

Gamp's Finest Blend of Pretend

One of the unwritten but frequently emphasized rules for the members of Dumbledore's Army was that the Room of Requirement was not a broom closet...unless, of course, it was a broom closet.

Most everyone had imagined the possibilities and the potential when the Room had been first "discovered". It was one of a hormonally-charged teen-ager's greatest needs...a secure, comfortable place to snog your girlfriend or boyfriend...or more. And if you didn't have a girlfriend or boyfriend? Well, those same great needs for privacy and comfort applied when you had the urge to rub one off on your own.

But the defensive training was more important than the risk of embarrassment, and the risk of Umbridge or Filch finding out about the Room increased as the frequency of its use increased. They had all agreed on these points, and all promised not to use the Room for anything other than their DA meetings.

Now promises are sometimes hard to keep (especially when they aren't enforced by magical contracts). Both Weasley Twins had tried to get the Room to recreate the broom closet that they'd used to hide from Filch (for purposes other than hiding). Their efforts, however, had failed... regardless of whether they were alone, or with their girlfriends Katie and Alicia; no amount of eager pacing had made the door appear.

Hermione Granger had developed a theory to explain the situation, once she'd found out about the attempts and thoroughly castigated the offending parties. If the Castle possessed some type of magical sentience (as some had argued within *Hogwarts, a History*), then the Room of Requirement might be smart enough to "know" what somebody truly needed the most...regardless of what they thought was their greatest need, or what they were concentrating on as they tried to summon up its doorway. And if a person's need for defensive and training or personal safety trumped their need for a private lover's nest?

No schtoop for you! (at least not within the Room of Requirement).

Now schtooping was farthest from Hermione's mind when Harry Potter returned to Gryffindor Tower after his first "Remedial Potions" lesson with Severus Snape. Not because she would never even consider the possibility of snogging...or even shagging...her best friend. Because those thoughts had crossed her mind once or twice before (or ten or twenty times if she were honest about it). No, she couldn't think about Harry that way at that moment because of the way that he looked...broken...despondent...defeated. She knew he needed more than a friend with benefits...he needed a friend with a sympathetic ear.

And he needed to speak to that ear someplace where other ears couldn't listen in.

And that is why she didn't do much more than tell Harry "Come with me" as she dragged him straight out the Gryffindor Common Room on a path towards the Seventh Floor hallway. Because saving the Room of Requirement for DA meetings would be pointless if the leader of the DA was a broken man.

Harry didn't protest. He didn't whine, or shout or display any of the other emotions that had popped up during his tumultuous Fifth Year. Didn't even ask where they were going. He trusted her. Trusted her enough to let her take the lead, and to tell the Room of Requirement what their greatest need was.

The teenaged wizard assumed that his friend was going to focus her thoughts on the DA training room...a place where they could talk privately, and a place where he could relieve some stress by blasting target dummies. But there was something quite different waiting for them on the other side of the door that appeared before them...because the Room knew what their greatest need was, even if they were too daft or too afraid to admit it.

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Hermione's breath caught in her throat when she looked through the doorway.

"It worked!" she whispered.

"It's brilliant!" Harry declared as he looked over her shoulder.

"It" was a large room with Muggle decor and furnishings, wall-to-wall carpeting, and a relatively low ceiling. There was a ping pong table set up right in front of the them, close enough to block the Room's door from freely swinging inward. To their right, a large sofa and matching overstuffed captain's chairs were grouped in front of an entertainment system that housed a large television, VCR, Playstation and stereo. A wet bar was set up on their left, complete with a brass rail, bar stools, and hanging wine glasses. A dartboard and arcade-style stand-alone Pac-man game were standing against the far wall, on either side of a door-sized opening and a set of carpeted stairs that led upwards.

"So are we going in?" he asked.

"Erm...right, yeah...I guess," his friend muttered, as she walked into the room and stepped around the ping pong table.

Wow, Hermione...what were you thinking as you paced back and forth?"

"Erm, I...I was imagining someplace where we could relax, and act like normal teenagers."

Harry shook his head with disbelief. "Well, if by normal you meant 'Muggle,' then...it's unbelievable! It's amazing! It's...."

"It's my basement!" Hermione exclaimed.

"Your what?"

"It's the basement of my house...the basement of my parent's house. You know...in Weybridge?"

"Really?"

"Yeah...right down to the smallest details," Hermione said with disbelief. "Look...there's my mum's embroidery bag sitting next to her chair...which is next to my dad's favorite chair...and those are even my videos on the shelf!"

Harry closed the door behind him, then asked, "So the Room brought us to your parent's house?"

"No...don't be silly," Hermione replied. "I'm certain that the Room just reconfigured itself and recreated a familiar setting for me...for us."

"How could it do that?" Harry asked.

"Magic?"

"Okay, fine...magic. But how with magic?"

"Well...if the Room could read my mind while I paced back and forth...not that hard to imagine it also being able to extract memories or others bits of information about the layout and furnishings."

Harry groaned. "Ugh...you just had to mention mind reading, didn't you!"

Hermione winced, and immediately pulled her best friend into a hug.

"Oh, I'm so sorry Harry...how could I forget?"

"It's okay."

"No, it's definitely not...I really was hoping that we could relax. So how can I make it up to you?"

A rather naughty response popped into his mind as he stood there hugging his very pretty friend. But he really didn't want to deal with that thought right at that moment, so he went with something slightly less scandalous and nodded towards the bar.

"You could buy me a drink?"

"Harry! You can't!"

"What? You asked," he replied glibly. "After what Snape put me through, I rather fancy the thought of a mind-numbing beverage."

"No...that's not what I meant. You really can't have a drink."

"Why not? Does your father lock up his liquor or something?"

"Well yes, he does, but..."

"No worries, then," said Harry, as he broke free of the embrace and walked behind the bar. He pulled a small knife from his pocket and added, "I've been waiting for a chance to test out Sirius's Christmas present."

"Harry!" his friend exclaimed, as she pulled back a bar stool and sat down in front of him.

"What? Do you need to ask the Room to conjure up your father so that I can ask for his permission?"

"No, it's not that."

"Then what are you worried about, then?"

"What I'm worried about are the Principal Exceptions to Gamp's Law of Elemental Transfiguration."

"The what?"

"Gamp's Law, Harry...surely you know...I mean, even with all that's going on, this is still your O.W.L year..."

"Oh, right...how could you let me forget?"

"How could I let you..."

"Relax, Hermione, I'm just pulling your chain a bit," Harry teased. "I know Gamp's law."

"Then you *should* know that there are certain things that can't be magically created from nothing, like food, or money...or love..."

"Look, I'm not hungry right now, and I don't need any money," Harry declared (either ignoring or not recognizing the change in Hermione's tone of voice when she wistfully whispered that last bit). "As for the love...well, admitting that I might like some loving could be rather dangerous when the only pretty girl in the room is your wand-wielding best friend."

"Harry!"

"Right, so...a drink. That's what I want...that's what I need. And it's different from food, right? That's why they talk about food *and* drink?"

"Same principle, though...it provides sustenance."

"So explain the Fountain of Wine spell, then?"

"The what?"

"The spell that causes wine to gush out from the end of your wand. Ollivander used it last year during the wand weighing ceremony."

"Oh, well...I suppose the spell could just summon the wine from someplace else."

"But it would still be wine, right? Still have a kick?"

"I suppose. But that doesn't mean..."

"Hermione, what's the worst that could happen?"

"Merlin, Harry...that's always a dangerous question to ask when you're around."

"Ha, ha...very funny. Look, if it's not real alcohol, then when we leave the room it'll go poof from our stomachs...or poof from our bladders, if we stay here long enough. No hangovers, no harm, no foul."

"But if it's real and we get drunk?"

Harry shrugged. "Then it will do what I want it to do right now. And didn't Dobby say that the Room provides him with sobering potions whenever he brings Winky here to dry out?"

"But he also said that it gives her a bed to sleep it off, too...do you see a bed around here?"

The question caused Harry to chuckle. "No, you got me there...I imagine that if what you really needed most was to sleep with me, then we'd be standing in your bedroom, rather than your basement."

"Harry!"

"What? I was agreeing with you...although..."

"Although what?"

Harry pointed across the room and slyly asked, "Is that a pull-out couch over there?"

The deep-red blush that quickly spread over Hermione's face provided an answer.

The-Boy-Who-Lived chuckled some more as he opened the blade on his lock-picking knife and turned towards the nearest cabinet.

Hermione shook her head, slipped off of the stool, and walked around the end of the bar.

"Here, Harry...Dad keeps the good stuff on this side."

The black-haired wizard snorted as he followed her directions and picked open the locked cabinet door that she had pointed towards.

"What?" challenged Hermione. "I figure if the Room has gone to this trouble, might as well take advantage of what it's offering."

Harry let out a low whistle as he scanned the shelved bottles.

"See something that you like?"

"Yeah, no...erm...maybe."

Hermione giggled. "Well that's a full coverage response."

"Sorry...just recognized some of these labels. Your father has a nice collection of single malts."

Harry...it's not my father's whisky. It's the Room's re-creation of my father's whisky collection."

The black-haired wizard leaned back against the wall and began to laugh.

"What?"

"That's just like my Uncle's collection...a re-creation."

"How so?"

"When he had his wet bar installed, Uncle Vernon found a mail-order place that recycles whisky bottles. For fifty quid they send you two dozen empty bottles of the finest, most expensive whiskys that somebody else drank...you know, the twenty-four year old single malts that go for a hundred quid or more?"

"He bought just the bottles?"

"Erm...no, they had corks as well."

"So he lined up these empty corked whisky bottles behind the bar?"

"Of course not," Harry chuckled. "First he used a funnel to fill them with the cheapest whiskey he could find...then he put them up on the top shelf."

"So it looks like he's built up a nice, expensive collection?"

"Exactly....appearances are everything."

"But what about the taste? How could he not be found out?"

Harry shrugged. "Not that hard, actually. The friends and neighbors? They've never tasted the real thing, and most probably couldn't tell the difference. But since most of the posers are just as pompous as my Uncle...they'll take a sip, then go on and on about the excellent '*pungent smokiness*' or the '*lofty stewed fruit ripeness*,' or similar kinds of nonsense."

Hermione laughed in a way that sounded rather musical to Harry's ear. "And there's nobody that's caught him?"

"Nope," Harry grinned. "Uncle's a smart man when he wants to be. Whenever his boss or an important client is invited over for drinks and dinner, he finds out what the man drinks, and makes sure to have a real bottle of that on hand. Offers it up as his own personal favorite...works every time, the tosser."

"Unbelievable," said Hermione.

"So...any recommendations, then?" asked Harry, pointing towards the cabinet.

Hermione smiled and shook her head. "Well, Daddy likes them all...but they're a bit too strong for my taste."

"You're having me on."

"What?"

"Your parents really let you drink whisky?"

The bushy-haired witch chuckled. "Now Harry...I said that I've tasted these whiskys...I didn't say anything about parental consent."

The-Boy-Who-Lived arched an eyebrow, wondering if there was more to his best friend's apparently naughty side.

"So, right then...what do you recommend, Miss Granger?"

Hermione smiled. "Trust me?"

"Completely."

"Then have a seat, Mister," she said, as she draped her school robes over the bar rail and pushed the teen-aged wizard out of the way.

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Harry was amazed at how immediately comfortable his friend was behind the bar...with an apron slipped over her head, and a bar rag over her shoulder, and knowing where everything was located.

"Hey, look...the simple syrup's already made up for us," she declared, staring into the built-in refrigerator/freezer. "Is that okay? I mean...I could whip some up from scratch, if you want."

"Erm...whatever is easiest," Harry said with chagrin.

She nodded, and pulled out the container of simple syrup, a bottle of lime juice, and a full tray of ice. These she carefully set out next to a cocktail shaker, a bottle of blended scotch whisky, a measuring cup, a small cutting board, and a sharp knife.

"I can't believe...you look right at home."

"Well I am in my home...or in my basement....sort of..." Hermione giggled as she poured half of the ice into the shaker and measured out an exact amount of alcohol.

"You know what I mean."

The bushy-haired witch nodded as a smaller measured portion of lime juice was dumped into the shaker.

"Oh...silly me!"

"What?"

"Nothing...bit out of practice is all...should have prepped the glasses first," Hermione explained, as she went back to the refrigerator and pulled out a fresh lime, a fresh orange and a bottle of maraschino cherries.

"I can't believe this," Harry exclaimed. "Your parents....your parents the Muggle dentists....they let you mix drinks?"

"Ever since I came back for hols after our First Year," Hermione said, as she cut an orange slice, halved it, and speared each half with a small plastic sword pick. Then two cherries were fished from the jar and impaled.

"I wanted to show them what I'd learned," she explained, "but I couldn't do underage magic, so...well, mixing drinks is a lot like making potions, right?"

"So is cooking, though."

Hermione snorted as she began to cut and peel back perfectly-shaped strips of lime rind.

Yes, well...let's not talk about my miserable efforts in the kitchen."

"Speaking of which...where did you get that fruit?"

"From the refrigerator?" Hermione asked, as she pulled two cocktail glasses out and wiped their rims with the rind.

"From Gamp's refrigerator?"

"Oh, yeah...see your point," Hermione mused. She thought for a moment while she pulled a small container from underneath the bar, opened it, then pushed the lip of each glass into a pile of sugar. Each sugar-rimmed glass was then set on the bar top and filled with ice cubes, over which Hermione deftly poured the cocktail shaker's contents.

It wasn't until she balanced the speared orange slices and cherries on top of each drink that she decided, "Maybe we look at it this way... this isn't food...it's Gamp's garnish."

Harry chuckled. "Really splitting hairs now, aren't you?"

"Is that a complaint?"

"Not at all," Harry smiled, as Hermione pushed one of the finished cocktails across the bar. He held up the glass, then asked, "Cheers?"

Hermione smiled, and clinked the lip of her glass against his.

"To us," she replied.

"Sounds good to me," Harry grinned. He took a healthy sip, smacked his lips.

"Delicious," he declared. "Definitely deserves an Outstanding, Miss Granger!"

"Thanks."

"What is it called?"

"Scotch sour."

"I'm surprised...you don't really taste the alcohol."

"That's the point," Hermione grinned. "No worries, though...you'll definitely feel the alcohol after you've had two or three."

"Speaking from experience, Hermione?"

"Perhaps."

Harry snorted. "Of course, we won't feel a thing if this is only Gamp's Finest Blend of Pretend, right?"

Hermione smiled, and shook her head. Then she placed two clean shot glasses on the bar, and filled them straight from the whisky bottle.

"One way to find out?" she asked, holding one of the shot glasses up.

Her friend gave her a very curious look as he nodded, and followed her lead. He clinked glasses, and said, "To us, again?"

"I'll drink to that," Hermione grinned.

And then she swallowed. And then she coughed.

"Yup," Harry wheezed. "No hiding the alcohol there."

"Agreed."

"Think that I'll stick to your cocktails, Miss Granger."

"Sounds good to me."

A sip from the cocktail glass took the edge off of Harry's shot of whisky. He watched quietly as Hermione prepared two more spears of "Gamp's garnish."

"You're really good at that, you know," he told her.

Hermione shrugged dismissively. "Oh, it's nothing much...lot easier than mixing up a potion, especially when you don't have Snape hovering over your shoulder."

"Doh!"

"Sorry."

"No worries...looks like you're getting ready to compensate with a second round."

"Well, just in case," Hermione replied.

"Unless you've got some other hidden talent to distract me with?" quipped Harry.

Hermione arched an eyebrow at her messy-haired friend, then gave him a sly smile.

"Maybe I do," she replied, as she fished another bright-red cherry from the bottle.

Harry watched with growing interest (and growing surprise) as his best friend popped the cherry, stem and all, into her mouth. A look of intense concentration grew on her faces as her tongue and jaw began to move...the same expression that Hermione adopted whenever she bore down on a homework assignment. Her lips stayed closed, forcing Harry to wonder what exactly was going on...until those lips smiled, Hermione's mouth opened, and she proudly displayed the cherry stem on the tip of her outstretched tongue.

It was now tied into a knot.

Harry laughed, and clapped, and imagined some other uses for Hermione's talented tongue. And wondered if Hermione was displaying this specific talent to him for a reason.

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They were definitely able to feel the effects after the third round of drinks.

The whisky loosened Harry's tongue enough for him to open up and tell her everything that had happened during his first "Remedial Potions" lesson. Hermione listened with an ear that was just as sympathetic as any good bartender. Easily more so, since she knew the truth behind Harry's characterization of Snape as a petty and vindictive man.

What Hermione didn't know much about was Occlumency and Legilimency, or the proper way to teach these subjects. It seemed to Hermione that Snape's methods were just as abrupt and abrasive as when he was "teaching" Potions...no explanations or descriptions of fundamental principles...just "Clear Your Mind!"

Right before she finished her third drink Hermione promised Harry that she'd do some research on this topic before his next class.

"Thanks...I can always count on you," Harry gushed.

"Same here," she replied with a bright smile. "Want another one?"

Harry looked at the bottom of his class with one eye shut, then shook his head.

"Probably should take a little break," he decided. He nodded towards the whisky bottle that Hermione had been pouring from and added, "We've put a bit of a dent in that, haven't we?"

Her eyes lit up with delight as she nodded in agreement. "We have, haven't we?"

"Think your father will notice?"

"Probably," she giggled. "But hey...can't blame me, right? All of his English daughter is in Scotland, and all of his Scotch whisky is in England!"

Harry laughed. "Good one, Hermione...so where are we again?"

"Within the Room of Requirement's representation of the basement of my parent's house, silly."

"Oh, that's right," Harry said. "You wanted a place that was...what did you need most, again... someplace with a pull-out bed?"

"No, Harry...someplace where we could relax," Hermione replied.

"Like a pull-out bed, right?"

"Hush!" Hermione gently chided. "I wanted us to relax, and act like normal teenagers."

"So normal teen-agers don't bother pulling out the bed...they just snog on the couch?"

"You are incorrigible, Mr. Potter."

"Is that a good thing to be?"

Hermione looked at Harry for a moment...looked at him *closely*. Then she smiled.

"Sometimes," she replied.

"Is now one of those times, then?"

Hermione chuckled as she slipped off her stool and stood up.

"Excuse me for a moment, Harry."

"Where you off too?"

"I have to go," she explained. "It's one of those things that normal teenagers do when their bladders are full."

"Right...back to the Tower, then?"

"Don't be silly," Hermione replied, placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "The loo is up at the top of the stairs...be back in a minute."

Harry watched his friend dash up the stairs, not bothering to remind her that she'd previously declared them to be nothing more than decoration. He knew her too well...Hermione had this bad habit of ignoring her body's little signals while she focused on her research or revising. So when she finally listened to her screaming bladder and decided that she had to go...well, she really had to go, and trying to distract her with questions was futile.

Without Hermione there to distract him with either her questions or gifted tongue, Harry took a closer look at what the Room had provided. The level of detail was truly magical. And while he couldn't claim to know the boundaries of what magic could or couldn't do...couldn't even remember what the Fourth or Fifth Principal Exceptions were to Gamp's Law...the level of detail seemed almost *too* good.

Harry walked over to the entertainment center and picked up television remote control. A BBC news reader appeared on the screen when he pressed the green power button. Hitting the channel change button offered up the expected range of different programming.

Expected, of course, if he were still in the Muggle world.

With his curiosity levels rising, Harry turned on the stereo receiver, and spun the analog dial through a spectrum of Muggle radio broadcasts.

Then he turned off the electronics, and walked over to the Pac-Man game. He'd never seen the stand-alone, five-foot tall arcade version...that would have required his Aunt or Uncle actually letting out of the house to do something other than school or chores. But when he was younger he had watched his cousin Dudley play a home version of Pac-man on his old Nintendo game system. Harry wasn't interested in comparing the differences, or in tracking the movement of the colored ghosts, though. What really caught his eye was the cord that connected the back of the machine's cabinet to a plug socket at the base of the wall.

Harry pulled the plug from the socket, then nodded his head as he watched the video display disappear.

"Hey, what are you doing with my game?"

The teen-aged wizard glanced over his shoulder, and was startled by what he saw. Hermione had obviously done a bit more than just use the loo.

"I was...I was...trying to figure out if it was powered by electricity or magic," he replied.

Hermione snorted and shook her head. Since she'd been looking for her best friend's reaction to her reappearance...or, more specifically, his reaction to her change in clothing.

She liked what she was seeing almost as much as Harry did.

Nonchalantly holding out a t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants, Hermione said, "Thought you might want to change into something more comfortable as well. Got these from Dad's chest of drawers, but they should fit you."

Harry snorted, still trying to come to terms with the tight pair of pajama bottoms and the undersized camisole that Hermione was now wearing. And wondering how cold it must be upstairs, to have provoked the clearly defined response of what was underneath that thin shirt.

"Get your clothes from your little sister's room, then?" he quipped.

Hermione chuckled.

"You know I'm an only child, Harry. So is that a complaint?"

"Oh, God, no."

"Good," Hermione replied sweetly. "Hope you don't mind...I brought all my winter pajamas with me to school, so the only things I had left in my drawers were a few summer-weight outfits that I've grown out of."

"Don't mind at all," Harry quipped weakly. "So....so I gather that there's more up those stairs than just the loo?"

"Yeah, the whole house is here, Harry...isn't magic wonderful!"

"Erm....yeah. Love magic," Harry replied, as he held the sweatpants that Hermione had given him against his legs.

"Too tight?" Hermione asked playfully, her eyes focused south of his waist.

Harry shrugged, keeping the sweatpants gathered in front of his crotch in the hope that Hermione wouldn't notice just how tight his trousers were already getting, given what she was now wearing.

"Be right back," he muttered, as he dashed towards the stairs.

"Take your time," she replied brightly.

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That the bathroom at the top of the stairs was only fitted with a toilet and sink was just one more reason why Harry suspected that they were someplace other than the Room of Requirement...because what he was really in great need of at the moment was a *very* cold shower.

And then he remembered that it was Hermione who had done the pacing in front of the doorway, and he began to wonder if seeing his tented trousers was what *she* needed most.

Couldn't be...right? Just like there was some other perfectly valid explanation why his normally fastidious friend had left her clothes on the floor, piled up in the corner?

Hermione's wool jumper, silk long-sleeved shirt and trousers were clearly visible within the pile. He also spotted black bra straps and a portion of one of the black bra cups. So what did it mean that she had purposely gone braless downstairs, and left proof of that fact? Anything?

And what did it mean that he couldn't help himself from pulling the pile of clothes apart to see if there were a pair of knickers hidden underneath?

There weren't any knickers, though. Which cooled Harry's hormonally-fueled thoughts down just a bit...until, of course, he imagined the possibility that Hermione hadn't been wearing knickers in the first place.

Oh, this was bad. Bad that he was thinking about his best friend this way. Badder that he was rock hard from thinking about his best friend this way. And baddest?

"Baddest" was probably the fact that someone parked in the back of his brain was urging him to take care of his erection by rubbing a quick one off. Rubbing one off right there, while thinking about Hermione, and with Hermione just downstairs. In what was or was meant to be her parent's house.

Merlin help him if parents weren't Principal Exceptions to Gamp's Law.

The adrenaline rush generated from the thought of getting caught out by Mr. and Mrs. Granger was sufficient to take the edge of his testosterone levels. He quickly changed into the t-shirt and sweats, adding his clothes to the small pile that Hermione had started. A quick look in the mirror didn't ease his fears all that much...Mr. Granger was obviously not the same size as his obese cousin, and his clothes were much more tight-fitting. Which meant that they tented even more than Dudley's cast-offs.

Unless these weren't Mr. Granger's clothes, and Hermione just wanted to see him wearing something that actually fit (at least when his brain wasn't addled by pervy thoughts).

Having calmed down enough to be able to use the lavatory for its primary purpose, Harry opened its door and stepped out to take a look around. There wasn't much he could see, since it was dark and none of the lights were on, but he could just tell that the ground floor of this "house" was the polar opposite of the Dursley's. And that was a good thing.

Harry was tempted to explore the upstairs rooms...maybe even find the kitchen and see if there was more "garnish" within its refrigerator. But it was

Hermione's place to show him around, and there was this very intriguing "wakka-wakka-wakka" sound drifting up the stairwell.

He walked back down to the basement, and leaned out the opened doorway, trying hard not to disturb Hermione in the middle of her game. Not that he needed to, probably...she had an intense look of concentration on her face as she stared at the video display and manipulated the joystick with her right hand. And her tongue was sticking out of the corner of her mouth...a sure sign that there might be hexes flying if anyone tried to disturb her.

It wasn't until she'd cleared the current level maze that Hermione even noticed that Harry had returned. She risked a glance in his direction as she wiggled her fingers and took a deep breath.

"Hey...the clothes look good on you," she commented. "Give me two more minutes?"

"Erm...sure."

"Haven't played since last summer," she explained, as the next game level loaded up. "Didn't think I'd be able to do this well, but...lots of practice and muscle memory, I guess."

"So you can win this game?"

Hermione nodded, her eyes once again glued on the display. "You can win every time, if you know the right route to take, and don't make any mistakes."

"And have lots of practice?"

The highly-focused witch just nodded. Two levels later, she smiled.

"Yes! Still got it!" she declared.

"Very impressive," said Harry. "More so because you've had a few drinks."

Hermione snorted, then nodded solemnly. "Yes, that is the first time that I've played that game with a few sours under my belt."

The teen-aged wizard shook his head. "I can't decide which is more out of character...*Hermione the Drinker*, or *Hermione the Gamer*."

"Oh really?" asked Hermione. "I suppose you'd rather I be *Hermione the Bookworm*?"

"No, no...it's not that," Harry quickly countered. "It's just that...you're displaying a side of you that I haven't seen before."

Hermione looked down the front of her thin t-shirt and smiled. "You mean my display of drinking and gaming...right?"

"Erm...right...your display of *those* two," replied a rather flustered young man.

A snort escaped from Hermione's nose as she decided not to pursue this line of flirty bantering. And yes, she was quite convinced that the banter with her best friend was quite flirty.

She waved towards the joystick asked, "Want to play?"

Harry chuckled. "Thanks, but I sure that I'd be horrible at it. Besides, it's only a one-player game."

Hermione chuckled. "You'd rather play with me instead of playing with yourself, then?"

"Not necessarily," Harry said with a smile. "I'd also be perfectly happy watching you play with yourself."

"I bet you would."

"And you'd win that bet."

"Erm, right...table tennis?" Hermione asked, once again backing off of the bantering.

"I'd love to," Harry replied, moving towards one side of the table.

"You should know that I'm pants at this game," Hermione noted.

"Didn't like it as much as Pac-man growing up?"

"Didn't have anyone to play against," she admitted, as she picked up a paddle and ball.

Hermione was right about her skill levels for table tennis....but Harry wasn't any better, so it was an even match. Neither really cared. She was happy for the company, and he was happy to have something that distracted her just enough for her to open up and talk about her childhood.

"I never had any friends before Hogwarts," Hermione admitted. "My parents built this game room and bought all this stuff hoping that I'd develop some friendships and bring those friends here to play...but that never happened."

"Sure it did," Harry countered.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well...you brought me here, right?"

Hermione sighed in between volleys. "Harry, this isn't the same basement."

"Okay, okay...so video games and ping pong balls aren't Principal Exceptions," Harry teased. Then he placed his paddle on the table and nodded towards the television. "Shall we see if videotapes aren't Exceptions as well?"

"Are you really that curious, or are you conceding defeat?"

"Yep, I lost," Harry quipped. "Now pick out your favorite movie, pop it in the machine, and snuggle up next to me on the sofa so that we can move onto the next game."

Hermione arched an eyebrow. "And what kind of game is that?"

Harry waggled his eyebrows.

"Spin the bottle?"

"Harry!"

"Nude Twister?"

"In your dreams."

"Yeah, sure...but is that game in your dreams as well?"

"You wish!"

"And what if I do?" Harry dared.

Hermione was ready to shoot back a retort, but held her tongue. That was a question that deserved a serious answer.

At least she hoped that it did.

To gain some time, she silently walked over to "her" collection of videotapes. They were, of course, all there, and shelved in the correct order.

Without really thinking about what she was selecting, she asked, "Have you seen *Spiderman*, Harry?"

"No, that sounds great."

"Good," she stated, as she grabbed the VCR remote and pressed the play button.

Of course the machine worked, and of course the movie began to play.

Hermione didn't hesitate to follow Harry's suggestion that they snuggle together in front of the telly. His arms were resting against the back of the couch, and remained there even after she scooted up against his side and leaned her head against his shoulder.

Deciding that Harry was either too scared or too much of a gentleman for his own good (not to mention hers), she reached up and pulled his arm down onto her shoulder, and held it there until she was confident that he wasn't going to remove it. Harry didn't need that much convincing, and the two were soon very, very comfortable.

Right up until the point twenty minutes into the movie where Hermione began to panic about her selection.

"*Spiderman*" was her favorite kind of cross-over film...a movie that bridged the genre gap between "*Boy falls in love with the girl next door*" and "*Reluctant hero saves the world*." There were two big problems that she hadn't considered, though. First was the fact that the girl Peter Parker falls in love with had red hair, and bore a slight resemblance to Ginny Weasley. Not that Ginny was presently in the running for Harry's attention...Cho was far ahead of the Fourth Year in that race...but she knew that Ginny fancied him, and Hermione wanted to make sure that the only girl that Harry thought about as the movie played out was the one snuggled against his side.

Her second (and much greater) concern was how the movie ended. Yes, Peter Parker fulfills his destiny and saves the day...only to walk away from his girlfriend muttering nonsense about sacrifices and purpose. It wasn't until the second movie that MJ refused to let him go!

So what was she going to do...ask to switch movies for one with a brunette heroine? Force him to sit through both *Spiderman* movies? Force him to stay awake through both *Spiderman* movies? Simply admit that she had in a very short period of time come to realize that she wanted to be more than a best friend with her best friend?

Maybe there was a more subtle, less risky approach.

Hermione leaned a little bit deeper into Harry's side and smiled.

"Hmmm...this is nice," she purred.

"Yeah, it is...brilliant..." he replied, trying not to be too obvious as he reached for her shoulder and began to play with Hermione's hair. "Can't thank you enough for thinking this place up."

"You're welcome," she replied. "So long as you don't think that I only did this for you."

"Huh?"

"The Room did this for me, Harry," she explained. "While I was thinking about ways to lift your spirits, I was also thinking about something that I've wanted for a while now."

"What's that?"

"A chance to act like a normal teenager with you."

"I know what you mean...even if I think you are far more extraordinary than normal."

"Why thank you Harry...I feel the same way about you."

Harry nodded, then risked turning his face away from the screen long enough to drop an "innocent" kiss on Hermione's forehead.

"So...two normal teenagers?"

"That's right."

"Don't suppose you've prepared a checklist of normal teenaged behaviors for us to work through?"

"Harry!" Hermione hissed, giving his chest a gentle slap.

"Right, never mind...let's see. We've raided the old man's liquor cabinet, played video games and table tennis, watched a movie...what else are we supposed to do when we're left alone and unchaperoned in the basement of your house?"

"You mean besides Naked Twister?"

"That was a joke, you know."

"Think bad of me if I wish it weren't?" Hermione asked.

"Erm...don't suppose you've got a Twister game laying about here someplace?"

Hermione chuckled and shook her head. "Sorry...you'll have to settle for a snog."

Harry's breath caught a bit.

"Are you serious?"

"No, that's your godfather," Hermione teased.

"You know what I mean."

Hermione nodded, and reached over for the VCR remote. She turned off the movie, then swung her leg across Harry's lap, wrapped her arms around his neck, and straddled his thighs. She then leaned forward, until their noses were just a few inches apart, and whispered.

"I'm pretty certain that snogging is on the checklist of normal teenage activity."

"Well then...we must be diligent about these sorts of things, mustn't we?"

The Muggleborn witch nodded as she closed her eyes and closed the distance between Harry's lips and her own.

oo00000oo

There was a very content smile on Harry Potter's lips when he woke the next morning. It had probably never left his lips during the night...why should that smile go away, when you are stretched out on a comfortable couch, spooning against a very pretty witch, with your arm wrapped around her side and your hand slipped up her shirt?

But then he opened his eyes, and immediately thought of one very good reason to lose that smile.

Hermione protested when he tried to pull his hand back.

"Leave it," she muttered, trying to drag it back into place while her eyes were still shut. "It's comfy."

"Erm....you awake, Hermione?"

"No, I'm still asleep."

Oh.”

“Hermione?”

“Yes, Harry?”

“Is getting caught by a girl’s father with your hand up her shirt somewhere on that checklist of normal teenager activities?”

“Probably...why?”

“Because you two can mark that one off of your lists now,” said a man whose voice was very much awake.

The bushy-haired witch whose slowly opened her eyes and smiled at the adult who was sitting in front of them.

“Good morning, Daddy.”

“Good morning, Hermione...care to reintroduce me to your friend?”

“Erm...sure. Daddy? This is Harry. Harry? This is my father.”

“Yes, I gathered that,” Harry replied, as he yanked his hand from Hermione’s grip and sat up. “Good morning, Sir.”

“Good morning, Mr. Potter.”

Harry was puzzled, and not just because he was still waking up. Hermione’s father was staring at him silently...but didn’t seem all that upset. And she didn’t seem all that surprised.

“Hermione?”

“Yes, Harry?”

“We really are in the basement of your parent’s house...aren’t we?”

“Yup.”

“So when did you figure it out?”

Hermione stretched her arms out and yawned.

“When I rang Mum and Dad up last night while they were still out.”

“You rang them up when you went upstairs?”

“That’s right. Asked if I could have a sleepover with a friend.”

“And they said yes?”

Her father snorted. “The fact that her friend was a teen-aged boy may not have been adequately conveyed to us.”

“Ah,” said Harry.

Mr. Granger stood up and said, “I’m going upstairs to help your Mum fix breakfast. You two will be joining us upstairs in a few minutes...right?”

“Erm....right Daddy,” Hermione replied. “See you soon.”

Harry waited for her father to walk up the stairs before he turned back to Hermione and asked, “Why am I not dead right now?”

“Because I asked Daddy not to kill you.”

“When you talked on the telephone?”

“Uh-huh.”

“During the conversation that left you certain that you were home...so when did you really suspect?”

“Somewhere in between the first and second scotch sour.”

“That soon? What tipped you off?”

“Well, there were all sorts of clues...you were the one that pointed half of them out.”

“But you didn’t tell me?”

“It was rather fun to pretend, wasn’t it?” Hermione asked. “Look, I’m sorry...I should have said something sooner. But things seemed to be going so well, and if the Room set things up that way...that’s when I really began to suspect, by the way.”

"When was that?"

"When I carefully examined what I was thinking about when I was pacing in front of the Room."

"You said that you wanted someplace where we could relax..."

"And act like normal teenagers," agreed Hermione. "So tell me, Harry...is there anyplace....anyplace...within the wizarding world where you can act like a normal teenager?"

Harry thought for a moment, then shook his head and chuckled.

"You've got that one spot on, Hermione."

"Thank you. I guess the Room did too."

"So instead of giving us that place, the Room created a doorway that led to that place?"

"It does make sense, doesn't it?" asked Hermione.

"What do we do now, then?" asked Harry.

His Muggleborn friend shrugged.

"So what's the difference between doing what's right and what's easy?"

Harry looked longingly at the magical portal that still stood behind the ping-pong table, then turned and walked towards the stairwell.

"Right now, I'd say the difference is one hacked-off father," he quipped, as he began to head upstairs.

Hermione followed close behind. She wasn't worried...her mum had warned her over the phone that her dad was going to do this obligatory scary father routine, and had promised to have him on a short leash at the breakfast table.

She smiled as she mentally checked "Meet the parents" off of her list of normal teenage activities. That smile grew as she stared at Harry's bum, and considered some of the more naughty items on that list that were not yet checked...but soon would be, so long as the Room of Requirement played along.