

Heat Wave

by StormySkize

London is in the middle of a heat wave. Hermione Granger and Remus Lupin are both just trying to find a way to cool off. Neither of them anticipated just how that would happen.

One

Chapter 1 of 4

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One

Hermione Granger swept a hand across her desk, gathering a number of scattered parchments into an untidy stack. She shoved them into her desk drawer, uncharacteristically unconcerned about bent corners or creases. A large box crammed with rusty buckets, torn galoshes, dented soup tins, and flattened hub caps sat next to her desk. She gave the box a kick as she tried to push it under the desk. The heavy box refused to budge, so she settled for transfiguring a large sheaf of blank parchment into a dust cover and throwing that over the top of the box to hide the contents.

Sweat beaded her upper lip and her forehead. Her hair clung damply to her neck and cheeks. She could feel her robes sticking to her sweaty back. As she bent down to tuck the dust cover over the box, she sniffed at her armpit, and then she wrinkled her nose. She cast a quick cleansing charm and hoped for the best.

It was five o'clock on a Friday afternoon; it was July; and it was the hottest day London had seen in more than thirty years.

And the Ministry of Magic had never heard of air conditioning.

She'd been excited when she'd been offered a job at the Ministry after the war. She'd scored top marks on all her N.E.W.T.s in spite of the fact that she'd spent much of her seventh year searching out and destroying Voldemort's Horcruxes with Harry and Ron. Her scores in Transfiguration and Charms had been especially high. She'd been assured those high marks were the reason she'd been sought out to work at the Ministry.

The reality of her job turned out to be a lot different than what she'd expected.

Because of the 'trouble' (as the Ministry of Magic was wont to understate) at the World Cup in 1994, and the subsequent 'incidents' (another Ministry understatement) that led to the wizarding world very nearly being destroyed, the World Cup had been cancelled in 1998.

When Harry finally ended Voldemort's reign of terror on Halloween night in 1999, the Ministry realised that something needed to be done to lift the spirits of the war weary citizens.

After listening to hundreds of suggestions, the Ministry decided that the best thing they could do to make every Quidditch-mad witch and wizard happy was bring back the World Cup.

The idea was an instant success, and on New Year's Day, Rufus Scrimgeour announced that the World Cup would take place in August of 2002. There was a roar of

protest when the date was announced. August of 2002? That was more than two-and-a-half years away! Surely the Ministry could arrange things quicker than that!

After consulting with both Q.U.A.B.B.L.E. and the International Association of Quidditch, Rufus Scrimgeour called a press conference to announce that the date for the Quidditch World Cup had been moved up to August of 2000. He made the announcement on the first of February, which meant the Ministry would have just six months to organise the event. Corbett Cornfoot, the head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, had complained bitterly. It had taken more than a year to prepare for the World Cup in 1994, and the wizarding world hadn't had its resources stretched thin by a war then. How were they going to get everything done in just six months?

Mordecai Midgen, head of the Department of Magical Transportation also complained. In 1994, over two hundred Portkeys had been created to get people to the site of the World Cup. Even more would be needed this time. Creating Portkeys was a complicated and time-consuming process. How would they ever get it done?

Scrimgeour had assured Midgen that he would have all the help he needed, and then he had assigned Hermione to the Portkey Office.

Within hours after Scrimgeour made the announcement about the World Cup, Hermione had been inundated with requests for Portkeys. She'd been working twelve hour days for months trying to process the flood of applications. Now, the World Cup was just two weeks away, and she still had at least twenty-five Portkeys to create and deliver.

But Monday was Harry's birthday, and there was a big party planned at Order headquarters on Saturday night to celebrate. Ginny and her parents were staying at Grimmauld Place tonight so that they could get an early start on the cooking and decorating tomorrow morning. She'd promised to spend the night there, as well.

As she locked her office door, she silently vowed to come in even earlier on Monday morning to make up for not staying late tonight.

She turned toward the lifts that would take her to Atrium.

"Leaving early, Miss Granger?"

Hermione stiffened slightly and turned to face her immediate supervisor, Matilda Hopkirk.

"It's after five o'clock on Friday afternoon, Miss Hopkirk. I'm hardly leaving early. Besides, I've already worked more than sixty hours this week, including five hours last Sunday."

"When you were foisted upon me, Miss Granger, I wasn't informed that you were a clock-watcher," the older witch sniffed.

Hermione held on to her temper with some difficulty. "I'm *not* a clock-watcher ..."

"The World Cup is just two weeks away, and those Portkeys won't create themselves, you know," Hopkirk said.

"I'm well aware of the time constraints this office is under," Hermione said. "In addition, as I've produced more than one-hundred-and-ninety Portkeys in the last five-and-a-half months, I know exactly how difficult it is to create them."

"Then I am at a loss to understand why you would be leaving so early," Hopkirk said. "Surely, you could manage one or two more this evening."

"I'm sure I could," Hermione said, her patience at an end. "I'm also sure that I wouldn't have to work sixty hours a week if I had some help! I was promised that another person would be hired to help with the Portkeys needed for the World Cup, yet months have gone by, and I'm still working alone."

"My budget is stretched quite thin," Hopkirk said.

"I happen to know that the budget for this department has a surplus."

"And how would you know that?" Hopkirk asked.

"Ministry finances are a matter of public record."

"I expect there will be additional expenses soon. There are still a number of Portkeys to be produced, you know."

"Boxes full of old Muggle junk are hardly expensive," Hermione said. "Your reluctance to bring in additional personnel wouldn't have anything to do with your end-of-year bonus, would it?" Hermione asked archly. "I believe that your bonus is a percentage of any surplus in your budget."

"The Ministry rewards my hard work," Hopkirk said with a smirk that had Hermione wondering if Matilda Hopkirk was related to Severus Snape.

"Your hard work? How many Portkeys have you created in the last five months?"

"My administrative duties ..."

"End at five o'clock every night!" Hermione shouted. "I've yet to see you stay late or come in early. And I've yet to see a Knut's worth of overtime pay in my pocket!"

"You're on salary, as you very well know, Miss Granger. We're not required to pay you overtime. In return, your packet is not docked when you're late for work or when you abuse our generosity and call in 'sick'," she sneered.

"I've been working here for more than eight months, and I've only called in sick once. I've been working sixty hours a week, or more, for six of those eight months. One sick day certainly doesn't equal the overtime I've put in."

"I should have known that someone like you would react this way to a bit of constructive criticism," Hopkirk said.

"What do you mean, 'someone like me'?" Hermione asked, her eyes narrowing in anger.

"Being a *war hero* doesn't change what you *are*," Hopkirk said through thinned lips.

"What I am is a very powerful witch, Miss Hopkirk," Hermione said in a deceptively quiet voice. "You'd do well to remember that."

"Are you threatening me?"

"You may interpret my words however you'd like. I don't take kindly to being insulted. As a matter of fact, sometimes my temper gets the best of me," she said as she slid her wand up and down through her fingers.

Hopkirk took a cautious step backward. "How dare you! I'll be speaking with Mordecai Midgen about you, Miss Granger," she said. "And now I suggest you go back in your office and return to work."

"My work is done for today. I'll be here at my usual time on Monday morning," Hermione said.

"Are you disobeying a direct order from your supervisor?" Hopkirk asked. There was a vein throbbing on the side of her head.

"Yes, I am," Hermione replied.

"I'll have your job for this ... this insubordination!"

"By all means, Miss Hopkirk," Hermione said sweetly, "have my job. I quit!"

And with that, Hermione spun on her heel and walked away.

In spite of the tight schedule in all departments of the Ministry, it didn't appear that very many employees were staying late on this particular Friday afternoon. The lifts to the Atrium were packed with sweaty and irritable witches and wizards and judging by the malodorous emanations, not many of them had bothered with cleansing charms as she had.

Once she reached the Atrium, Hermione realised that there was also a long line of people waiting to Floo out. She crossed the crowded Atrium to the visitors' entrance. She was pleasantly surprised to discover that no one else had thought to use it. She stepped into the lift, and a minute later, she stepped out of the broken-down red telephone box and onto the dingy pavement outside the Ministry.

She ducked into the nearest alley and Apparated to the empty lot that served as the Apparition area for Order headquarters. A two-minute walk later, and she was opening the door to number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

Once she was inside, Hermione went down to the kitchen. She was sure she'd find Molly and Ginny there already beginning to prepare the food for the Harry's party. Instead she found a note.

We've gone to the market. Arthur says the Ministry was like an oven today. Have a cool bath and relax for a while. I've put a chilled bottle of wine under a Stasis Charm. Enjoy!

Molly

Hermione was only too happy to follow Molly's suggestion. She was already unbuttoning her robes as she climbed the stairs. By the time she entered the bedroom that she and Ginny shared when they stayed here, she had shrugged out of her robes, unbuttoned her blouse, and unhooked her bra. It only took her another minute to kick off her shoes, peel off her socks, and strip off the rest of her sweat-soaked clothing. She took a minute at the dressing table to pin up her hair, and then she slipped on a light cotton dressing gown, grabbed a book and her wand, and headed toward the bathroom.

A long soak, a sappy romance novel, and a cool glass of wine were just what she needed after her unpleasant confrontation with her former boss!

Hermione opened the bathroom door and stepped inside, closing the door behind her.

She was already untying the belt of her dressing gown when she heard a throat clear behind her.

She whirled, her wand at the ready and a hex on her lips, to find Remus Lupin standing, quite naked, with one foot in the tub and the other on the floor.

"*Expelliarmus*," Remus said, and Hermione's wand flew out of her hand. Remus plucked it out of the air as it flew towards him.

"Remus!" Hermione exclaimed, "I nearly hexed you! What are you doing here?"

She kept her eyes on his face, not letting them stray any lower.

"Sorry about the Disarming Spell," Remus said as he stepped back out of the tub and approached Hermione. He handed her wand back to her. "But I knew you didn't realise I was here. I'm also well aware of how quick your reactions are."

He was smiling, but made no move to reach for a towel or for his own dressing gown, which Hermione could now see was hanging on the back of the bathroom door.

"I learned during the war to hex first and ask questions later," Hermione said.

"Didn't we all?" Remus replied.

"You still haven't said what you're doing here," Hermione said.

"I'd say I was about to do the same thing you were enjoy a cool bath and a glass of wine. I read the note Molly left in the kitchen and assumed it was meant for me. I'll wager you did the same."

He was still standing there naked, apparently not at all uncomfortable with his state of undress.

"I did," Hermione confirmed. "I had a brutal day."

"Me, too. Mad-eye is convinced that there will be an attack by renegade Death Eaters at the World Cup. We spent hours practising locator spells and revealing spells. If I hear him say the words, 'constant vigilance' one more time, I may hex him myself."

Hermione chuckled. "Well, I don't have to worry about my boss anymore; I quit my job today."

"You did? Why?" Remus asked.

"It's a long story," Hermione said. "I'd better just let you take your bath." She glanced longingly toward the large tub filled with cool water.

"We could share the tub," Remus suggested. "It's certainly big enough for two."

Hermione only hesitated about two seconds. Then she untied the belt of her dressing gown and dropped it to the floor.

"Last one in has to pour the wine," she said as she gave Remus a slight shove in the chest and brushed past him to step into the tub.

Remus chuckled and followed her. Hermione stepped into the tepid water and sank down into its cooling depths gratefully. She leaned her head back against the marble tiles and closed her eyes.

"Molly must've charmed the tub," she said. "It feels as big as a swimming pool. And the water is scented with jasmine and elder flowers." She took a sniff. "There's something else, too, but I'm not sure what it is. I know I've smelled it before, but I can't remember where. I'll have to ask Molly."

"The herbal water is my doing, actually," Remus said as he climbed into the tub and settled back against the opposite side. "The other scents are hops and catnip."

Hermione smiled. "That's where I've smelled that scent before. I bought Crookshanks a catnip toy. Why did you use those particular herbs?"

"That combination of scents is supposed to relieve stress and promote a peaceful, contemplative mood," he said.

"I remember my parents talking about things like that. They were hippies back in the sixties. That was a few years before they settled down to go to uni and dental school," Hermione said. She opened her eyes and glanced at Remus. "You're not old enough to have been a hippie."

Remus smiled. "Not quite. I was a teenager in the seventies rather than the sixties, but there were still a few free spirits around then."

"What made you become one of them?" Hermione asked.

"I started out looking for something that would help me after my transformations this was long before there was Wolfsbane, of course. Back then, my transformations were truly horrible. For days afterward, I would have sore muscles and cuts and bruises. I'd no sooner heal than it would be the full moon again, and it would start all over. I did some research and found natural remedies that helped a lot."

He sat up and poured the wine into two glasses as he talked. He leaned across the tub and handed one of the glasses to Hermione.

"Along with the natural remedies, I discovered nudism."

"I wondered that you didn't seem ... uncomfortable ... when I walked in on you," Hermione commented.

"Neither did you," Remus said.

"My parents weren't nudists, but they were quite open and relaxed about things. Wizardkind, on the other hand, has always seemed rather staid and straight laced to me," Hermione said. "I can't believe there are wizard nudist colonies."

Remus laughed outright. "You're right. Wizard folk are generally stuffy and prissy, if not downright Victorian. Look at the way Severus dresses. He wears frock coats for Merlin's sake. And Minerva still favours her high-button shoes and gabardine skirts. No, there are no nudist colonies in the wizarding world. When I feel the need to get away, I go to Muggle places. Nudist colonies have become a sanctuary for me."

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked.

Remus took a sip of his wine before he spoke. "When I'm there, no one takes any notice of my scars. No one draws back in fear when I approach. Mothers don't push their children behind them to shield them from my sight. Nor do they tell them that I'll 'get' them if they don't behave."

He paused to take another sip of his wine. "When I'm there, I'm not a werewolf or even a wizard. I'm just a man. I can relax and not have to be constantly on guard. As a matter of fact, I find that I'm generally much more comfortable among Muggles than I've ever been among wizards."

Hermione was quiet as she contemplated Remus's words. She hadn't realised how difficult his life was among those who knew his true nature, but didn't know *him*.

"Have you ever considered just leaving the magical world behind and living as a Muggle?" Hermione asked.

"More times than I can count," Remus replied.

"Why haven't you?"

"I stayed because I felt I had an obligation to Albus Dumbledore. He protected me during my school days, and he allowed me to teach DADA at Hogwarts during a time in my life when I was rather desperate. Did you know that it was Albus who paid for much of the expenses associated with the development of Wolfsbane?"

"He did?"

"Yes. He commissioned the research while I was still a student. It was many years before a viable potion was available, but if not for Albus, it would probably never have been created. He also convinced Severus to learn how to brew it for me. I felt I owed Albus my loyalty and whatever aid I could render to the Order."

"Dumbledore is dead, and the war is over," Hermione said.

"You're right," Remus agreed. "But since the war, I'm more accepted, at least by most people. I have a steady job at the Ministry, and Harry refuses to allow me to pay rent for my room here. The Muggle world isn't going away. If things become intolerable, I can leave here anytime."

They sipped their wine, a comfortable silence between them.

After a few minutes, Hermione spoke again. "Why nudism?"

"I probably could have immersed myself in any Muggle community and found the same anonymity and acceptance; it just happened that the herbalist I went to see was a nudist. She brought me along with her one day, and I found it a fascinating experience."

"Was it hard the first time you saw so many naked women?"

Remus chuckled and gave her a wicked grin, and she blushed slightly as she realised what she'd said.

"I meant was it *difficult* to see naked women and not ... not react. Which, I guess, is what I asked the first time," she said with a grin of her own.

Remus laughed again. "I had a few *tense* moments at the beginning. After a while, though, you don't notice that the people around you are naked."

"I'm not sure I could be as blasé about it as you seem to be," Hermione said.

"We're both naked now. You don't seem embarrassed."

"Well ... I *know* you. Besides, my longing for a cool bath was stronger than my modesty."

"It's actually easier with strangers."

"It is? Why?" Hermione asked as she took another sip of wine.

"Because there are no expectations," Remus replied.

"I'm not sure I understand."

"Let's take a hypothetical situation. There's this former professor you know. Every time you've ever seen him, he's been dressed very neatly and properly. What you don't know is that under the neat and proper attire, he wears a ... a girdle. He's vain and the girdle holds in the slight paunch he's developed. One day, you go to a gathering of nudists and see this former professor, and you discover that the trim, athletic body you thought he had doesn't exist. Instead there's this greying, slightly flabby, middle-aged man with hairy balls and flat feet."

Hermione giggled. "Are you telling me you wear a girdle?"

"I was speaking hypothetically, remember? Besides, I think it's Severus who wears a girdle." Remus grinned as Hermione nearly choked on her wine.

"The point is that with strangers, you don't have those expectations. If you see a man with a paunch or a woman with a fat arse, it's just the way they *are*. You've never

seen them any other way thus, you have no expectations to be dashed. And since everyone is naked, there are no outward trappings of wealth, occupation, or station."

"Okay, I think I understand now. I'm still not sure I wouldn't be embarrassed, though."

"Want to find out?" Remus asked.

"What? How?" Hermione asked.

"There's a get-together tonight. There'll be a buffet, some drinks, maybe a bit of dancing. Want to come with me?"

"Naked?"

Remus grinned. "Well, they won't let you in if you're wearing anything but shoes," he said.

"I don't know ..."

"It'll be an eye-opening experience," Remus said in a slightly wheedling tone.

"I'll just bet," Hermione said dryly.

"The food's good, and because the party is being held at a hotel that caters to American tourists, the place is air conditioned," he said by way of further incentive.

"I don't know the *rules*," Hermione said. "I wouldn't want to embarrass you."

"I'll give you a quick run-down on the way; and you couldn't embarrass me if you tried," he assured her.

"What time?"

"The buffet will open around nine o'clock. We've plenty of time. It's not like you have to worry about what to wear."

Hermione laughed. "Okay."

"Okay? You'll come with me?"

Hermione bit her bottom lip. "Yes," she said before her courage could desert her.

Remus drained his wine glass and stood up suddenly, splashing water all over the floor as he did.

"Comfortable shoes and a towel that's all you need," he said. "Well, you have to wear clothes to get there. There's a changing room."

"A ... a towel?" Hermione said as she stared up at him.

"It's a courtesy thing. And a sanitary thing, as well. You bring a towel to put down on the chair before you sit down."

"I'm amazed to discover that makes perfect sense to me," Hermione said with a chuckle.

Remus laughed again, and Hermione realised that she'd never heard him laugh as often as he had in the brief time they'd been together in the tub.

It was a nice laugh.

"Can you be ready to go in an hour?" Remus asked as he grabbed a towel and began drying himself. "We'll have time for a drink before we eat."

"I'm just going to wash my hair," Hermione said as she pulled out the clip holding her hair atop her head. "It's all sweaty." And with that, she sank all the way down into the tub and let the cool water close over her head.

When she sat up again, Remus had put his dressing gown on. "I'll go get ready and leave a note for Molly so she won't worry that something's happened to us," he said.

"I'll meet you in the drawing room in forty-five minutes," Hermione said as she reached for the bottle of shampoo.

Author's note number one: After I wrote this story, I learned that air conditioning is not as ubiquitous in Great Britain as it is in the United States. As will become evident in the next chapter, I *needed* air conditioning to make this story work. At the end of the story, I will provide what I hope is a reasonable way to reconcile this paradox. I ask for your indulgence until then.

Author's note number two: The moderators of The Petulant Poetess have graciously granted me Validated Author status. I am grateful and humbled by their faith in me. In an effort not to 'blow it', I would like to ask my readers to let me know if they find any spelling, grammar, punctuation, or Canon errors that slip by me or my beta. I hope there won't be any, but if there are, and I am notified, I will correct them as quickly as possible. Thanks so much!

Two

Chapter 2 of 4

Hermione Granger and Remus Lupin are both just trying to find a way to cool off. Neither of them anticipated just how that would happen.

Author's note: This story was written for Potter Place's Winter, 2007 Challenge. However, contrary to a message that I posted on Potter Place, this story was not written in response to prompt #31, but rather in response to prompt #33. Mistakes like this are what happen when middle-aged women try to do things from memory rather than actually look at the list of prompts.

At any rate, this is the prompt I used to inspire this story:

Typical someone-walks-in-on-someone-else-bathing

situation. But instead of the typical reactions (they are mortally embarrassed or they start to shag like bunnies immediately), Remus, in the true spirit of the '68 sexual revolution, tells Hermione that he is sexually liberated, being naked is only natural and that he doesn't mind her seeing him naked at all. So Hermione takes her robe of as well to call his bluff. What happens then? Does she succeed and

fluster him? Do they shag like bunnies anyway? Do they have an in-depth discussion about the pros and cons about the sexual revolution with a take on the impact on the Wizarding World? Your call, though romance would be nice.

I don't know who left this prompt, but I hope that person is pleased by my interpretation.

As always, I am grateful to my beta, JuJuJenn. She never lets the prose get too purple or the dragon dung too deep. Thanks, honey.

I would also like to thank Janine and DawnEB for responding to a question I had about British television.

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Two

When Hermione walked into the drawing room, Remus was already there. He was wearing jeans and an open-collared shirt. He was holding a small bag.

Hermione was also wearing jeans and a light-weight summer blouse. She wore sandals and carried an over-sized purse. She'd pulled her hair back on the top and sides. The curly mass cascaded down her back.

"Perfect," Remus said as he took in her apparel.

"I've put a couple of towels in here," Hermione said as she indicated her purse. "I'll probably need an extra one to sop up my nervous perspiration."

Remus smiled. "You'll be fine."

"I hope so."

"Where's your wand?" Remus asked.

"It's in my purse. I don't relish leaving it behind. Old habits, you know."

"I know. Mine's in my bag, as well. I would have held yours for you if you didn't have room for it. I wouldn't expect you to leave it behind."

"You said you'd tell me the rules," Hermione said.

"I'll tell you while we walk to the Apparition area," Remus said.

"That's only two minutes away!" Hermione protested.

"The 'rules' will only take half that time," Remus assured her as he took her arm and led her toward the front door.

As they walked toward the empty lot that served as the Apparition point for Order headquarters, Remus spoke.

"Each club or colony has its own specific rules, but there are a number of general guidelines that they all have in common. You don't have a camera in your bag, do you?"

"Of course not," Hermione replied.

"I didn't think you did, but I just wanted to make sure. Contrary to popular belief, very few nudists are exhibitionists. All clubs require that you get permission before you take any photographs."

"Not a problem."

"Next, always sit on a towel and never sit on someone else's towel."

"Got it."

"Most clubs frown on public displays of affection, and of course, any kind of outright sexual activity is forbidden."

"That's no different than any other kind of social event, nude or not," Hermione said.

"That's true," Remus replied.

"Anything else?" Hermione asked.

"The rules about jewellery vary from club to club, as well. The one we're going to tonight doesn't allow it."

"I'll put my earrings in my bag," Hermione said lifting a hand to her ear.

Remus laughed. "Your earrings are fine. When I said jewellery, I was referring to items of a more ... personal ... nature."

"It's a good thing I left my navel ring at home, then," Hermione said with a smile.

"Oh, navel rings are okay," Remus said. "They're referring to jewellery in even more personal areas."

"Ouch."

"My thoughts exactly," Remus said. "I'll never understand why a man would want a Prince Albert. It doesn't even bear thinking about!"

"Ditto for nipple rings," Hermione said, and Remus chuckled.

"That's it," Remus said. "If you have any other questions, you can ask me. People are generally indulgent of newcomers and will make allowances."

They had arrived at the Apparition area.

"I can give you the address, and you can Apparate on your own, or we can use Side-along," Remus said.

"I think I'll just ride along with you, if that's all right," Hermione said. "I don't like Apparating to new places on my own if I don't have to."

"Hang on, then," Remus said as he draped an arm across Hermione's shoulders.

Hermione wrapped her arms around Remus's waist and closed her eyes.

When she opened her eyes, they were standing in a deserted alley.

"It's just a short walk from here," Remus said as he stepped away from Hermione. "When we get there, I'll check us in at the door. Once we get inside, I'll go to the men's changing room and you'll go to the ladies'. You'll be given a locker key on an elastic strap. Put your things in the locker and keep the key. You can wear the key like a bracelet, or an anklet, if you prefer. Leave your sandals on, and be sure you have your towel. I'll meet you outside the changing room."

"Can I carry my purse?" Hermione asked.

"If you want to, but most ladies don't bother. Unless you'll need it when you go to the loo, though I believe the ladies' room will have anything you might need."

"I'll leave it then," Hermione said. "If I carry it, I might be tempted to hide behind it."

Remus chuckled. "You'll be fine. We don't have to stay if you find it truly unbearable."

"Was that a nudist joke?" Hermione asked.

Remus looked puzzled for a moment, and then he laughed. "A completely unintended pun, I assure you," he said.

"Just don't leave me alone once we get inside," Hermione said.

"I won't," Remus promised.

After a short walk, they arrived at the front of a mid-class hotel.

Remus held the door open, and Hermione stepped into the lobby.

"The club rents one of the small ballrooms for some of its social gatherings. The hotel provides security to keep peepers out."

"Is that a problem?" Hermione asked as they stepped into the lift.

"Not usually. The club doesn't advertise its events. Only members would know about tonight's gathering, for example. The security is more to stop people who might wander in accidentally."

They rode the lift to the fifth floor. When they left the lift, they approached a small podium set up outside the ballroom doors.

"Remus," said the fully-clothed man standing behind the podium, "we ain't seen you here in a while. How the hell are you?"

"I'm good, Clyde," Remus replied. "How are you? And how's Betty?"

"She's doin' real good. The docs say they caught it in plenty of time. She'll be back here, dancing her heart out, afore you know it!"

"That's wonderful news. Please tell her I was asking for her."

"I will, Remus, I will. Now, I see you've finally convinced your girlfriend to join us at one of our soirees, huh?" He pronounced it 'sore-ees,' but he winked as he said it, and Hermione got the impression that he knew exactly how the word was supposed to be pronounced.

"Clyde, this is Hermione Granger," Remus said. "She's my guest tonight. She's a good friend, but not my girlfriend. I don't have a girlfriend, as you very well know, in spite of your repeated attempts to fix me up with every single woman under the age of sixty and a few over."

Clyde gave a deep laugh. "I just want you to find someone to be as happy with as I've been with my Betty. You always seem so alone."

"Well, I'm not alone tonight. This is Hermione's first time, so you be nice to her," Remus said.

"I'm always nice to the ladies," Clyde protested.

Clyde wrote Remus's name down on the sheet of paper he had on the podium, and then he wrote Hermione's name down next to it, with a large 'G' in parentheses. He reached into a box under the podium, and after shuffling around a bit, he pulled out two keys.

"I gave her a locker in the middle row so she won't have to bend down," Clyde said.

"Very thoughtful," Remus replied.

"Now, young lady, you go through that door, the first one on the right," Clyde said as he pointed to a narrow door halfway down the hall. "There's lockers there for your things. When you're ready, go through the doors that open out into the ballroom. Your young man'll be waiting there for you."

"Thank you ... Mr. ... uh ..."

"You just call me Clyde. We're not much on formalities here."

"Thank you, Clyde," Hermione said as she clutched the key tightly in her hand.

"Remus, here's your key," Clyde said as he handed Remus another one of the keys. "I gave you your usual locker in the corner."

"Thanks, Clyde," Remus replied as he took the key.

"I'll be in later," Clyde said. "Maybe we'll have a drink."

"I look forward to it," Remus said. Then he took Hermione's arm and led her down the corridor.

When they were standing outside the door to the ladies' changing room, Remus noticed that Hermione was trembling slightly.

"Are you having second thoughts?" he asked.

"Second thoughts, third thoughts, fourth thoughts ..." Hermione let her voice trail off.

"Do you want to leave?"

"No. I'm just a bit nervous," she replied.

"Take your time, Hermione. It'll only take me a couple of minutes. I'll wait for you outside the door," he said.

"Hey, Remus," said a woman as she approached them. Hermione judged that she was in her early sixties. She had dark blond hair streaked with a bit of grey. She was nearly as tall as Remus, but a lot leaner. She stepped closer to Remus and leaned in, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

"Hello, Anna," Remus replied. He kissed her cheek in turn. "How are you?"

"I'm good, thanks." Then she turned to Hermione.

"Hi, I'm Anna Mills. I'm an old friend of Remus's." She put her hand out, and Hermione shook it.

"Hermione Granger."

"Is this your first time here?"

"Can you tell?" Hermione asked with a small, nervous smile.

"You go on, Remus; I'll take care of Hermione," Anna said as she pushed open the door to the changing room.

Remus nodded and then turned and walked a bit further down the corridor to the other door.

Hermione followed Anna into the changing room.

Anna immediately went to a locker and opened it. Hermione looked at the number on her key and found her own locker, which was just two over from where Anna was standing.

Anna glanced around and then spoke. "So, Hermione, how do you know Remus?"

Hermione's thoughts skittered around as she tried to come up with an answer.

"We work in the same building," she said at last.

Anna leaned closer. "Are you a witch, then?"

Hermione's jaw must have dropped because Anna started to chuckle.

"I've known Remus for years. I know he's a wizard."

"I didn't think anyone in the Muggle world knew that," Hermione said.

"I'm the one who introduced Remus to nudism," Anna said.

"You're the herbalist he told me about," Hermione said. "You helped him after his ..." her voice trailed off, and she covered her mouth with her hand.

That was stupid, Hermione! You very nearly ruined his life here in the Muggle world!

"Don't look so panic-stricken," Anna said in a soft tone. "I know Remus's other secret, as well."

"I can't believe that I almost ..."

"I caught you off-guard," Anna said.

"It was still stupid. I'd never hurt Remus."

"I won't tell him," the older woman said with a smile. "So, you're a witch?"

"Yes," Hermione said, grateful to have the conversation turned away from her *faux pas*.

"I have to say I'm surprised. Remus always said that his people were too prudish to appreciate this lifestyle."

"I'm a Muggle-born," Hermione said quietly.

Anna just arched a brow at her.

"I guess Remus doesn't talk too much about our ... our world," Hermione said.

"No, not really, though I've been fascinated by what he has told me," Anna replied. "I know that I'm a Muggle, but what does Muggle-born mean?"

"My parents are both Muggles. There's no magic in my family at all. At least not that we know of."

"How does that happen?"

"No one's really sure," Hermione answered.

Before they could say anything else, the door to the changing room opened, and another woman stepped through.

"Hey, Anna," said the newcomer.

"Hi, Jeanne," Anna replied. "This is Hermione. It's her first time."

"Hello, Hermione," Jeanne said.

"Pleased to meet you," Hermione replied.

"You'd better get cracking," Anna said turning back to Hermione. "Remus will think I've kidnapped you."

Hermione turned back to her locker and quickly stripped off her clothes. She shoved them haphazardly into the locker. She took out one of the towels she'd brought and made sure her wand was laying along the bottom of her purse, and then she shoved the purse into the locker, as well. She closed the locker and slipped the strap with the key over her wrist. She took a deep breath and turned back towards Anna.

"I guess I'm as ready as I'm going to get," she said with a glance downward at her nakedness.

"See you later," Anna said with a wave toward Jeanne.

Jeanne waved back, and then Anna headed toward the door on the other side of the room, the door that led into the ballroom.

Hermione followed Anna out of the door.

Hermione was glad to see Remus standing just outside the door waiting for her. He had his own towel thrown over his arm and had changed from his trainers into a well-worn and comfortable looking pair of Birkenstocks.

"Here you go, Remus," Anna said.

"Thanks, Anna," Remus said, but his eyes never left Hermione's face.

"Are you sure you're okay with this?" he asked.

"So far, so good," Hermione replied.

"The buffet will open in about thirty minutes," Remus said. "Are you hungry?"

"My stomach is in knots," Hermione admitted. "I'll probably throw up all over you if I eat."

Remus chuckled. "Let's go get a drink. Maybe that'll settle your nerves."

"Okay," Hermione said.

Remus held out his hand.

Hermione hesitated. "What about the rule against public displays of affection?" Hermione asked. "I wouldn't want to be expelled my first visit."

Remus smiled. "Hand holding is allowed. So is dancing. Public displays of affection refer to open-mouthed kissing and kissing or touching below the neck," Remus explained.

"No naked snogging. Got it," Hermione replied as she took the hand that Remus still held out.

As they walked toward the bar, Remus exchanged greetings with a number of people, but he didn't stop to introduce her to anyone. Hermione kept her eyes level, not allowing her glance to drift downward at any time. She did note, however, that people tended to be grouped together in small circles. She could hear the soft murmur of voices and an occasional burst of laughter. Pretty much what one would expect at any social gathering. The only difference was that these people were naked.

When they got to the bar, Remus found two stools together at the far end. He draped his towel over the seat of one of them, and Hermione spread her towel out over the other one. Remus waited until she was seated before he sat down.

The bartender, who was wearing an apron tied around his waist, approached them.

"You want your usual, Remus?" the bartender asked.

Before he answered, Remus turned to Hermione.

"What would you like, Hermione?"

"Do you have white zinfandel?" Hermione asked the bartender.

"Sure thing," the man replied.

"Make it two, Johnny," Remus said.

"You got it," Johnny replied and turned to get their drinks.

"Remus," Hermione whispered.

"Yes, Hermione?" Remus replied.

"How do we pay for our drinks? I left my purse in the changing room, and I don't see any pockets on you, either," she said as her eyes swept up and down his body quickly.

Remus chuckled again. "You are such a delight," he said when he'd stopped laughing.

"It's a legitimate question," Hermione replied a bit tersely.

"I'm sorry I laughed," Remus said. "You're right; it's a legitimate question. All members run a tab. When Johnny brings the drinks, I'll sign a chit. I can either pay the tab when I leave, or I'll be billed along with my monthly dues."

"But how will I pay for my drink?"

"Guests can't buy drinks. Yours will go on my tab."

"I'll pay you back when we leave. I've money in my purse," Hermione said.

"You're my guest. I don't expect you to pay for your drinks. I'm not destitute, you know," he said a bit more sharply than he'd intended.

Hermione realised that she had bruised his pride. She placed a placating hand on his arm.

"I'm sorry, Remus," she said softly.

Remus patted her hand. "No, I'm sorry. I'm afraid I'm still a bit sensitive about financial matters, though I'm in much better straits these days."

"Then I'll enjoy my wine and be quite happy to let you pay for it," Hermione said. "As of five o'clock this afternoon, I'm unemployed."

"You said it was a long story," Remus said. "Care to share it?"

Johnny brought their wine, and Remus signed the chit. They sipped their wine, and Hermione told him about her run-in with Matilda Hopkirk. They talked in low voices, their heads close together, to avoid being overheard.

"Did she actually come right out and call you a ... a ... Mudblood?" Remus asked.

"No, but she certainly implied it," Hermione said.

"You could file a complaint, but unfortunately, it would be her word against yours," he said.

"I know."

"What are you going to do?" Remus asked.

"I received a number of job offers after the end of the war," Hermione said. "I took the Ministry job because I felt I had an obligation to help restore a sense of normalcy after everything that happened. It was only as I was walking away this afternoon that I realised how much I hate what I've been doing."

"I thought you liked Charms work," Remus said.

"I do, but creating Portkeys isn't what I want to do. It's difficult and time-consuming, but hardly innovative. I want to do research and create new charms. I'll probably take a week or so off, since I've been working so many hours of late, but after I've caught up on my sleep, I'll contact some of the people who made those other job offers. I'm sure I'll be able to secure another position without too much difficulty."

"I could talk to Moody. You're a powerful witch; the Aurors' Office would be lucky to get you."

Hermione shook her head. "I appreciate it, but I'm not interested in becoming an Auror; and I don't fancy working for the Ministry any longer, either. I'm quite disillusioned, to say the least. It seems that all the things we fought against are still quite rampant there. They took advantage of me for months. I'll bet Hopkirk and Midgen laughed at me every time they walked past my office. Besides, if I took a job in the Aurors' Office, everyone would say I only got the job because of Harry."

"It's a damn shame," Remus said. "But it's their loss."

"I think so, too," Hermione said.

They'd finished their wine and ordered a second glass while they'd been talking.

"They've opened the buffet," Remus said as he signed for their drinks. "Let's go find a table and put our drinks down. Then we can get in line. I'm starving!"

"I'm hungry now, too," Hermione said as she stood up. She picked up her towel and folded it over her arm as she noticed others did.

They found a table toward the back of the room and put their drinks down. They arranged their towels on the chairs and then moved toward the buffet line.

Again, Remus exchanged greetings with a number of people.

"We could have sat with your friends if you wanted to," Hermione said when joined the end of the buffet line.

"Oh, I can visit with them any time," Remus said. "I'm quite content to spend the evening with you."

"I'm enjoying your company, as well," Hermione said. She glanced up at him and smiled in a way that had Remus's heart thudding suddenly. He had to concentrate deeply to prevent himself from reacting to that artlessly seductive smile.

They moved through the buffet line, filling their plates, and then they headed back to their table.

They didn't talk much as they ate and sipped their wine.

"You were right," Hermione said after she'd emptied her plate. "The food is delicious."

"Do you want more?" Remus asked.

"I've had enough, but don't let me stop you," she said with a smile.

"You won't," Remus said as he stood up. "I'll be right back."

When Remus returned, his plate was piled high again. He sat back down and began to eat enthusiastically.

When he'd finished his second plate, he pushed it away with a satisfied sigh.

"Now all I need is tea and something chocolate," he said.

"That sounds lovely," Hermione agreed.

"I'll go get us something from the pudding table," he said.

"I'll go with you," Hermione said as she stood up.

"You're really all right with this, aren't you?" Remus asked.

"I think I've surprised even myself," Hermione replied.

When they got to the pudding table, which was off to one side of the buffet, they put a few small pastries on a plate, and then they went to the beverage table to get their tea.

"Milk only, right?" Remus asked as he held the milk jug over one of the cups.

"Yes, how did you know?" Hermione asked.

"I've seen you have tea often enough at Grimmauld Place to remember that you drink your tea the same way I do," Remus replied.

Hermione carried the plate with the pastries, and Remus carried the two tea cups as they walked back to their table. They chatted as they nibbled on their pastries and drank their tea.

"That was wonderful," Hermione said as she wiped her mouth with her napkin and tossed it down beside her empty plate.

"I'm glad you liked it," Remus replied.

"Remus ..."

"Hermione ..."

They'd both spoken at the same time.

"Go on," Remus said.

"No, it's okay, you go," Hermione insisted.

"Well, I was about to ask you something that's really not any of my business," he said.

"You want to know about Ron, right?" Hermione guessed.

"How'd you know?"

"Sooner or later, *everyone* asks me about Ron," she said with a small smile.

"It just seemed to happen so suddenly," he said. "For months you'd been practically inseparable, and then it was over."

"We simply realised that we weren't really suited, at least not in a romantic way. As a friend, I could tolerate his obsession with Quidditch, his atrocious table manners, and his slovenliness. I could even overlook his constant flirting with other women. As his girlfriend, those behaviours just pissed me off. And I was tired of being the second or third most important thing in his life."

"Did you tell him that?" Remus asked.

"I told him that I thought we should just be friends. I guess it's a measure of just how little I meant to him that he didn't raise a single objection. As a matter of fact, I think he was relieved."

"I'm sorry," Remus said in a quiet tone.

"My feelings were a bit hurt," Hermione said. "He could have at least made a token protest at being thrown over."

Then she started to laugh, and Remus joined in.

"As long as we're delving into personal areas, what happened between you and Tonks?" Hermione asked a moment later.

"She thought she was in love with me. Turns out, she was in love with the idea of being in love."

"And were you in love with her?" Hermione asked.

"Maybe I was in love with the idea of being in love, as well. I was lonely, and I liked having someone to be with. We were too different to manage any type of lasting relationship, however. Towards the end, she thought I was too stuffy for her," Remus said.

"What? Too *stuffy*? You're a nudist," she said with a smile.

"Nymphadora never knew that. No one in our world knows about this," he said with a wave that took in the entire room.

"What made you decide to reveal yourself to me?" Hermione asked.

"You walked in on me in the bathtub, remember? That was rather more of a revelation than I'd planned on," Remus said, and then he laughed softly.

"Allow me to rephrase my question," Hermione said when she stopped giggling.

"I know what you meant," he said. "If you had reacted the way every other witch I've ever met would have reacted, I would have grabbed a towel, covered myself, and apologised profusely for my unseemly behaviour."

"As you said, I walked in on you. There was nothing unseemly about your behaviour," she protested.

"I should have locked the bathroom door," Remus said simply.

"Why didn't you?" Hermione asked.

"I was too eager to sink into that tub," Remus admitted. "You didn't lock the door when you came into the bathroom, either."

Hermione thought back to her actions when she'd entered the bathroom.

"You're right, I didn't. I suppose I was eager to sink into that tub, as well."

"At any rate, when you didn't yell and scream and cover your eyes dramatically with your hands, I hoped I'd found a kindred spirit."

"You took a quite a chance considering how long you've kept this a secret," Hermione said.

"I trusted that even if you didn't turn out to be that kindred spirit, you'd keep my secret," he said.

"I will, I promise," she said and reached out to put her hand over his.

"I know," he said. He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. "Thank you."

Hermione flushed. "I haven't done anything," she said. She made no effort to withdraw her hand from his.

"You've accepted me as I am. That's a very important thing to me."

"I've always accepted you, Remus," she said.

"Back when I was teaching, you knew about me a long time before it became general knowledge. You never told anyone, not even Harry or Ron. Thank you."

"I ... I accused you of awful things that night in the Shrieking Shack. I've never apologised for that."

"You thought I was protecting a murderer. You didn't know the whole story. You, Harry, and Ron never said anything afterwards. I'm grateful for that."

"Our silence didn't make a lot of difference, did it? Not after Severus spoke out," Hermione said. "He knew the whole story by then. He was a member of the Order, just as you were. I never understood why he did that."

"He was following orders."

"Whose orders? Voldemort's?" Hermione asked.

"No, Dumbledore's. Even back then, some of Voldemort's followers were questioning his loyalties. It was common knowledge that Severus and I had issues that went all the way back to when we were students. During the year we worked together, we managed to put all that behind us, but we kept up the pretence of animosity."

"To fool Voldemort?"

"Yes, but just that animosity between us wasn't enough. We needed to do something that would reassure Voldemort that Severus was still his faithful servant. When we discovered that Peter Pettigrew was still alive, Severus, Dumbledore, and I worked out a plan to make Severus look good. Part of that plan was his 'betrayal' of my lycanthropy."

"That was just the first step, though, wasn't it?" Hermione said.

"Yes."

"Was Dumbledore's death part of the plan, even back then?"

"Gods, no," Remus said. "We never thought it would come to that. It was only after Albus was injured destroying the first Horcrux that he decided to use his own death as a means to an end."

While they'd been talking, the event organisers had been clearing away the buffet and pudding tables and setting up a small sound system.

Clyde walked over to where Remus and Hermione sat.

"We're going to start the dancing in a few minutes, Remus. Are you and your lady done eating? We need to get this table off the dance floor."

"We're done," Remus said as he stood up. "We were just chatting."

"We're sorry to have held you up," Hermione added as she got to her feet as well.

"Not a problem. You staying for the dancing, Remus?" Clyde asked.

Remus turned to Hermione. "What do you say, Hermione? Want to take a turn 'round the dance floor?"

Hermione bit her bottom lip, and then she shook her head. "I don't think I'm ready for dancing, yet. Maybe next time."

"I think we'll be going, Clyde," Remus said. "Though, I still owe you a drink. I'll catch you at the next meeting."

"Betty'll be back next time," Clyde said. "You can buy us both a drink."

"It'll be my pleasure," Remus said.

He and Hermione picked up their towels and headed toward the doors that led to the changing rooms.

"I'll be right out," Hermione said.

"No need to hurry. I'll wait for you," Remus said.

Ten minutes later, the two of them met up in the corridor outside the changing rooms.

They took the lift down to the lobby and then walked outside. The heat of the day hadn't abated much.

"It's still hot, isn't it? I was hoping it would cool off a bit once the sun went down." Hermione said as she took the arm that Remus offered.

"The humidity makes it stifling," Remus agreed.

After a brief walk, they were back in the deserted alley they had Apparated into earlier.

"Can you get back to Grimmauld Place on your own, or do you want me to take you back?" Remus asked.

"I think I'm just going to go back to my flat for the night," Hermione said. "I've actually got air conditioning. Grimmauld Place will be awful, and I'll never get to sleep in this heat. I'll get up early and head back to help Ginny and Molly with Harry's party."

"How did you manage to find a flat with air conditioning?" Remus asked.

"The building used to house some sort of high-tech computer software company. They went belly-up when the bottom fell out of the market. A developer bought the building and converted it into flats. My dad did some work on the man's teeth and discovered that one of the units was available."

"That was lucky," Remus said.

"I know. It doesn't get this hot very often, but it's nice to have air conditioning when it does."

"Well, I hope I remember my cooling charms, or I won't be getting much sleep," Remus said.

Hermione looked at the man standing next to her and made a sudden decision.

"Do you trust me?" Hermione asked.

"Of course," Remus replied.

"Then I've a better idea than you suffocating in your room," Hermione said as she reached out and wrapped her arms around Remus's waist. "Hold on."

Author's note number one: After I wrote this story, I learned that air conditioning is not as ubiquitous in Great Britain as it is in the United States. As will become evident in the next chapter, I *needed* air conditioning to make this story work. At the end of the story, I will provide what I hope is a reasonable way to reconcile this paradox. I ask for your indulgence until then.

Author's note number two: The moderators of The Petulant Poetess have graciously granted me Validated Author status. I am grateful and humbled by their faith in me. In an effort not to 'blow it', I would like to ask my readers to let me know if they find any spelling, grammar, punctuation, or Canon errors that slip by me or my beta. I hope there won't be any, but if there are, and I am notified, I will correct them as quickly as possible. Thanks so much!

Three

Chapter 3 of 4

Hermione Granger and Remus Lupin are both just trying to find a way to cool off. Neither of them anticipated just how that would happen.

Author's note: This story was written for Potter Place's Winter, 2007 Challenge. However, contrary to a message that I posted on Potter Place, this story was not written in response to prompt #31, but rather in response to prompt #33. Mistakes like this are what happen when middle-aged women try to do things from memory rather than actually look at the list of prompts.

At any rate, this is the prompt I used to inspire this story:

Typical someone-walks-in-on-someone-else-bathing situation. But instead of the typical reactions (they are mortally embarrassed or they start to shag like bunnies immediately), Remus, in the true spirit of the '68 sexual revolution, tells Hermione that he is sexually liberated, being naked is only natural and that he doesn't mind her seeing him naked at all. So Hermione takes her robe off as well to call his bluff. What happens then? Does she succeed and fluster him? Do they shag like bunnies anyway? Do they have an in-depth discussion about the pros and cons about the sexual revolution with a take on the impact on the Wizarding World? Your call, though romance would be nice.

I don't know who left this prompt, but I hope that person is pleased by my interpretation.

As always, I am grateful to my beta, JuJuJenn. She never lets the prose get too purple or the dragon dung too deep. Thanks, honey.

I would also like to thank Janine and DawnEB for responding to a question I had about British television.

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Three

A moment later, they were standing inside a small parlour.

Hermione released Remus and stepped back.

"Just let me adjust the thermostat. It'll be cooler in a minute," Hermione said.

"This is nice," Remus said as he turned in small circle, taking in the room and its furnishings. There was a couch and a matching chair, a coffee table and a couple of small tables with lamps. There was a large armoire against the far wall, and he wondered if Hermione had a telly behind the closed doors. He'd had a secret addiction to the telly ever since Lily had introduced it to him, James, Sirius, and Peter during the summer after they'd left Hogwarts.

"In spite of my years at Hogwarts, I never got used to functioning on a day-to-day basis without electricity," Hermione said.

"I guess that's the difference between growing up in a Muggle home and a wizarding home," Remus said. "I suppose you have to be careful about using magic here, though. Don't your Muggle neighbours wonder what's going on?"

"I try not to use too much magic when I'm here. It's not that difficult to keep things clean without magic. After all, that's all I knew until I was nearly twelve years old."

"How do you get back and forth to the Ministry?" Remus asked. "Do you Apparate?"

"Most days I walk, actually. It's less than a mile, and it's just about the only exercise I get. On inclement days, I Apparate. My neighbours tend to keep to themselves, anyway. I don't have more than a nodding acquaintance with any of them."

"It's a lovely flat. I'm hoping to get out of Grimmauld Place soon. I'd like a place that's truly my own."

"As I said, this is just a rental, but my parents are after me to buy a house. They insist it's a good investment."

"Well, they're right, but it's a lot of responsibility, as well."

"And since I'm currently unemployed, I doubt I'll be engaging a real estate agent any time soon," Hermione said with a smile.

"You won't have a problem keeping this place until you get another job, will you?" Remus asked. "There's plenty of room at Grimmauld Place. I'm sure Harry would be happy to let you a room. The rent's cheap, too," he added with a chuckle.

Hermione smiled. "I've already paid my August rent. And I'm sure I'll have a job by the time the September rent is due. I've a bit put by, so I'm all right."

"Did the place come furnished?" Remus asked.

"No. Just before I moved in, my Mum and Dad conveniently decided to re-do their house. I got all their cast-offs."

"These hardly look like cast-offs," Remus commented.

"This stuff was barely five years old. My parents knew I'd never let them buy me new furniture, although they offered to. This was their way of seeing to the job of furnishing the place," she explained.

"Clever of them," he replied.

"The couch opens up into a bed. There're sheets and an extra pillow inside," she said.

"I couldn't impose on you this way, Hermione," Remus protested.

"It was my idea, so I don't consider it an imposition. The bathtub isn't as big as the one at Grimmauld Place, but I've a shower. I don't cook nearly as well as Molly does, but I should be able to throw some breakfast together in the morning."

The cool air was starting to waft through the room, and the thought of returning to his sweltering room at Grimmauld Place was becoming less and less appealing to Remus.

"What about Molly?" Remus asked. "I left her a note telling her we'd be back later."

"I've a hunch Molly knew exactly what she was doing when she left that note with no name on it," Hermione said.

Remus looked startled. "You think she meant for us to run into each other naked?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. She's an inveterate matchmaker, you know. She's been trying to pair me up since Ron and I broke up."

"Now that you mention it," Remus said, "she's made a number of remarks to me about my solitary status, as well."

"And there were *two* glasses next to the tub, weren't there?" Hermione said.

"You're right; there were two glasses."

"I doubt she'll worry if we don't return to Grimmauld Place tonight," Hermione said, "but I'll let her know, anyway."

With that, Hermione went and knelt in front of her small electric fireplace. She reached into a decorative pot that sat on the hearthstone.

"Don't tell me you're on the Floo network," Remus said with a chuckle.

"I charmed the electric fire to send and receive messages only," Hermione said. "It's much too small to travel through, but it's a lot less messy than a regular fireplace, and I don't have to feed it or clean up after it like I would an owl. And in spite of the fact that my neighbours generally mind their own business, I'm sure someone would notice if I had an owl hanging about my window."

"You *are* the cleverest witch of your age," Remus said.

Hermione threw a pinch of Floo powder into the electric fire and called out, "Molly Weasley, Grimmauld Place."

A moment later, Molly's head was floating in the middle of Hermione's electric fire.

"Hermione, is everything all right? I was just getting ready for bed."

"I'm fine, Molly. I just wanted to let you know that I've decided to stay at my flat tonight. It's much too hot at Grimmauld place to sleep comfortably," Hermione explained.

"I don't blame you, dear. We were actually going to go back to the Burrow we might catch a breeze there, at least but then Arthur charmed a few of those Muggle fin things. They've helped cool the house a bit. And I really did want an early start in the morning."

Hermione smiled. "And just so you don't worry, Remus will be sleeping on my couch tonight."

Molly smiled ingenuously. "That's nice, dear. You have one of those Muggle hair conditioning gadgets don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Hermione said, inwardly smiling at Molly's malapropisms.

"It'll be much cooler there, then," Molly said.

Molly twisted her head slightly, turning to try to catch a glimpse of Remus.

Remus obligingly moved into her line of vision, making a point of letting her see him opening the couch out and pulling the sheets and pillow from inside.

"I'll be by early tomorrow morning to help with the party," Hermione said. "Do you need me to bring anything?"

"Ginny and I shopped this evening. I think we've got everything. I do hope Harry will be surprised," Molly added.

"I talked to him earlier today at the Ministry," Remus said as he moved closer to the electric fire and crouched down beside Hermione. "He didn't seem to have any idea that anything was going on."

"Will you be coming over in the morning, as well, Remus?" Molly asked.

"Yes. We'll both be there right after breakfast," Remus assured her.

"Good. Arthur will need help with the decorations."

"Then it's a good thing I've a deft hand at stringing crepe paper streamers," Remus said with a smile.

"Look at the time!" Molly exclaimed. "I've got to get to bed. Goodnight, you two."

"Goodnight, Molly," Hermione and Remus said. Molly's head faded from the fire.

Remus got to his feet and held out a hand to help Hermione up.

"Thanks," Hermione said.

"You're welcome," Remus said. He held her hand a few moments more than was necessary.

"Would you like a nightcap, Remus?" Hermione asked. "I've a bottle of zinfandel in the fridge."

"I think I've had enough to drink tonight," Remus said.

"Me, too," Hermione said. "Tea, then? Or a soft drink?"

"I'm fine, but thanks."

"Let me help you make the bed," Hermione said as she reached for the pile of linens.

They worked together to make up the couch. Hermione patted the pillow into place. "There you go. I hope it isn't too lumpy."

"It'll be fine," Remus assured her. He sat on the edge of the couch. "I appreciate your inviting me to stay here tonight. Almost as much as I appreciate your accompanying me this evening."

"I enjoyed myself," Hermione said.

"I'm glad."

"I was so nervous."

"Really?" Remus said with a smile. "I couldn't tell."

"Liar," she replied. And then she smiled.

Remus patted the seat next to him, and Hermione sat down.

"I invited you on an impulse. I never expected you to actually agree to come with me," he said as he turned his body slightly toward hers.

"I accepted on an impulse," she admitted. "The whole time I was getting ready, I was trying to think of a way to get out of it."

"I would have understood," Remus said.

"I'm glad I couldn't think of anything."

"So am I."

They looked at each other for a moment, and then Remus cleared his throat.

"Hermione," he said, "would you like to go out with me again?"

"I do owe you a dance," Hermione replied. "When's the next get together?"

"They usually have them about every six weeks or so, but I didn't mean then."

"Oh?"

"I meant would you go out with me again soon. Would you have dinner with me next week? I'd say tomorrow, but I know we have Harry's party tomorrow night," Remus spoke in a rush.

"You want to take me on a ... on a date?" Hermione asked.

"I'm sorry," Remus said as he jumped to his feet. "Forget I said anything."

"No," Hermione replied.

"I understand," Remus said. He was running his hands through his hair. "I'm far too old for you, anyway. I shouldn't be thinking about you that way ..."

"I meant, 'no, I won't forget you said anything', not 'no, I won't go out with you'," Hermione said. "I'm flattered that you would think of me that way; and you're certainly not too old for me."

"I'd very much enjoy having dinner with you," she added, almost shyly.

"You would?" Remus sat back down next to her.

"Why wouldn't I?"

"I'm a werewolf," Remus said simply.

"Only one night a month. There're thirty other nights each month, aren't there?"

Remus smiled. "Most months, yes," he said.

"Would we go to a wizarding place or a Muggle place?" Hermione asked.

"Where ever you would feel comfortable," Remus replied. "I wouldn't want you to be embarrassed to be seen consorting with the likes of me."

"Stop that!" Hermione said sharply. "Stop putting yourself down! You're a powerful wizard. You're a respected and honoured member of the Order of the Phoenix, and you're a Ministry employee. I'd be happy to be seen with you anywhere."

Remus looked taken aback slightly by her outburst. Then he reached out and took her hand in his again. "I'd be proud and honoured to be seen with you anywhere you'd like to go."

"We could start by going to Harry's party together tomorrow night," Hermione said.

"We'll both be there anyway," Remus said.

"After everything is ready at Grimmauld Place, I could come back here to shower and change. You could come get me and escort me to the party," Hermione said. "If you want to, that is."

"I'd be delighted," Remus replied.

"We could arrive fashionably late, and everyone would wonder what we'd been up to," Hermione said with a smile.

"Well, since we've already promised Molly we'll be there early, I guess we should get some sleep," Remus said.

Hermione got to her feet. "You're right. I'll see you in the morning, then." She moved toward the short hall off the parlour.

"Might I use the loo before I retire?" Remus asked as he got to his feet as well.

"Oh, how stupid of me!" she exclaimed. "Of course you can use the loo. It's the door on the right side of the hall."

"I'll only be a few minutes," he said as he moved towards the door she had indicated.

"There's a new toothbrush in the medicine chest," Hermione said. She flushed slightly. "My parents are dentists. They're always giving me toothbrushes, toothpaste, and dental floss. I've a whole drawer full."

"You don't have to explain anything to me," Remus said over his shoulder as he entered the bathroom and closed the door.

When he came out a few minutes later, he had transfigured his shirt into a long, loose-fitting nightshirt. His feet were bare.

"Sorry," he said as he saw Hermione still standing near the made-up couch. "I didn't mean to tie up the loo so long."

"Oh, I wasn't waiting for the loo. I didn't want to leave you with the wrong impression," she said.

"About what?" he asked.

"I don't want you to think that I make a habit of giving men toothbrushes. Well, I do. But then, I give them to everyone. What I meant was that I don't make it a habit to have men staying overnight." Her cheeks were still stained a slight pink.

Remus smiled. "Even if you did, which I could never believe, it wouldn't be any of my business," he said.

"I want you to know," Hermione said as she looked at him earnestly. "I mean, if we're going to ... to date, you should know that I'm ... healthy."

"You're not a ... I mean, you and Ron ..." his voice trailed off, and it was his turn to blush.

"No, I'm not, but my experience is somewhat limited," she said softly.

"Well, since we're getting things out in the open, I'm ... healthy, as well. Aside from my lycanthropy, that is. By virtue of my years, I've probably a bit more experience than you, but I've never been much of a ladies' man."

There was an awkward silence for a few moments and then Hermione smiled.

"We're a pretty pathetic pair, aren't we?" she said at last.

"Dismal," he agreed, and then he started to chuckle. Hermione joined in, and the awkwardness between them disappeared.

Hermione stood on tiptoes and placed a kiss on his cheek.

"I'll see you in the morning. Good night, Remus."

"Good night, Hermione."

Hermione ducked into her room and closed the door.

Remus stretched out on the sofa and let the gentle hum of the air conditioning lull him into sleep.

Remus woke up to the tantalising smell of coffee brewing. He had a moment of disorientation as he sat up and looked around at the unfamiliar surroundings, and then he smiled as he realised where he was and remembered the events of the previous night.

"Are you always so cheerful in the morning," Hermione grumbled as she walked into the parlour carrying two cups. She held one of the cups out to Remus.

He took the cup and then sipped, savouring the taste. Nothing was better than freshly-brewed coffee in the morning.

"Good morning. And, yes, I'm definitely a morning person. Are you always so grumpy?" he asked.

"Only when I forget I don't have to get up for work and don't turn off my bloody alarm," she muttered.

"Your grumpiness is understandable, then, and forgiven," Remus said. "What time is it, anyway?"

"Half past five, or thereabouts. I've been up for about a half hour. And good morning to you, as well," she added.

She sat on the edge of the side chair that sat at a right angle to the sofa.

"Ministry hours are nine to five," Remus said. "Why do you get up at five o'clock, anyway?"

"I've been working extra hours trying to get all those bloody Portkeys finished," Hermione explained. "I've been going in at seven most mornings."

"Why didn't you just shut the alarm off and go back to sleep?" Remus asked.

"Once I'm awake, I can't go back to sleep. I'm sorry I woke you. I actually forgot you were here until I walked through into the kitchen. I had to have coffee."

"It's all right. I usually get up early myself. I smelled the coffee. I think that's what woke me, but I don't mind; it's coffee worth waking up for." He took another sip of the fragrant brew.

"It's my favourite blend," she said.

They sat in companionable silence for a few minutes, drinking their coffee.

"In spite of Molly's wish that we get an early start this morning, I can't imagine she'd be happy if we showed up now," Remus said when his cup was empty.

"By the time we shower and have breakfast, we should be all right," Hermione replied.

"You want the bathroom first, then?" Remus asked.

"If you don't mind. Sometimes it takes me a while to tame this awful hair of mine." Hermione stood and headed toward the bathroom.

"What's wrong with your hair?"

Hermione turned back toward Remus, about to make a scathing comment. Then she realised that he had a puzzled look on his face.

"You don't think my hair is terrible?"

"Of course not," Remus replied.

"It's bushy and unruly," Hermione insisted.

"It's lovely."

"You're barmy. Everyone thinks my hair is a mess."

"The colour is marvellous, and I like the way the curls frame your face," he insisted.

"You're serious, aren't you?" she asked, almost in wonder.

"Hasn't anyone ever told you that?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Even my mother used to despair of keeping it presentable," she said with a smile.

"Well, I like it. I think it suits you perfectly. Now, go take your shower while I pour myself another cup of coffee," he said as he got to his feet and moved toward the kitchen.

"The sugar is ..." Hermione began.

"I'll find it," Remus assured her.

Two hours later, Hermione and Remus, along with Ginny and Arthur, were in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place, and Molly was rattling off instructions.

"The first thing we need to do," Molly said in a tone that brooked no argument, "is go through the house and cast some cooling charms. It's already warm in here, and it will be stifling by this evening if we don't do something about it. We'll need to go through every couple of hours and renew the charms to keep the place bearable.

"Next, the drawing room and the library both need to be dusted. Hermione, you and Ginny can take care of that. Be sure you check the curtains for Doxies. I sprayed them with Doxycide a couple of months ago, but if I missed any of the eggs, they will have hatched by now."

"I hate Doxies," Ginny muttered under her breath.

Hermione nodded and hoped that Molly had some Doxy venom antidote handy, just in case.

"Remus, I think another Boggart has taken up residence in the writing desk in the drawing room, as well."

"I'll see to it," Remus said.

"Arthur, you need to start transfiguring chairs or we'll never have enough seats for everyone tonight."

"Yes, dear," Arthur said.

"I'm going to start cooking," Molly finished.

The four of them scuttled away before Molly could think of any other chores to give them.

Starting on the top floor of the house, the four of them went room to room and cast cooling charms. By the time they got to the ground floor, the house was much cooler, but hardly as cool as some nice Muggle air conditioning would have made it.

As she cast the last cooling charm, Hermione blessed her foresight in deciding to live in a Muggle flat rather than a wizarding home. She was further grateful that the flat had come with air conditioning. There was a lot to be said for the convenience of air conditioning in the summer, heat in the winter, and electricity all year round.

Hermione and Ginny approached the drawing room curtains with trepidation. Ginny poked the curtains with her wand. A small shower of tiny, black specks fell to the carpet, but it seemed the Doxycide had rendered the eggs incapable of hatching. Hermione used her wand to banish them to the rubbish bin.

Once they knew the curtains were Doxy-free, they began the actual cleaning.

Remus, meanwhile, was trying to pull open the drawer of the writing desk. He tried a number of spells, but he didn't think it was magic keeping the drawer shut. Something seemed to be jammed inside the drawer, and it wouldn't slide along its runners. He finally resorted to simply pulling forcefully on the knob, putting most of his weight behind his effort.

There was a loud screech as the drawer released suddenly. Remus fell back and landed hard on his bum. The momentum caused the drawer to fly up and hit him in the chest. He fell backward, hitting the back of his head on the carpeted floor. His wand fell from his hand as his eyes closed.

A Cornish Pixie flew up and out of the drawer. It hovered near the ceiling for a moment, and then it dived toward Remus's head.

At the sudden noise, both Hermione and Ginny had turned. Hermione was a second quicker than Ginny. She raised her wand and aimed it at the Pixie, casting a Freezing Charm on the pesky creature.

The Pixie, its wings frozen and useless, fell to the floor.

Hermione didn't spare it a glance as she rushed to Remus.

"Remus! Remus, are you all right?" Hermione cried as she fell to her knees beside him.

"I'll go get Mum," Ginny said as she hurried toward the door.

By the time Molly and Ginny got back to the drawing room, Remus was sitting up, rubbing the back of his head.

"I'm fine, Molly," he insisted.

"Ginny says you were knocked out," Molly said as she passed her wand over him.

"I saw stars for a second when my head hit the floor, but I heard Hermione cast the Freezing Charm, and I heard Ginny say she was going to go get you, so I don't think I lost consciousness," Remus said.

Molly was reading the words that had formed in the air as she'd cast a diagnostic spell.

"No concussion, but you're developing a bruise on your chest and another on your ... your bottom," Molly said.

"I'll never live this down," Remus muttered as he got to his feet and glared at the immobilised creature on the carpet. "I'm a Ministry Auror and a former DADA professor, and I got knocked on my arse by a bloody Cornish Pixie."

"Should we call a healer?" Hermione asked anxiously as she urged Remus to sit on the desk chair.

"I don't need a Healer," Remus said as he sat down gingerly. The developing bruise on his arse was already sore.

"Are you sure?" Hermione was biting her bottom lip.

"I've raised seven children, Hermione," Molly said in a soothing tone of voice. "I know when to call a Healer. He has a few bruises, that's all. He'll be fine in a couple of days. I've got some Bruise-Be-Gone that he can use."

"What made you think there was a Boggart in that drawer, Molly?" Remus asked as he looked around for his wand.

Ginny picked it up and handed it to him.

"Thank you, Ginny," he murmured.

"Fred and George told me they thought ..." Molly's voice trailed off as she realised what she'd said.

Remus grinned. "Fred and George, eh?"

"I'm sure those boys thought it would be funny to see a Cornish Pixie fly out at me," she said grimly. "They didn't know I'd ask you to clear out the 'Boggart!'"

"Are the boys staying here tonight?" Hermione asked with a gleam in her eye.

"Probably," Molly replied. "Why? What do you have in mind?"

"A little pay-back. How about a Cornish Pixie *in their* drawer?" she said as she bent down and picked up the Pixie from the carpet. It glared at her and made a slight humming sound, but Hermione knew the Freezing Charm wouldn't wear off for hours.

"That's a fine idea," Molly said with a grin. "When they open the drawer to get clean underwear ..."

"Oh, and the Pixie should be good and angry by then," Ginny said with a grin of her own.

"Give it to me," Molly said holding out her hand. "I'll put it in a nice safe place for now."

Hermione dropped the Pixie into Molly's outstretched hand.

Ginny, Hermione, and Remus were all smiling as they watched Molly stride purposefully out of the drawing room and head toward the stairs.

"I know where Mum keeps the Bruise-Be-Gone," Ginny said. "I'll go get it for you, Remus."

"Thanks again, Ginny," Remus replied.

Ginny nodded and left.

"Are you sure you're all right?" Hermione asked.

Remus got to his feet, wincing slightly. "I'm fine, really. It takes more than a bump on the head to finish me off."

"It doesn't seem like it's your *head* that hurts," Hermione said. She was trying to stifle a grin.

"You think it's funny, don't you, that I got knocked on my arse?" He tried to keep his tone stern, but he couldn't help but smile.

"Well ... now that you mention it ..."

"I'm sure you won't be the last one laughing at the image of me brought low by a Cornish Pixie," Remus said in a rueful tone.

"I won't say anything, I promise," Hermione said.

"It's not you I have to worry about. Molly'll be telling this tale to anyone she can get to stand still long enough to listen."

"She doesn't mean any harm. We could ask her to keep it quiet," Hermione suggested.

"Might as well ask Hagrid to keep a secret," Remus replied.

Hermione sighed in an overly dramatic way. "I'm afraid you're right. You'll be the centre of attention tonight. I wonder if anyone will even know Harry is here."

"I just hope no one asks to see my bruises," Remus said.

"Wrong party," Hermione said. She started to laugh, and Remus joined in.

"Oh, you're feeling better," Ginny said as she walked into the drawing room.

"I'm fine," Remus said.

"Mum's telling Dad what happened," Ginny said as she held out the jar of salve to Remus.

"Of course she is," Remus said as he took the jar. "Thanks, Ginny."

"Mum says to rub it in good," Ginny said with a small giggle.

"It's going to be a long night," Remus said.

Author's note number one: After I wrote this story, I learned that air conditioning is not as ubiquitous in Great Britain as it is in the United States. As you can see, *needed* air conditioning to make this story work. At the end of the story, I will provide what I hope is a reasonable way to reconcile this paradox. I ask for your indulgence until then.

Author's note number two: The moderators of The Petulant Poetess have graciously granted me Validated Author status. I am grateful and humbled by their faith in me. In an effort not to 'blow it', I would like to ask my readers to let me know if they find any spelling, grammar, punctuation, or Canon errors that slip by me or my beta. I hope there won't be any, but if there are, and I am notified, I will correct them as quickly as possible. Thanks so much!

Four

Chapter 4 of 4

Hermione Granger and Remus Lupin are both just trying to find a way to cool off. Neither of them anticipated just how that would happen.

Author's note: This story was written for Potter Place's Winter, 2007 Challenge. However, contrary to a message that I posted on Potter Place, this story was not written in response to prompt #31, but rather in response to prompt #33. Mistakes like this are what happen when middle-aged women try to do things from memory rather than actually look at the list of prompts.

At any rate, this is the prompt I used to inspire this story:

Typical someone-walks-in-on-someone-else-bathing

situation. But instead of the typical reactions (they are mortally embarrassed or they start to shag like bunnies immediately), Remus, in the true spirit of the '68 sexual revolution, tells Hermione that he is sexually liberated, being naked is only natural and that he doesn't mind her seeing him naked at all. So Hermione takes her robe of as well to call his bluff. What happens then? Does she succeed and

fluster him? Do they shag like bunnies anyway? Do they have an in-depth discussion about the pros and cons about the sexual revolution with a take on the impact on the Wizarding World? Your call, though romance would be nice.

I don't know who left this prompt, but I hope that person is pleased by my interpretation.

As always, I am grateful to my beta, JuJuJenn. She never lets the prose get too purple or the dragon dung too deep. Thanks, honey.

I would also like to thank Janine and DawnEB for responding to a question I had about British television.

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Four

It was a long night. By the time the party was winding down, the story of Remus's encounter with the Cornish Pixie had been told and re-told so many times, it seemed it had already passed into legend.

Reactions had been varied. Mad-eye Moody was of the opinion that Remus had paid a small price for his lack of vigilance.

The twins had just about fallen over themselves laughing. Remus didn't say anything to them about their part in the debacle, but he took a small measure of satisfaction in knowing that they would have their own run-in with the pesky Pixie later.

Hagrid had volunteered to take the Pixie away. Remus assured him that it had already been disposed of.

Neville, nearly in tears, confided to Remus that he still had nightmares about his encounter with the creatures back during his second year. He added that he sincerely hoped that Remus wouldn't suffer the same fate.

Luna Lovegood looked at him solemnly and told him he should be glad that it hadn't been a Wrackspurt hidden in the drawer.

"They're invisible, you know," she said. "They float into your head through your ears and make your brain fuzzy."

Remus didn't know how to respond to that remark, so he merely nodded.

With all the interest in Remus's run-in with the Pixie, his and Hermione's arrival together hadn't caused a ripple. The fact that they drifted through the party side-by-side and sat next to each other to eat didn't seem to engender any interest, either. By the time they were ready to leave, most of the guests had already left, so their departure together went largely unremarked upon, as well.

As soon as they Apparated into Hermione's parlour, Hermione went to the thermostat to adjust the air conditioning.

"Those cooling charms were wearing off faster than we could re-cast them," Hermione said.

"It's because there were so many people there," Remus said.

"I know, but it was nice to see everyone come out for Harry. He never got to celebrate his birthdays when he was living with the Dursleys," Hermione said. "And this is his first birthday since he killed Voldemort, so it was special."

"It certainly was. I just hope Harry doesn't think that my adventure today made people forget that it was his party," Remus said.

"Oh, Harry thought it was funny. He really hates being the centre of attention, you know, so I think he was glad there was something else for everyone to focus on," Hermione assured him.

There was a sudden silence between them.

"Well, I guess I should be going," Remus said at last.

"You're welcome to the couch again," Hermione said. "It'll still be like an oven at Grimmauld Place."

"I appreciate it, Hermione," Remus said. "But I need a good, long soak."

"The Bruise-Be-Gone didn't help?" Hermione asked.

"The Bruise-Be-Gone helps the blood under the skin to reabsorb quicker; it helps with the appearance of the bruises, but it doesn't do much for the soreness. Since the bruises are located in places that don't generally show, at least not in the wizarding world, there's not much point in using it."

"What *will* help?" Hermione asked.

"I've some healing oils I'll put in the tub."

"I have a tub," Hermione said.

"I don't have the oils with me," Remus said.

"You could go get them and come back," Hermione suggested.

"It's late, and you were up so early this morning," Remus said.

"I've put a Silencing Charm on my alarm clock," she said. "I can have a lie-in tomorrow."

"Are you sure?" Remus asked. He recognised that he was making a token protest, at best.

"I'm sure, but only if you want to," she said.

"I want to."

Hermione let out the breath she'd been holding.

"I'll fill the tub while you pop back to Grimmauld Place and get what you need."

"It won't take me long," Remus said.

"You could bring enough for tomorrow," Hermione said. And then she blushed slightly. "I thought maybe we could spend the day together. I mean, if you don't have any other plans."

"At this moment, I can't think of anything I'd rather do than spend the day with you."

"I'm glad."

"Me, too."

Hermione smiled and Remus felt a jolt.

"I'll be back in ten minutes," he said.

"I'll be here," Hermione replied.

It took him seven minutes. When he reappeared in Hermione's parlour, he was carrying a small bag. He could hear the water running in the bathroom.

"Hermione, I'm back," he said as he approached the bathroom. He knew how quick she was with her wand, and he didn't want to startle her. He was sure that the sound of the running water had masked the small sound of his Apparition.

"Hi," Hermione said as she stepped out of the bathroom.

"Hi, yourself," Remus replied.

"The water's good and hot," she said.

Remus reached into his pocket and brought out a small vial.

"What's in it?" Hermione asked.

Remus opened the vial and held it out to her.

"Why don't you tell me?" he said.

Hermione took the vial and lifted it to her nose. She took a small sniff.

"Peppermint and ginger," she said. She took another small sniff. "And pine?"

"You could have gone into Potions instead of Charms," he said with a smile.

"I like Potions well enough, but I prefer Charms," Hermione replied. "How much should I put in?"

"Half the vial," Remus replied. "That'll leave me enough to have a soak tomorrow, as well."

"Did I get the ingredients right?"

"Spot on," he said. "The carrier is almond oil and grape seed oil. Both are excellent emollients, but don't contribute much scent."

"And why that combination?" Hermione asked as she poured half of the vial's contents into the tub.

"Peppermint oil is an anti-inflammatory and also an analgesic. Ginger oil is warming and helps heal damaged muscle. Pine oil helps improve the blood flow to injured areas, which promotes healing. And they smell good," he said with a smile.

"Yes, they do," Hermione agreed as the fragrant steam billowed up from the tub.

"Anna and I experimented with a lot of combinations. When the properties of the ingredients were similar enough to use them interchangeably, I went with scents I really liked."

"I'll leave you to it, then," Hermione said. "I'll make up the couch for you."

"Hermione ..." Remus reached out a hand and touched her lightly on the arm. "You could join ..."

"I don't think that's a good idea right now," Hermione interrupted. "We've moved past the casual, haven't we?"

"You're right, we've moved past the casual, but we haven't quite arrived at the intimate, have we?"

"Not quite," she agreed. "But I think we're moving in that direction."

"Oh, gods, I hope so," Remus said with a small groan.

Hermione smiled. "Have your soak. I'm exhausted. I'm going to bed. I'll see you in the morning."

She slipped past him and headed into the parlour to make up the couch.

"Thank you, Hermione. Sleep well," Remus said.

"You, too. Good night."

"Good night."

Remus closed the bathroom door, undressed, and slipped into the soothing, healing water of Hermione's tub.

Once again, it was the fragrant aroma of freshly-brewed coffee that woke Remus the next morning.

He sat up on the edge of the couch and stretched. He glanced towards the windows. In spite of the drawn drapes, he could see bright light spilling in around the edges. It was much later today than it had been when he'd awakened yesterday.

"Good morning," Hermione said as she stepped into the parlour. She held a steaming cup toward Remus.

"Good morning," Remus said as he took the cup.

"Did you sleep well? How's the soreness this morning?" she asked.

"I slept great." He lifted a hand to his chest and rubbed it experimentally. "The soreness is nearly gone. Another soak tonight and I'll be as good as new relatively speaking, of course."

He smiled and took a sip of his coffee. "How did you sleep?"

"Like someone slipped me a dose of the Draught of Living Death," she replied.

"What time is it?" Remus asked.

"It's nearly eleven."

"Really? I don't think I've slept past nine o'clock since I was a student. Well, except for the mornings after my transformations."

"Are you hungry?" Hermione asked.

"Famished," Remus said.

"I'll go see what I can scramble up for breakfast."

"Why don't you go have your shower first," Remus suggested. "I'll prepare breakfast and then shower while you're fixing your hair."

"You cook?" Hermione asked.

"You don't think Molly comes to Grimmauld Place every day to cook for me, do you? I'm no cordon bleu, but I know how to scramble an egg."

"And you can probably do it better than I can," Hermione admitted. "I'm not fond of cooking. I eat a lot of take away."

When Hermione entered the kitchen thirty minutes later, she was wearing a terrycloth dressing gown, and her hair was wrapped in a towel.

She went to the coffee pot and poured herself a second cup as Remus put two plates down on the table.

"Scrambled eggs, fried tomatoes and mushrooms, bacon and toast. Where did all this food come from?" Hermione asked as she sat down.

"You had four eggs left in the carton. At the back of the fridge, I found a tomato, which was about twelve hours away from being inedible," Remus said. "The mushrooms are tinned, but the tin wasn't bulging, so we're probably safe from botulism. The bread and the bacon were both in the freeze drawer. You really don't cook, do you?"

Hermione gave a small pout. "I cook."

Remus just grinned.

"I do. Sometimes." She paused. "All right. When I have absolutely no other choice, I might scramble an egg or throw together a bacon and tomato sandwich," she said as she picked up her fork.

Remus laughed and picked up his own fork.

After a few bites, Hermione put her fork down. "Does it matter to you that I don't like to cook?"

"Why would it?" Remus asked.

"Sometimes when people find out that I don't like to cook, or that getting married and having babies isn't my primary goal in life, they think there's something wrong with me."

"I don't think that at all. You obviously can cook enough to keep from starving," Remus said.

"Just barely."

"Maybe so, but you're not completely hopeless in the kitchen. Cooking is just not something you enjoy, and so you use your time and energy on things you do enjoy. There's nothing wrong with that. As for the other, well, you're still young. You have plenty of time for that."

"That's what I told Ron," Hermione said.

"Is that the real reason you and he broke up?" Remus asked.

"Well, it was certainly part of it," she admitted. "He was always talking about having a big family. I would be miserable if I were like Molly."

"Do you think Molly is unhappy?" Remus asked.

"No, no, I don't. She was born to be a mother, and she's a good mother. It's just not a role I see myself in. I want a career, and I want to travel. Is that wrong?" she asked.

"Not at all. And since you and Ron had such widely divergent ideas about the matter, it's probably best that your relationship didn't progress any further," he said.

Hermione bit her bottom lip thoughtfully for a moment before she spoke. "How ... how *do you* feel about it? Or is it too early in our relationship to discuss it?"

Remus reached across the table and took her hand in his. "I don't mind discussing it. As a matter of fact, it's probably good that we do. I'm not opposed to marriage. I rather like the idea of it, actually. I like the concept of being part of a couple, of having someone to talk to, of having someone to trust and confide in."

"I'm not opposed to marriage," Hermione said. "It's the babies part I can do without."

Remus smiled. "Perhaps we're made for each other, then; I'll never be able to father a child."

"Because of your lycanthropy?"

He nodded. "Yes. Had I been bitten as an adult, I wouldn't have been rendered sterile. The genetic changes that take place when a person is bitten before puberty result in sterility."

"Does it bother you? That you'll never have a child, I mean?" she asked.

"I've had many years to come to terms with the knowledge. I'm very grateful that I wasn't rendered a eunuch; at least I'm capable of performing sexually. Not all werewolves are, you know."

"Well, I certainly didn't come across that information when I was researching werewolves for the paper Severus made us write back in our third year," she said with a smile.

"Imagine that!"

"Maybe I should write letters to the authors and tell them that their information is incomplete."

"I'm sure that would go over well," he replied, and then he chuckled.

"Finish your breakfast before it goes stone cold," he said as he released her hand and picked up his own fork again.

They chatted as they ate, and when they were done, Hermione cleared the table.

"I'll do the washing up while you shower," she said.

"Did you have anything in mind for today?" Remus asked

"Not really," Hermione replied. "Any ideas?"

"I haven't been to the Victoria and Albert in a while," he said.

"You like museums?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, I do. And I like libraries and lots of other stuffy places, as well. At least I like them better than Weird Sisters concerts and nightclubs."

"I hate the Weird Sisters' music," Hermione said. "And I dislike nightclubs. The music is always too loud, the air is always full of smoke, and the drinks are always over-priced."

Remus nodded in agreement. "I'd much rather go to a nice dinner club, have a good meal with a decent glass of wine, and then enjoy a nice slow dance to something soft and romantic," he said.

"So would I," she agreed.

"Why don't we plan that for next week, then?" he asked.

"I'd like that. And the Victoria and Albert sounds wonderful for today. I haven't been in some time, either."

"Go get ready, then," he urged. "I'll finish the washing up and take a quick shower."

"I'll be ready in forty minutes," Hermione said.

"So will I," Remus replied.

It was nearly two o'clock when Hermione and Remus entered the Victoria and Albert.

They spent the better part of three hours walking through the photography gallery where the *Breathless! Photography and Time* exhibit was on display.

"That was amazing!" Hermione exclaimed as they exited the gallery.

"It certainly was," Remus agreed.

"Who would have thought you could 'grow' a picture?" Hermione asked, referring to the photograph they had seen of a 'picture' made by planting different flowers, plants, and grasses and photographing the area from above.

Remus leaned down to whisper into Hermione's ear, "Wizards' photographs would have been an excellent addition to the collection, don't you think?"

Hermione laughed softly. "Well, they certainly would have caused a stir."

"Would you like to take a walk through Hyde Park before we head back?" Remus asked.

Hermione looked up where there were a few clouds starting to roll in. "It looks like it might rain," she said.

"Not for hours yet," he said. "Besides, a little rain never hurt anyone."

"Let's go then," Hermione said. She took his arm as they stepped onto the pavement.

It didn't take them long to reach Hyde Park. It seemed that the persistent heat wave had driven many Londoners from their homes in the hopes of catching a breeze in the open area of the park.

They walked along the Serpentine for a little while, and then they made their way to Speaker's Corner. They stopped and listened as a short man wearing a bowler hat ranted about the NHS. Hermione thought the man looked a lot like Cornelius Fudge, but she doubted that the former Minister of Magic would ever stand on a soap box in Muggle London regardless of his current status as a *persona non grata* in the wizarding world.

As they resumed their walk, the sound of distant thunder could be heard.

"It's going to pour buckets," Hermione warned as she glanced upward.

Thick, grey clouds had completely covered the sun. People sitting on blankets and benches were beginning to gather their things in preparation for leaving the park ahead of the impending storm

"There's still plenty of time to get back. Are you hungry?" Remus asked.

"Ravenous," she replied.

"Do you like pizza?" he asked.

"I'm Muggle-born. Of course I like pizza," Hermione said with a smile.

"There's a place on Knightsbridge called Pizza on the Park. I've had a slice there a time or two," he said.

It was only a short walk to the restaurant. A number of people had the same idea, and there was a wait for a table. After about twenty minutes, a small table near the front window became available.

Hermione looked outside as they sat down. The clouds had thickened even more, making it seem like deep twilight rather than late afternoon. The air was still and expectant as though the atmosphere was literally holding its breath.

The wind began to swirl, setting the trees limbs in motion and pushing dirt, grass clippings, and bits of litter along the pavement. They placed their order just as the first fat drops of rain began to fall.

Bright flashes of lightning could be seen striking closer and closer. Even from inside the restaurant, the distinctive scent of ozone could be detected. Thunder boomed, rattling the windows. The noise frightened a small child at a nearby table, and she burst into tears.

Then the skies opened, and the rain began in earnest. In a matter of seconds, the gutters were overflowing. The rain came down so hard and so fast that it formed a nearly impenetrable curtain, blocking the view of the park right across the street.

Remus watched Hermione watching the storm. She had her elbow on the table, and her chin rested on her palm as she stared through the window.

"It's very powerful, isn't it?" Remus remarked as he leaned slightly across the table to speak to her in a quiet tone.

"It's magnificent," Hermione said, her eyes never leaving the spectacle of the rain and the lightning on the other side of the glass. "As long as I'm inside and safe, I love storms."

The storm moved through quickly. By the time they finished their pizza, the clouds were breaking up, and the sun was peeking through.

Remus paid for their supper, and they walked outside.

The air was fresh and clear, the oppressive humidity washed away by the storm. It was so much cooler that Hermione shivered slightly in her sleeveless summer blouse. They walked along the edge of the park trying to find a spot they could use to Disapparate. They finally ducked behind a high hedge, and with two soft pops, they disappeared.

When they reappeared in Hermione's parlour, the first thing she did was move to the thermostat and shut the air conditioning off. Then she went to the two windows at the front of the house and opened them wide to let the cool, clean air into the room.

"Would you like some tea and biscuits?" Hermione asked as she moved into the kitchen and filled the kettle.

"I never say no to tea and biscuits," Remus replied. "What kind of biscuits?"

Hermione laughed. "I keep a tin of chocolate biscuits in the fridge. It keeps them fresh. Not that they're usually there long enough to get stale."

"I didn't see any chocolate biscuits in here this morning," Remus said as he followed Hermione into the kitchen and opened the fridge.

"They're in the tin marked, 'Doctor Delmore's Digestive Drops'," Hermione explained. "Ron was always eating the last biscuit and leaving the empty tin in there. Worse, he wouldn't tell me he'd eaten them all. Sometimes after work, I'd go looking for a biscuit to go with my tea and all I'd find was the empty tin. I started putting the chocolate biscuits in that tin because I knew Ron wouldn't touch digestive drops."

"I wondered why you had digestive drops; you don't seem the type to suffer from indigestion," Remus said with a smile.

"I don't. I asked Minerva to give me the empty tin. She doesn't suffer from indigestion, either; she actually *likes* Doctor Delmore's Digestive Drops. She goes through at least two tins a month."

Remus made a face. "Remind me never to go to tea at Minerva's."

"Disgusting, aren't they?" Hermione said as she prepared the tea pot and brought cups down from the cupboard.

"Let's go in the parlour and have our tea and biscuits," Hermione suggested as she poured a splash of milk into two steaming cups of tea.

Remus had arranged the biscuits on a small plate.

"I noticed you have a lovely armoire in the parlour," Remus said as he grabbed some napkins and picked up the plate of biscuits.

"It was among the things my parents gave me," Hermione said.

"Do you happen to have a telly behind there?" Remus asked in a hopeful tone of voice.

Hermione smiled at him. "You like watching the telly?"

"Another of my secret vices," Remus said as he moved toward the parlour.

"Lily introduced us to the telly the summer after we all finished at Hogwarts. She was Muggle-born, like you, you know."

"Yes, I know," Hermione replied as she followed Remus out of the kitchen.

She placed the two cups of tea on the coffee table, and then she straightened and went to the large armoire that stood against the wall opposite the couch.

"As a matter of fact, I do have a telly," Hermione said as she opened the doors of the armoire. "What would you like to watch? I have Freeview, so I've got a bit more of a selection."

"Anything, anything at all!" Remus said.

Hermione couldn't help but smile at Remus's exuberance. She picked up the remote control and turned the telly on.

Remus was sitting on the edge of the couch, leaning forward eagerly as he watched the screen come to life.

Hermione walked over and sat down beside him. She handed him the remote.

"Have fun," she said as she reached over and picked up one of the chocolate biscuits.

Remus spent the next three hours watching programs in ten minute stretches. As soon as a commercial came on, he switched to a different channel. When a commercial began on that channel, he would switch again. Ordinarily, this type of behaviour would have had Hermione going spare, but she found Remus's boyish enthusiasm about the telly endearing rather than annoying.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Remus finally switched the telly off.

"Had enough?" Hermione asked with a smile.

"I didn't realise how late it was," Remus said as he stood up. "I should be going home."

"You're welcome to spend the night again," Hermione said. She had got to her feet, as well, and was now standing in front of him.

"The heat wave has broken," he said. "I can't use my stifling room as an excuse for staying here again."

"You don't need an excuse to stay," she said in a soft voice. "I like having you here."

"I like being here," Remus replied.

"So, will you stay?" Hermione asked.

"I'd like that very much," he said. He turned and made a move to open the couch.

"You ... you don't need to sleep on the couch."

He straightened and turned back to Hermione.

"Hermione, are you sure?" he asked.

"I'm sure," she replied. "But, if you don't want to ..."

"I want to. Believe me, I want to," he said.

"I should warn you that ... that Ron said I was a blanket hog," she said as she bit her bottom lip nervously.

"Did Ron live here never mind," he interrupted himself. "It isn't any of my business."

"No, it's all right. Ron never lived here. I may not like to cook, but I'm neat and organised. I wouldn't pick up after him, and I wouldn't let him hang his Chudley Cannons posters on the walls, so he stayed at the Burrow. Molly doesn't seem to mind that he's a slob."

"I'm neat, as well," Remus assured her. "And I've no posters to hang."

Hermione smiled. "Anyway, Ron would stay over once in a while, but not very often, actually. Not even sex seemed to hold his interest as much as Quidditch did. At least not sex with me." She blushed and let her gaze drop to the floor.

Remus put a finger under her chin and raised her head.

"Ron was a damn fool," he said in a hoarse whisper. And then he ducked his head and brushed his lips across hers.

The tip of his tongue teased her lips, urging her to let him in. She parted her lips slightly, and Remus deepened the kiss. He nibbled her bottom lip gently between his teeth. His tongue swept over hers lightly. He sucked softly, drawing her tongue into his mouth.

Hermione felt an electric jolt that started at her lips, rushed through her belly, and ended by curling her toes.

"Oh, my," Hermione breathed when Remus lifted his lips from hers.

"You'd think you'd never been kissed," he teased.

"I've never been kissed like that," she said as she lifted a finger to her lips.

"Never?" Remus asked, genuinely surprised.

"Never like the person who was kissing me wanted to please *me* rather than himself," she said.

"All I want is to please you, love," Remus whispered. "I want to spend the next several hours pleasing you, if you'll let me."

Hermione smiled, and then she took Remus's hand in hers and led him toward her bedroom.

Outside, the heat wave was over, but inside, it was just beginning.

Mischief Managed

Author's note: First: I have absolutely no idea if the 'facts' I submitted about werewolves' sterility or their ability to perform sexually are true. I used those 'facts' merely as a literary device. Second: After I wrote this story, I discovered that air conditioning is not common in Great Britain. I did read that some high-tech companies do have air conditioning in order to protect delicate electronic equipment, such as computers. Since it was vital to the story that Hermione's flat be air conditioned, I solved the dilemma by stating that the building Hermione lived in had once been a computer software company. I also assumed that a hotel that caters to tourists would have air conditioning. That may or may not be the case. Again, I took some literary licence.

The moderators of The Petulant Poetess have graciously granted me Validated Author status. I am grateful and humbled by their faith in me. In an effort not to 'blow it', I would like to ask my readers to let me know if they find any spelling, grammar, punctuation, or Canon errors that slip by me or my beta. I hope there won't be any, but if there are, and I am notified, I will correct them as quickly as possible. Thanks so much!