could, but things are hard for Ron right now, you know? One of his brothers isn't getting along with the family, and things are tense.... And Harry is having trouble in school, I'm going to be helping him this summer, and we promised him we'd go with him to the town where he was born; he's always wanted to go. There're just too many things that we need to do, and it will be easier if I stay with the Weasleys while we do it. I thought you and Dad were all right with that.'

'I know you think they need you, Hermione, but they've managed to get through two weeks without you, and I'm sure they can handle the rest of the summer just fine. You're not their mother, you know.'

'No,' she says frostily, 'I'm their friend. I promised them I would be there. They're important to me.'

'We're your *family*,' I remind her as calmly as I can. 'We should mean more to you.'

'You do, Mum, but Harry and Ron are like my family too. And right now, they need me more.'

'I'm sorry, but I disagree. Your father and I really think...'

'I know, I know, but you and Dad don't get to decide what I should or shouldn't do. I'm not a child anymore.'

'I know.' I shake my head. 'You've grown up, and we missed it. We've barely seen you for years, Hermione. Do you know what it's like to see the little girl who used to love spending time with us go away to school and come back a woman who wants nothing to do with us?'

'I never said I didn't want anything to do with you,' she says softly. 'I just... I can't explain, but they need me right now, Mum.'

'They always do.'

Sighing, she picks up her wand from where it lies beside her plate and, with only a single wave, her half of the table is cleared. I watch silently, glaring at the piece of wood in her hand.

'It's just a wand, Mum. Nothing to be afraid of,' she says with a giggle, misinterpreting my look, and offers it to me to examine. When she was little, she could practically read my thoughts just by looking at my face. I don't remember when she stopped being able to do that.

Reaching out, I take it from her and run my fingers over the carved designs on the handle. 'I'm not afraid of it,' I tell her. 'I hate it.'

She looks confused and stretches out her hand to take it back, but I pull it closer to me and stand, walking over to the window and turning my face away from her.

'Do you remember the day we bought you this wand?' I ask, and I see her reflection in the glass nod.

'Of course I do.'

'Do you remember how scared you were that you wouldn't fit in with the other kids? From the minute we got home from Diagon Alley, you locked yourself away in your room and read your schoolbooks. We barely saw you at all for the rest of the summer.'

She laughs, smiling at the memory. 'It was all just so exciting.'

'You wrote to us every day for weeks that first year. We were so proud of you, making your way in this strange world. I've always thought that took so much more courage than I could ever be capable of, and you excelled at it. But then the letters only came when something particularly exciting happened, and then they nearly stopped altogether. Every time you came home you spent more and more time studying, or spent more of your summer at the Weasleys'. You haven't even come home for Christmas since you were twelve.... You live in this magical world, with wands and ghosts and potions, and your father and I have never been a part of it. We *can't* be a part of it, and....'

I can't go on, I can't even speak; all I can do is cry. I've lost my little girl, and it only hurts more to realise that neither of us is really to blame. It just... happened. Things like that shouldn't just happen.

'Oh, Mum,' Hermione whispers, and I can hear tears in her voice. Suddenly her arms are around me, and I realize it's the first time she's hugged me this way in years.

After a moment, I pull away and wipe the tears off my face. 'Well, if you're leaving tonight, that leaves the whole day free. I know it won't be as exciting as any of your magical things, but would you like to go to town with me? We can do some shopping, or have lunch at that restaurant you love. We can even stop off at that bookstore on Fourth Street, if you want, though I have to insist we limit that particular visit to an hour or we won't get to anything else.'

Grinning and sniffing quietly, she nods. 'I just need to get dressed and I'll be ready.'

'I still need to shower and dress, so take your...' I start to say, but I'm interrupted by a knock at the door.

'I'll get it. You go get ready to leave,' Hermione offers, brushing her hair out of her face as she hurries out of the room. It's not until I start to clear my dishes from the table that I hear her shout excitedly, 'Ron! Harry!'

Setting the plate and cup down, and dreading finding out what's going on, I walk into the sitting room, wishing I was wearing something besides one of John's old, oversized t-shirts.

As I open the door, I see my daughter hugging her two best friends and giving them kisses on their cheeks, despite the way they both blush a violent shade of red when she does.

'What are you two doing here?' she exclaims, and she looks more excited to see them after only being separated for two weeks than she did to see her father and I after nearly a year apart.

'We just left the Dursleys'...I went to pick him up; didn't want to risk getting his wand taken away over using magic a month too soon...and we figured we'd come here first and help you with your things,' the Weasley boy answers, his eyes never leaving hers. It occurs to me that he may be her boyfriend, and then I realize that I have no idea if my daughter has ever had a boyfriend at all.

'I thought I wasn't supposed to come to the Burrow until tonight?' She glances guilty back at the kitchen door and looks surprised to see me standing there. 'I kind of have plans with my mum today,' she finishes.

'Oh,' the boys say in unison. They both look suddenly uncomfortable, and Ron's eyes leave Hermione's face for the first time since he arrived, focusing on the floor instead.

'No problem. We'll see you tonight, then. Sorry to show up without warning, Mrs Granger,' Harry says quickly, nudging Ron with his elbow.

'Yeah, sorry. See you tonight, Hermione.'

'Bye,' my daughter says softly, and she sounds so sad that it almost breaks my heart.

'Go,' I say before I let myself think about it too much. 'Go with your friends.'

'Really?' Her face lights up, and now my heart feels like it is breaking. I never thought I'd see the day when my daughter's happiness would hurt me so much.

'They came all this way... It would be a shame if they went to all that trouble for nothing.' Refusing to let myself cry in front of Hermione's friends, I look down at her wand, which is still clutched in my hand, and offer it to her, resisting the urge to snap it in two as she takes it from me.

'Thanks, Mum!' she nearly shouts, and then says, 'I'll be right back, I just need to change into my robes and grab my things,' to her friends before darting up the stairs.

Ron and Harry stand in the doorway, casting awkward glances my way, and I know I should invite them in, at the very least, but I can't bring myself to do more than stand there, my arms folded across my chest. These boys know my daughter better than I ever will, and mean the world to her, and I can't help but hate them for it.

It's only a few minutes before Hermione runs back down the stairs, her trunk gliding along behind her and Crookshanks racing her to the bottom step. Ron, looking relieved to have something to do with his hands, grabs the handle of the trunk.

'You're sure this is all right with you, Mum?' Hermione asks, her eyes pleading with me not to change my mind.

'Yes, I'm sure.' I'm not, though, not really. Part of me thinks that this is one of the stupidest things I've ever done, second only to letting her go away to Hogwarts to begin with. 'Maybe you can come home for Christmas this year, though?'

She sighs softly and only says, 'We'll see. If I can get away, then I will, I promise.' Running her hand through her hair, she looks around as if to make sure she's not forgetting anything and then nods to herself before looking back to me. 'Well, say goodbye to Dad for me, and tell him I'll write to him as soon as I can,' she says, hugging me quickly before turning to scoop Crookshanks up off the floor.

Staring at the cat for a moment, she frowns and turns around. 'Mum, do you think... Well, Crookshanks is getting a bit old, you know,' she says, and if I didn't know better, I would swear the cat is shooting her a dirty look. 'I don't like moving him around so much, and he likes it here... And I know you and Dad like *him*. Do you think maybe you could keep him here, at least for now?'

'Of course he can stay here,' I answer, smiling weakly. 'He's part of the family, right?'

Hermione nods, holding Crookshanks tightly to her chest for a moment before settling him into my arms. Giving him one final scratch on the head, she hugs me one more time before grabbing Harry's arm and holding up her wand.

'Bye, Mum!' she says cheerfully, and then with a loud cracking noise, the three of them disappear.

Crookshanks twists around in my arms to look at me questioningly, and I pet his head, sinking onto the couch and settling him on my lap. 'I know,' I whisper. 'I'll miss her too.'

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