

Overlapping Dots

As the library's closing bell chimed, Harry Potter closed his eyes, tilted back his head, and scrunched his shoulders. When the *crack-crack-crack* of readjusting vertebrae didn't produce the usual admonishments from the best friend who sat across from him, the reluctant Tri-Wizard Tournament champion arched an eyebrow and opened an eye.

"Find something useful?" he whispered.

"Maybe," replied Hermione, as she transcribed a page of text. "Won't know for sure until we decipher the clue."

Harry nodded, and once again checked a piece of parchment that was stashed inside the back cover of his book.

A short, exasperated breath escaped his mouth.

Hermione looked up from her notes and let out her own resigned sigh. She didn't need to ask what was bothering her best friend, having long ago learned to read his body language like a book.

The arrival of Madame Pince kept the pair from saying anything of consequence, other than a hastily whispered "Mischief Managed."

"Miss Granger," the elderly witch stated, "the library is now closed."

"But just a few more....there are still some Ravenclaws over there....please?" Hermione asked, using her best puppy-dog eyes.

The librarian shook her head. "They know by now that the library is never truly closed for the night until you have left, my dear."

"Yes, Ma'am," Hermione sighed, as she packed up for the night. "Ready, Harry?"

The Boy-Who-Lived nodded, and followed her out the library's doors.

Two-thirds of the way back towards the Tower, Harry and Hermione checked over their shoulders. Not seeing anyone else in the hallway, they quickly slipped into the unused classroom that they'd adopted as an ersatz war room.

As soon as locking and silencing charms were reflexively applied, Hermione turned to Harry and asked, "I take it that the Prefect's Bath is still occupied?"

Harry nodded. "Been more than an hour now...those two have more stamina that I would have thought."

"How much stamina do you need to take a bath?"

Rolling his eyes, Harry replied, "Hermione, their dots have been overlapping the entire time...I'm quite certain that they're doing more shagging than soaking."

"Maybe they're just cuddling?"

"Cuddling naked in a tub?" Harry asked incredulously. "Sorry, Hermione....Slytherins don't cuddle."

"Speaking from personal experience?" asked Hermione with a grin.

"Of course not," Harry replied. "Why would I want to cuddle up next to a snake?"

"Does that mean you've cuddled up against someone in another house?"

"Merlin, no....you'd know if I had."

"Why is that, Harry?"

"Because...."

Harry paused to make certain that his response revealed nothing more than what was intended. Last he needed was to lose Hermione's friendship whilst mentally chasing her skirt.

"Because you're my best friend...you've always been by my side. Throw in the fact that you're the smartest witch in Hogwarts, and there's no way you wouldn't know if I had been....cuddling."

Hermione's eyes flashed. "Not even at the Yule Ball?"

"Urrrrgh...especially during that fiasco."

Harry didn't bother to add the fact that it had been a fiasco because the only girl that he wanted to cuddle with that night was dressed in periwinkle blue and on the arm of another Champion.

"How about you, Hermione...can you speak with authority on the topic of cuddling?"

The fourth-year witch blushed, and dropped her eyes to the ground. "No, I can't...not that Viktor didn't offer to instruct me..."

"Krum?" Harry asked in a sharp tone. "Did he try to...force himself on you?"

Hermione's eyes flashed to Harry's face, and she immediately tried to calm him with a reassuring touch to his shoulder."

"Sssssh, relax, Harry," she said softly. "Viktor was a perfect gentleman. Before agreeing to be his date, I told him that I fancied....erm, I mean...that I didn't fancy him. He respected that, and we went to the Ball as friends."

"Oh good," Harry replied. "I mean...it's good that you two knew where you stood with the other."

"Yes, that was good...if only it were that way with certain others."

Harry caught his breath, and decided that the conversation was going in an uncomfortable direction.

"Yeah, well, I'll let you and Ron sort that out on your own, I think."

"Ron?" asked Hermione. "What makes you think that I might fancy Ron?"

"Erm, I don't know...it's just, well...after the Yule Ball, it sounded as if he fancied you, and you told him that he should have asked you to be his date."

It was Hermione's turn to take a deep breath, and release it as a sigh of frustration. "Harry, I...when I said that, I was so upset at him, and about his attitude towards me. If he did fancy me...he should have gone about things differently, and asked me to be his date earlier, and much more eloquently."

Harry smiled. "You mean that it's not romantic to make your intentions known by saying 'Hey, Hermione...you're a girl'?"

The fourth-year witch chuckled and shook his head. "No, it isn't."

"So, just to be sure....you don't fancy Ron?"

Hermione snorted. "Merlin, no, Harry."

"But...but...but you did tell Viktor that you fancied somebody else, right?"

"Erm, did I say that?"

"Almost," Harry replied smugly. "You stopped short, but I've gotten almost as good at finishing your sentences as Fred and George are."

Hermione paused, tilted her chin slightly, then smiled.

"Yes, you have, haven't you?"

"So," said Harry, "who's the lucky wizard?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"I would," Harry replied. "But I'm even more interested in learning if the lucky wizard knows."

With a soft snort, Hermione shook his head. "Oh, Harry...I wish that he did, but...well, boys are daft about these things, aren't they?"

"Hey, I resemble that remark!"

"You certainly do," Hermione replied. She chose not to tell him that he resembled it in more ways than one.

"Well, look at the time," Hermione said, quickly changing the subject. "Better get back before we get caught out on curfew."

Harry nodded. "You go ahead, Hermione...I'm going to try to wait out the snake shag."

"But you've been trying for more than a week, now, Harry."

The Boy-Who-Live shrugged his shoulders. "Is there a better alternative?"

Hermione pursed her lips. "We haven't thought of one, have we? It really is too bad that your lavs don't have baths like ours do."

"S'okay...not like I'd want to take a bath while Ron and Seamus were mucking about the lav anyway."

"So there's somebody else you'd rather share a bath with, then?"

"Maybe," Harry replied with a grin.

"Anyone that I know?"

"Maybe," said Harry, his grin growing larger. "Now shoo...I've got my cloak to get around curfew, but you won't."

Hoping that Harry couldn't read her thoughts as well as she read his body language, the Gryffindor witch gave Harry's hand a squeeze and said, "Be careful, Harry."

"Aren't I always?"

"No."

"Well, okay, then, I'll make an exception for you."

"Thank you, kind sir," Hermione said with a smile. "If I'm not in the common room when you get back to the Tower, wait for me...I'll want to know that you got back safe."

Harry cocked his head. "And where are you going, then?"

"Up in my dorm," Hermione replied. "After all this talk about baths, I think that I'll take one myself while you're still out and about."

"Planning on a really long soak, then?"

"No, but it's not unusual for Lavender or Parvati to take one at this time at night...I might have to wait my turn."

Harry nodded. When inspiration hit, he dug the map out from his bag and held it in front of his face so that it came between Hermione and himself.

"You're right about that," he said from behind the map. "Looks like those two are sharing the tub right now."

"What?" Hermione asked. "You mean they're sharing the lavatory, right?"

"No, they're sharing the tub," he replied. He made a show of rotating the map upside down, and added, "Hmmm...those dots are getting closer...closer...and we have overlap! Enough to give a wizard ideas...."

"Ohhhh, let me see that," Hermione said, only half-believing what Harry was saying. Sure enough, the fourth-year's lavatory was unoccupied.

"You...you were having me on," she sputtered.

"Of course I was," Harry replied with a grin. "You're cute when you get flustered."

Hermione huffed. "So is that the only time you think that I'm cute?"

Harry arched an eyebrow. "Sounds like one of those questions where I'm in trouble however I answer."

"Tough luck, Harry," Hermione replied. But a reprieve was provided when she looked more closely at the map.

"I can't believe that I didn't see this before," she muttered.

"See what?"

"That the map shows the witch's dormitories and lavatories in far greater detail than the rest of the castle."

"Why are you surprised?" Harry asked brightly. "Considering who created the map...."

"Yeah, you're right," Hermione admitted. "It's a wonder that the map doesn't provide three-dimensional renderings of the witch's shower rooms."

"Oh, that's on a different map," Harry said smugly. "Snuffles promised to give me that bit of magic on my birthday."

Hermione huffed. "You're having me on again, aren't you?"

"Of course," Harry replied. "So scoot...before somebody else beats you to the bathtub."

Shaking her head in resignation, Hermione said, "I suppose that there's no way to keep you from tracking me from here to the lavatory?"

Harry smiled and shook his head. "I need to make sure that you get back to the Tower safely."

"But after that?"

"Well...you know what our DADA professor says about constant vigilance."

Hermione bit her lip to avoid the release of a wistful sigh.

"No worries," Harry said. "I promise not to peek."

"Oh, it's not a big deal, I guess," she replied. "What can you figure out from the position of a black dot on the map?"

"Erm, yeah...that's right," Harry said nervously.

"Stay safe, you prat!"

"Yes, Ma'am," he replied with a prim salute.

As Hermione left the classroom, Harry spread the Marauder's Map out onto a desktop. His hopes were raised when he spotted two dots move out of the Prefect's Bath and down the fifth-floor hallway. But just as made for his door with invisibility cloak in hand, he spotted two new dots pass by the originals and secure the Bath for their own use.

"Damn, more overlap," Harry muttered, as he sat back down in his chair. He scowled at the new dots and asked rhetorically, "Is it too much for me to get a little help, here?"

"Dobby be helping the Great Harry Potter, sir," said an amped-up house elf, right after he popped by the young wizard's side.

"Dobby?" Harry asked incredulously. "What are you doing here?"

"Harry Potter, Sir do be asking for help, and Dobby always waiting to be asked to help his great Harry Potter, Sir."

"Oh," the Boy-Who-Lived replied. "I didn't realize that Hogwarts house-elves were allowed to help students."

"Dobby just be helping the Great Harry Potter, Sir, or his She-Who-Must-Not-Knit."

"She-Who-Must-Not-Knit?" asked Harry. "Do you mean Hermione?"

"Yes, Harry Potter, Sir."

"Why are you willing to help me?"

"Because Harry Potter, Sir is a great and powerful wizard, and calls Dobby his friend," the house-elf replied proudly.

"And...Hermione?"

"She-Who-Must-Not-Knit be always helping her Harry Potter," Dobby replied. "When Dobby be helping Harry Potter's 'Mione," he reasoned, "Dobby be helping the Great Harry Potter, Sir."

"Well, that makes sense, I guess," Harry replied.

"So Dobby be helping how, Harry Potter, sir?"

"Oh, I don't know if you can," said Harry. "I need a safe place to soak with my golden egg, but the Prefect's Bath is always busy."

Dobby nodded seriously. After a few moments hunched over in thought, he straightened up and smiled.

"Dobby be thinking there is a place!" he said excitedly. "Dobby be seeing if the Come-and-Go Room be busy!"

The house-elf popped out of the room, only to return a few moments later with a frightened look on his face.

"Dobby, what's wrong?" Harry asked.

"Mistress Kitty-Cat's dungeon not a safe place for Harry Potter, Sir."

"Mistress Kitty-Cat?" asked Harry. "You mean Professor McGonagall?"

Dobby nodded his head up and down vigorously.

Harry frowned. "But Professor McGonagall doesn't live down in the dungeons...that's where Snape and the Slytherins are housed.

"Dobby not be speaking about Bat-man's dungeons," Dobby replied. "Mistress Kitty-Cat makes her dungeon and plays with her professors on the seventh floor, in the Come-And-Go Room."

"What is this Come-And-Go Room, Dobby?" Harry asked.

"It be being whatever a witch or wizard wants," Harry replied. "If Harry Potter, Sir, wants the room to be a bath, it be a bath. If Harry Potter, Sir, want a room full of chamber pots, it be a room full of chamber pots."

"I see," said Harry, thinking that this room sounded a bit like a magical holodeck. "So...right now, Professor McGonagall wants this Come-And-Go Room to be a dungeon?"

"Yes, Harry Potter, Sir."

"She isn't torturing students, is she?" Harry asked.

"No, Harry Potter, Sir," Dobby replied. "Mistress Kitty-Cat be only playing her games with other professors."

Harry snorted. Dare he ask.....of course, he was a Gryffindor, right?

"So who was playing with Professor Kitty-Cat, Dobby?"

"Right now she be playing spanking game with the Bat-man."

"Potions Professor Bat-man?" Harry asked amazingly.

"Yes, Harry Potter, Sir."

"She's spanking the Bat-man?"

"Yes, Harry Potter, Sir."

"And what's Professor Bat-man doing?"

"Bat-man be saying '*Well done, Gryffindor!*' after each whack."

Almost too much information, Harry decided. But in for a penny, in for a pound....

"And do these games...do they need special clothes?"

Dobby nodded near-violently. "Mistress Kitty-Cat be wearing big black dragonhide boots, and black leather knickers. Professor Bat-Man be wearing half of Mistress Kitty-Cat's old Quidditch robes."

"Snape is wearing Gryffindor Quidditch Robes?" asked Harry in disbelief.

"Only half, Harry Potter, Sir," said Dobby.

"Let me guess," Harry snarked. "Bat-Man was only wearing the top half?"

Dobby smiled brightly. "Dobby be thinking Harry Potter's 'Mione be making him even smarter than smart!"

Harry nodded, and considered his options. Like eyes drawn to a train wreck, his first inclination was to give Dobby his omnioculars and teach him how to use the "record" function. But that might be testing Dobby's loyalty, and Harry wanted to explore the limits of the house-elf's willingness to help in smaller increments.

"Dobby, do you think that the Come-And-Go Room will be busy much longer?"

"Yes, Harry Potter, Sir," Dobby replied. "There be Filch and Professor Mancy waiting their turns to play."

"Professor Mancy?" asked Harry with an arched eyebrow. Filing follow-up questions for a future point in time, he decided to stick to the issue at hand.

"Thanks for trying to help, Dobby," he told the house-elf. "Maybe this room will be available a different night."

"But the Great Harry Potter, Sir, be asking for a safe place to soak now!" Dobby wailed.

Harry nodded, hoping that his friend would think of something before he tried to punish himself. His patience was rewarded when Dobby's eyes lit up anew.

"Dobby be thinking of safe place for Harry Potter, Sir!" he announced. "Dobby be right back!"

As the house elf disappeared, Harry wondered what other potential adventure lay ahead.

Dobby reappeared with a wide grin.

"Dobby find Harry Potter, Sir, safe place to soak!" he said happily. "Dobby be taking Harry Potter, Sir straight away!"

In his eagerness to display his loyalty, Dobby grabbed Harry's leg and the two disappeared before Harry could ask more about this alternative location.

Harry and Dobby popped into a large tiled room, split into two parts. On one side of the room, a bank of sinks and mirrors sat across from a row of toilets. On the side, where Harry and Dobby now stood, shower stalls faced a ten-foot long rectangular sunken tub, filled with water whose surface glowed with fragrant wisps of steam.

"Erm...where are we, Dobby?" Harry asked.

"Ooops, Dobby be forgetting Harry Potter, Sir's egg," the house-elf said. "Dobby be taking Harry Potter, Sir's robes away for cleaning."

All of Harry's clothing disappeared from his body when Dobby snapped his fingers.

"Dobby?" Harry asked nervously, as the house elf disappeared. Dressed only in a leather wand holster strapped to his wrist, Harry fell silent and listened for other occupants.

A bracing January wind burst from an opened window and hit Harry head-on. Shivering from the cold, he braved the wind just long enough to glance out the window before setting his glasses down onto the pool's edge and jumping into the soothing warm water.

"A tower, from the looks of it," he noted, as he sank down to his neck.

Dobby popped back into the room holding the golden egg in his hand.

"Be calling for Dobby when Harry Potter, Sir be done with his soak," the house elf stated, as he passed the egg into Harry's hand.

"But Dobby....."

Harry instantly suspected that Dobby had selective hearing, for surely the house-elf had heard him start a sentence? With a shrug of his soaking shoulders, he craned his neck to look once more out into the room. Harry was more than a little nervous about where Dobby has brought him, and he hadn't brought the Marauder's Map along for a location check. But as long as he was there, with egg in hand.....

The Fourth Champion dived down into the water, opened his egg, and listened to the Mermaid's song.

Alarmed by the warning imbedded within the clue, Harry kept his head underwater while the song looped back and played a second time. Midway through a third replay, his lungs screamed and he was forced to close the egg and come up for air.

Where he hear a scream of a different sort.

"Harry!"

"Hermione?" he asked in reply. He turned towards the direction of the shriek, and squinted. Given his extreme near-sightedness, all he could make out in the rather dim light was a pair of legs and mass of bushy hair hiding behind a bath towel.

"Harry Potter! What in Merlin's name are you doing here?"

The Boy-Who-Bathed gulped.

"Erm...figuring out the egg?"

Banging on the lavatory door diverted both of their attentions.

"Hermione?" said a voice from the other side. "Are you okay in there?"

Hermione turned towards the door, and making one of those snap decisions that can alter the course of one's personal history, called out, "Sorry, I'm fine...Peeves was in here causing mischief again."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, thanks for checking."

Hermione wrapped the bath towel around her torso, then cast a silencing spell or three.

"Okay, Harry Potter," she said firmly, shifting her wand's aim from walls to wizard, "explain yourself."

"Erm...it was Dobby," Harry quickly said.

"Dobby, the ready-made excuse?"

"Yeah, it really was," Harry replied. "I was back in the war room, muttering about how I really wanted a place to soak, because the Prefect's Bath was still Shag Central. Dobby popped up asking how he could help me, and I just asked for a safe place to soak, and....well, apparently, Dobby considered this to be a safe place for me." Watching the wand tip move with Hermione's heaving breaths, he added, "You aren't going to make a liar out of Dobby, are you?"

Hermione crossed her eyes. "Oh, please...you didn't have any idea that you were in Gryffindor's fourth-year witch's lav?

"No, I didn't...looked out the window and figured I was in a tower, but..."

"But you didn't think to check your map?" Hermione asked sarcastically.

Harry shook his head. "Dobby grabbed my leg and popped me here without the map, or my bag...took my clothes, gave me the egg, and popped away again."

"But you can't apparate in Hogwarts."

"I didn't apparate," Harry replied. "I didn't do anything...Dobby carried me somehow."

Hermione shook her head dismissively. "Harry Potter, you knew I was planning on taking a bath, and here you are, naked as the day you were born...what were you...give me one good reason why I shouldn't hex you into next week."

"Because you want to hear the egg's clue and learn how our Head of House is a dominatrix and Snape is her bitch?"

Hermione arched an eyebrow. "That's two reasons."

Harry shrugged. "Both of them are pretty good, though...take your pick."

"This is such a ridiculous story."

"What, about Mistress Kitty-Cat's Dungeon?" Harry asked. "Straight from Dobby's mouth...he says that there's this Come-And-Go Room, that acts like a holodeck from Star Trek, and if you hex me then you can't find out that as well."

"That's a third reason."

"Looking for a better one?" Harry asked.

Hermione snorted. "I'm listening."

"Okay, how about...because you'd rather take a bath than explain to a whip-wielding Head of House why you hexed your best friend. And because you know I wouldn't intentionally do anything to hurt you. And I'm near-sighted, so even if you take off your towel I won't see anything more than three feet from my face, and this bath is at least ten feet long, and....well, because any other story about how I got here would sound just as crazy."

"Oh?"

"Sure...it's either Dobby, or...me finding a way to beat you back to the Tower, walking starkers into the common room carrying the egg, figuring out a way to make it up the charmed stairs to the girls' dorms, and making it past several witches without them noticing that boy who beat a Hungarian Horned-Tail had his tail hanging out in full view."

Harry's alternative explanation was finally enough to force a tight-lipped grin from his best friend.

"Anything else to add, Harry?"

"Well....just that the clue to the Second Task scares the hell out of me, and without your help I'm afraid that we're both in danger."

"Wait...both of us?"

Harry nodded seriously. "You really need to hear it for yourself, I think."

"And that means getting into the bath with you?"

Harry frowned. "You need to have your head underwater to make sense of the screeching, and you already know that the egg is charmed so that only I can open it."

Hermione bit her lip. "It's important enough that you don't care that I might see you starkers?"

Her best friend gulped, then nodded. "What's a little embarrassment, in exchange for your safety?"

Hermione sighed. "Oh, Harry, that sounds like rather melodramatic pick-up line."

"What's a pick-up line?"

"As if you didn't....well, maybe you don't," Hermione said with a sly grin. She then shifted her aim from Harry's forehead to her towel, and transfigured it into a skin-tight one-piece bathing suit.

Harry frowned as she stepped into the far end of the tub and sat facing him.

"Hey, what's the frown for...I thought you said that you can't see that far?"

"I can see shapes, and colors, Hermione...that navy blue is a sharp contrast to your skin tone."

"Well, then, allow me to fuel my fantasies," she said, as she grabbed her wand and changed the suit's color to match her skin color.

"Hermione, did you just...."

"Calm down, tiger," Hermione said with a cheeky grin. "I just changed the suit color."

"Really?"

"Want to check for yourself?"

Harry frowned. "Would you hex me if I said yes?"

Hermione bit her lower lip. "Would you think less of me if I let you check?"

"Erm....sounds like I'm getting in over my head."

"Of course you aren't, Harry," Hermione replied. "You're just to your neck...unless it was your other head you were thinking of."

Harry snorted. "Oh, I don't need to think about that head...it usually has a mind of its own."

"Dare I ask what it's thinking, then?"

"I hope so," Harry replied. "But first....the clue?"

Hermione nodded. "On three then?"

Harry nodded, and closed his eyes during the countdown. Once they were submerged, he opened the egg up, and allowed Hermione to hear the mermaid's song.

He expected her to follow his lead, and try to listen to the clue more than once. Harry was therefore surprised when, soon after the first stanza, he was tackled from underwater and pulled up into a deep embrace.

"Oh, Harry!" Hermione cried.

Any expectations that Harry had about being able to breathe once his head surfaced were dashed by the strength of Hermione's desperate bear hug.

"Need...too...breathe..."

"Oh, Harry!" Hermione cried once more. She back off on the pressure applied to his ribs just enough to allow for fresh oxygen.

As Hermione snuggled against his neck and sobbed, Harry tried to comfort her with soothing shushes and pats on her back, which was behind her front, which by now had almost completely spilled out of her transfigured swimsuit.

Oh, boy.

"Hermione?"

"Yes, Harry?"

"You do know that you're close enough for me to see you?"

Hermione snorted, and wiggled her left thigh where it had bumped into something hard.

"I think that I'm a little closer than that, don't you think Harry?"

"But..."

It was Hermione's turn to shush him.

"Harry?"

"Yes, Hermione?"

"Why do you think that I'll be in danger during the Second Task?"

Harry sighed. "You mean you don't already know?"

"Well, I might have an idea, but I'd rather hear it from you."

With a large intake of breath that rubbed Harry's chest against Hermione's in a very pleasant manner, he nodded.

"Because...I care about you more than anything else in the world....you're the thing that I would miss most."

Hermione smiled. "Oh, Harry!"

This exclamatory was combined with a second bear hug that was far squirmier than the first.

Not that Harry minded.

After a few moments, Hermione got a thought that caused her to pull back and look into Harry's face.

"So, when you say you care about me...is that a care for me like a sister kind of care, or something more?"

Harry chuckled to himself.

"I think, Miss Granger, that you are well positioned to answer that question yourself."

Hermione paused for a moment, considered their points of contact, then smiled.

"So is that a complaint, or are you just happy to see me?" she asked saucily.

Her lips, mashed up against his, kept him from answering verbally...not that his physical response didn't answer the question.

After a wonderful first snog, Hermione broke the embrace and flipped around so that her back was against Harry's chest. She pulled his arms around her into a firm hug, and sighed contentedly.

"Oh, Harry...we've got so much to do, now."

Harry nodded. "Want to get out, then?"

"Absolutely not," Hermione replied. "I'm quite happy to stay here, cuddling with you."

Harry chuckled. "But what if someone were to look at the map and see our overlapping dots? What would they think?"

Hermione smiled, closed her eyes, and leaned her head back against Harry's firm pecs.

"That it's impossible for a boy to get into the Gryffindor girl's dorm?"

"And if they should happen to see our dots overlap in a broom closet?"

"Have a specific broom closet in mind?"

Harry shrugged. "No, most of the sixty-seven are safe."

"Sixty-seven broom closets big enough for overlapping dots?"

"Uh-huh."

"Been scouting them out, have you?"

"Just from afar," Harry replied. He then squeezed Hermione closer. "So, what if our dots were to overlap on top of your favorite table in the library?"

Hermione shivered, and not because she was cold. "That...that might be more difficult to explain."

"So that means no overlapping dots in the library?"

Hermione reached up behind her and pulled Harry's head down for a passionate kiss.

"No. Harry," she said with a smile. "That just means no losing the map."