

Hands Can Tell

by Jenwryn

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Chapter 1 of 1

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For Juliana...

He sits in a chair by the fire, his hands moving nimbly in its flickering gleam. *Up, along, up, along.* The squat little needle glints cheerfully as he threads it, and the length of thick cord, back and forth through the heavy material bunched in his lap. He works with a look of great concentration upon his face, the calluses on his fingers not noticing the effort required to push the needle's point through the leather as he mends the vest. The claw that tore it was as long as his thumb twice over, and he's lucky to be sitting here at all, truth be told, but the knowledge doesn't seem to faze him. After all these months, that still surprises her. Perhaps more tellingly, it surprises her *that* it surprises her – she would have imagined that she'd be used to men courting danger after all those years at Harry's side. But the blazing look of fierce joy on Charlie's face whenever a dragon gives him cheek is still enough to make her heart stop dead – and her blood race – all in the same impossible moment.

The wizard has taken off his ruined shirt and let it fall in a shredded heap beside his boots at the door. The hole he is mending in his vest is echoed by a nasty gash across his chest. The line runs from beside his nipple, hidden amongst reddish curls, then curves through smooth skin to the place where his arm meets his shoulder. Hermione sewed the gash with healing thread when he arrived home in a mess, but it will still take a day or two before the flesh is knit and whole, and he'll be left with another stretch of fine silver traversing the black ink of the tattoos that darken his shoulders. His lack of concern for his own well-being frustrates her at times but she can't help admiring him in the firelight's glow. His hand moves with the rhythm of one of the songs he sings in his hearty voice when he does the dishes – *up, along, up, along* – and with it his whole arm shifts. There's something about that movement of his muscles that makes her lower the book she's been studying, and she relaxes back against the cushions of her chair, brown eyes soft as she observes him working. The golden colour of the flames wanders over his skin, setting the fine hair on his chest and arms and snaking from belt-buckle to navel alight like amber and casting the strong curves of his shoulder into a play of sepia shadows and tannin'd glow.

He notices her eyes upon him, and a boyish smile curves across his face. A heartbeat passes, then another, and he continues to sew *up, along, up, along* – and then makes a knot with an experienced twist of his wrist, thread bound upon itself and over. He bites the thick cord free with his back teeth and then places the needle into a ball of hard rubber on the bench beside him. Nut-brown hands shake the vest out and hold it up as he inspects his needlework with critical blue eyes. The mark on the leather will be visible, just like the scars and burns that trace their touch upon his body like the nail marks of a violent lover, but he's content with the end product. He folds the vest and lets it rest upon the arm of his chair. She continues to watch him, and the smile on his face is mirrored by the contentment in her eyes. The wizard stretches, the movement rippling through his body, and then winces slightly at the pressure it puts upon his torn skin: her lips twitch with amusement. Charlie shakes his head and glances at the book in her lap, its pages fluttering backwards and forwards unattended. He doesn't want to interrupt her research, and so there is a questioning look in his eyes as his hands brush threads of cotton and cord from his trouser'd thighs. Hermione sets the book on the bench beside his needles and a gleaming curved knife and stands up. She moves to the fireplace, eyes on him as she walks, then kneels and reaches for the heavy poker.

He rises too and comes to her, sits cross-legged on the thick rug beside her and watches the bright embers shift and splutter as she stirs them and then lays aside the

poker and adds a new log. She dusts her hands upon her skirt and then turns on the rug and seats herself in front of him. He inhales the sharp heat of the fire as fresh flames lap at the log and breathes in the peculiar aroma of embers and scalded metal and, beneath it all, the scent of sandalwood in her hair. The fire crackles and murmurs to itself in an ancient tongue, but the witch and the wizard do not speak. Normally he loves to hear the words on her lips, but now their eyes hold the thread of space between them, and his hands reach out and cup her hips. He pulls her towards him, and she shifts without a sound, raising her skirt up to her thighs and sitting in his lap, her legs on either side of him as he leans back slightly to give her space. She puts her lips to his, her head tilted slightly as she meets them, pulls away, touches again, up and along like the movement that his needle had made, up and along with her lips as she kisses him. He walks his fingers up the length of her back and onto her neck, his thumbs moving to caress behind her ears and in amongst her hair.

Her own hands brush across his torn shoulder: words fail her whenever he bears a new scar. She kisses him still, but deeper now, mouth warm and lips parted, eyes closed as she loses herself in the sensations of his skin. Tonight she wants to hear his heart; tonight she wants to hear the words that cannot be spoken. His hands pass across her, rough and gentle, moving towards buttons and the pale skin of her breasts. His hands, his hands can tell stories that his mouth never could, and she presses herself against them and listens to the words that they weave.