

Making Change

Making Change

September 30, 1997

It was the sniffing that tipped him off. When you grow up with someone, you come to notice all of their mannerisms, even try one or two on for size. Ron made a contented gasp when he finished a good meal; he made the same sound when he blocked a shot when playing Keeper. Ginny had a deep, throaty chuckle whenever a vicious prank went off as planned and a purring moan she produced whenever her current beau slipped his arms around her. Likewise, Hermione had her own sounds; the tut-tut sound she uttered when Ron or Harry were misbehaving; the little muted squeal she emitted when she was reading something of interest and a sniffing sound when she was trying to not cry. Harry had first heard that sniffing sound when he'd opened up the door to the girl's bathroom one night during his first year, the night that he and Ron ended up rescuing her from the Mountain Troll. Since then, he'd had a number of opportunities to hear it, along with the sobs that more often than not came afterwards. As his eyes tried to pierce the darkness, a blob of cold hit his spine; he had a good idea why Hermione Granger, Head Girl and future Headmistress of Hogwarts was crying.

"Are you going to come with me peacefully, or do I have to put you into a body bind?" he called to the sniffing figure in the shadows. The sniffing stopped for a moment and she moved from the darkness of the shadows into the pale moonlit hallway.

"I'll be all right," she said, running her hand through her hair before straightening her blouse and tucking her shirttail into her jeans. "Besides, you're sneaking off to see Susan," she said, wiping her cheeks with the back of her shirt sleeve.

He rummaged in his pocket, thankfully finding a clean handkerchief, which he handed to her. "If you're all right, I'm the Prince of Wales. I'm not sneaking off to see Susan; she's history. We agreed after the first week of classes that we were okay as friends, but pretty pathetic as lovers," he said quietly.

Hermione's face went through several expressions as she digested this fact. "Oh, Harry! That's awful, I mean, why didn't you tell me? What kind of friend doesn't know that about her best friend?" she asked.

"One that's having too much drama in her own life?" he countered.

"Yeah, that's about right," Hermione said, wiping her eyes with her borrowed handkerchief. "So, where are we going?"

"First the kitchens, then somewhere quiet to chat," he said, pulling out his wand to perform a subtle charm above Hermione's head.

"Very impressive, Mr. Potter," she said as the chill of the Disillusionment charm trickled down her body.

"Yeah, well, you're not the only one who studies stuff that's not on the syllabus," he replied with a wink before Disillusioning himself. Reaching out to the shadowy wraith before him, he found her hand, giving it a squeeze before they started walking towards the kitchens.

Moments later, Hermione cleared her throat. "Harry, why are you holding my hand?" she asked.

"How else am I going to keep track of you when we're both Disillusioned?" he answered.

"Oh, right," she replied.

~+~

The trip to the kitchens was perfunctory – after tickling the pear for admission, Harry lifted a small basket from a pantry near the door; evidently this was part of some standing order he'd made with Dobby. Hermione connected this to the fact that she'd noticed that Harry had been missing a number of meals since the start of the year. He Disillusioned the basket, carrying it with the hand that wasn't holding hers, slipping out of the kitchen like a couple of wraiths, wraiths that bothered to open the door, rather than floating through it.

She walked with him through the moonlit hallways, growing comfortable with his silent gait. After a while she concluded that he must have applied some sort of silencing charm, as they made absolutely no noise, even when walking in hallways that normally echoed under the best of circumstances. Several stairways later they began to walk towards a large mirror, that, oddly enough, reflected their Disillusioned selves. "Think Platform 9 and three quarters," he said as he kept a constant pace towards the mirror. Hermione closed her eyes, feeling a brief bit of resistance as they walked through the mirror and out onto a balcony overlooking the grounds. Harry cancelled the Disillusionment charms and then turned to Hermione. "Care to transfigure this chair into something that will seat two?" he asked.

She smiled, thinking what he might say if she transfigured it into something awkward like a very small love seat, a hammock or perhaps a large heart-shaped bed before transfiguring the classroom stool into a replica of one of the couches from the common room, plopping into it with a sigh. Harry took the opposite end of the couch, opening the basket. To her surprise he pulled what appeared to be a Muggle vacuum bottle, pouring

steaming hot chocolate into mugs. They drank their chocolate in silence, Hermione marvelling in the view. "So, is this where you took Susan last year when the two of you would disappear?" she asked, breaking their silence.

"Hm? No. Not Susan, we had other places we'd go when we didn't want to be seen or heard, besides, she'd get the wrong idea if I brought her here," Harry said, looking out over the grounds.

"Does it still hurt?" she asked.

"You can't miss what you never had, Hermione," Harry replied. "Susan was a nice enough girl, and was a truly brilliant kisser, but it was just a slightly less awkward version of what I had with Cho - nothing to talk about after bitching about Snape and talking about the Canons and the Harpies," he said, still looking out over the grounds. "How about you?" he asked.

"I broke up with Ron tonight," she said flatly.

"I won't say that I didn't see it coming," Harry replied. "Do I have to beat him up?" he asked cheerfully.

"No, that won't be necessary, I'm afraid that I took a leaf from Ginny's book and hexed him during our last row," she said, sighing as she sipped the last from her cup.

"Do I want to know what you did to him?" Harry asked, refilling her cup.

"It'll be pretty obvious," Hermione said, suppressing a little giggle.

"What did you do?" he asked, a grin appearing on his face.

"Partial transfiguration – he's got breasts now. Specifically, he's got *my* breasts now," she said, looking down at her own chest, her angry words still ringing in her ears. *There, you like them so much, now you have your own set that you can play with whenever you want!*

Harry began to laugh, quietly at first, and then deep convulsive laughs that Hermione found to be contagious.

"This," he wheezed. "This was a penalty for roaming hands?" Harry asked between gasps.

"Not exactly, oh, Harry, I tried, I tried so hard to make things work with Ron, I really did," Hermione said, putting her cup down on the floor. There was a long silence. "What?" she asked.

"I didn't say anything," he replied.

"That's the point – you're going to just sit there until I tell you everything, aren't you?" she asked.

"Um, yeah, that's the idea. I brood, you talk, Ron acts, and that's the big difference between the three of us. If you talk it out, you'll get better. You can't trust your roommates with this stuff, you're not going to talk to Ron about it for obvious reasons, you'd feel funny talking to his sister about it, so that leaves me, or Luna, and you barely tolerate Luna because you can never figure out when she's being spacey and when she's just being all intuitive and non-linearly brilliant," he said, looking into her eyes, causing a slight shiver.

"When did you get to be sensitive?" she asked.

"I'm not – it's a duty thing – fair damsel needs rescuing, the regular knight is examining his new cleavage, so the reserve team needs to go in for Queen and country," he said flippantly. "Sometimes availability counts for more than ability."

"It needed doing and we were there. That's been the story of our lives, hasn't it?" she asked.

"Yeah, just about," he replied.

Hermione pulled out her wand, conjuring a pillow, which she placed on Harry's lap, laying on the couch, her head resting on Harry's lap, looking out over the grounds of the school. She fidgeted for a moment and then moved his arm so that it was draped around her waist.

"Comfy now?" he asked.

"Yes. Thanks. This is going to take a while, so I thought I'd get as comfortable as possible. You're not half-bad as a pillow," she said, inhaling deeply. "Where to begin?"

"I find the beginning to be helpful, but then I'm not as brilliant as you are, or as intuitive as Luna," he replied.

"I'm not going to start at the beginning, but we'll get there soon enough," she said, resting her left hand on Harry's thigh while clasping his fingers with her right. "Remind me to thank Susan. Without her you wouldn't have learned how to properly cuddle," she said. Harry snorted in response. "It's true – your track record with girls is poor – first poor Cho, who thought that she was competing with *me*, then Hannah, who lasted less than a month, then Susan, who, it appears, knew when she was in over her head," Hermione said, ticking the girl's names off with her left hand.

"How'd you know about Hannah?" Harry asked.

"Who do you think Hannah was going to for advice?" Hermione asked rhetorically. "It's always the same – some pretty girl catches your eye, you torment yourself for weeks or months before you chat her up, the two of you have a good snog or three and then you discover that being pretty and kissable isn't enough. She doesn't understand what it's like to be Harry, and you start wondering what you found attractive in the first place," she

said, moving her fingertips in a small circle on his thigh.

"You've got me pegged all right," Harry chuckled.

"Well, think about it – who are the girls you know who are really your friends?" she asked.

"Well, there's you. Then Ginny, I guess, we're pretty good friends, then Luna, although it's always hard to tell with Luna. Susan and I are still friends, I guess – we don't hate each other at least," he said distantly.

"I'd classify your exes as friendly acquaintances," Hermione corrected.

"Yeah, that's probably about right. Cho and I still write – we do better on paper than we ever did in person," he said.

"I'm glad to hear that, Harry, I really am. Your ability to keep friendships alive is one of the things that I admire about you, when you're not being all pig-headed about things," she said.

"Like what?"

"Like the broom, or the rat, or trying to convince me that you had the egg all figured out, or swearing me to silence about that Umbridge hag, or the time you knocked Justin flat for what he did to Hannah," she said, giving his hand a squeeze.

"Well, I was right about the broom at least," he said putting on a mock aggrieved air.

"You were right – but I was right in worrying about Sirius Black – I just didn't know that everything the Ministry said about him was flat out wrong," she said.

"You weren't alone," he said.

"Yeah, but you were," she replied.

"I thought we were talking about Hermione, not about Harry," he said.

"I'm getting there – really I am. What's the real difference between me and my roommates, Harry?" she asked.

"Uh, let me think – you've all got great legs, so it can't be that. Lavender's a blonde, Parvati's got hair darker than mine and you've got pretty hair somewhere between blonde and brunette, but that can't be what you're after, because that's just an accident of genetics – so I guess it's that the two of them are all giggly and worried about clothes and makeup and boyfriends and you're concentrating on breaking the record for overall N.E.W.T. scores and keeping me from doing something stupid, as I am wont to do from time to time," he said.

"Well, you meandered a bit, but you got there eventually. Do you really think I have nice legs? Do you think I'm pretty?" she asked with a tone of wonder.

"That's two questions at once. I like it when you wear a dress; it's the only time I get to see your legs," he said, flashing a quick smile. "Yeah, I look at your legs. You're an attractive girl, Hermione. You're not trashy-flashy like your roommates, but I've seen many a head turn when you walk by."

"Thanks, it's nice to hear that I'm good for something other than revisions, tests and papers - anyways, back to my story. Ron, I've always been intrigued by Ron; then in our fourth year he figured out, a bit late, that I'm a girl," she said wistfully.

"Would you have rather gone to the Yule Ball with Ron than Victor?"

"Well duh! Although I wouldn't have said 'no' if you'd asked either," she said. "I knew in the end that it would be one of you, I just didn't know which one it would be."

"It was Ron," Harry said.

"No, Harry, it *wasn't* Ron," Hermione corrected. "My *thing* with Ron was something that I had to work through," she said, sighing deeply as she closed her eyes.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Of course you don't," Hermione said, opening her eyes. "I think it was the Brains. I don't think he ever fully recovered from the attack of the Brains at the Ministry of Magic. It's like it put an edge onto his personality – it accentuated his emotional highs and lows and took even more away from his ability to control his temper. I wanted things to work with Ron, because I thought if it did, we'd never break up, the three of us, I mean. Ron and I would be a happy duo circling around you - you'd eventually find the right girl and all would be fine. Everyone would be happy; at least that was the idea. I tried to make it work Harry, I really did, but in the end I decided that I couldn't live with it any more, because *I* wasn't happy," she said.

"So what pushed you over the edge?" Harry asked after a long silence.

"Any number of things: the bickering, the jealousy, the way he couldn't take 'no' for an answer," she said, closing her eyes again.

"Was he pressuring you?" he asked.

"I'm getting there, don't rush me. A lot of people think that I'm a prude, you know. I'm not though. I like being affectionate, and I really enjoyed the

physical aspect of my relationship with Ron over the last year, but I know what I want and how I want it, which made for a lot of conflict. At the risk of bleeding into too much information, when I go to bed with a man, I want a ring on my finger and I want to wake up with him in the morning, not sneak back to my own bed in the middle of the night, or make the walk of shame back in the morning” she said.

“And Ron wanted something else?” he asked.

“Ron wanted *everything* now. I wasn’t ready to sleep with him, not now, and I wasn’t willing to discuss living with him after we finished school. Ron knows which buttons to push, at least some of the time, so tonight he tried to talk me into everything at once when I was trying to point out that the boyfriend-girlfriend thing wasn’t working,” she said.

“So how did he end up getting all curvy?”

“Hush, I’m trying to tell my story,” she said, slapping him lightly on the thigh. “The snogging was delightful, but the groping didn’t do much for me. It was always the same old thing: after one or two good snogs, he’d grab my breasts. I didn’t mind him touching them, but the mashing got to be a bit much. No matter how many times I told him how I *wanted* to be touched, he go and do the same old thing,” she said.

“Stupid prat,” Harry said, looking away from her. “So why are you telling me all this?” he asked.

“I’m not the one who started this conversation, I’ll remind you,” she said.

“I thought you needed to talk – I wasn’t looking for a critique of your private times with Ron,” he said.

“No, but you need to know. When I told Ron that I thought we needed to step back and just be friends again, he asked me if there was another boy involved. I told him ‘no’ but that wasn’t entirely truthful,” she said, looking down at the floor.

“Please don’t tell me you were cheating on him, Hermione,” he said warily.

“No, never, but I have been thinking a lot about who I’d rather be with – which is close enough in my book,” she said, pushing up from his lap, looking into his eyes.

“Lucky fellow – does he know how you feel?” Harry asked.

“I’m not sure,” she answered.

“Well, let me know if there’s anything I can do to help enlighten the lad, whoever he may be,” he said.

Hermione sat silently for a while until she reached out her hand, placing it tentatively on Harry’s cheek. “You really don’t know do you?” she asked.

Harry shook his head slightly. “Not a clue,” he said.

Hermione leaned forward, placing the lightest of kisses on his lips, leaning back again to read the expressions playing across his face. She liked what she saw.

“No,” he said, shaking his head, “please tell me you’re having me on,” he said quietly.

“No, I’m not having you on. I’m not Ron’s girl – I never was,” she said. A wry smile came to her lips as she read Harry’s emotions. She leaned forward again, her hand moving from his cheek to the back of his neck. She kissed him again, a deeper, fuller kiss. Harry returned the kiss, moving his hands until they rested on her shoulders. When she pulled away, Harry folded her into an embrace. His cheek was scratchy. When she felt him relax, she broke the embrace and sat back a little. “It’s different when you care about the person you’re kissing, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Yeah, it is,” he said, swallowing twice.

“Don’t say anything, Harry – not until you’ve thought it through. I always knew that it would be one of you, Harry. Now I know that it’s not Ron. I think that Ron and I can still be friends, once he gets over tonight. What *were* going to be is up to you,” she said, pushing up from the couch. “I think I can find my way back to the tower. Thanks for listening to me. Thanks for bringing me here; it’s really a lovely view.”

“Hermione, wait!” Harry called. He pulled off his jumper and tossed it to her. “It’s a cold night, and this will be harder to see than a white blouse,” he said.

Hermione smiled, the first full wattage smile she’d had that evening. “Thanks. See you back at the Tower?”

“Yeah, sure,” he said, looking out over the grounds.

Whatever he was looking at, Hermione was sure that his mind was elsewhere.

~+~

September 30, 1997

Dear Diary,

Boy, talk about weird. Tuesday’s are usually quiet – I’m done with classes by 2:00 p.m., so I usually pack off for an early dinner and a night of reading and revising, with a short break to check in with Ben before I turn in for the night. Not tonight, though. Ben’s in the hospital, growing a new tibia, thanks to a mishap during the last Hufflepuff practice. I dropped by after dinner to bring him some chocolate and see how much I could get away with without making those blasted beds squeak (purely for medicinal purposes, mind you!). Hermione caught me in the hallways

afterwards. She wanted to talk. Boy did she want to talk!

She pulled me into an empty classroom, sealed and silenced the room, and then asked me to slap her! I did, of course. Hey, what are girlfriends for? Then she told me why she needed to be slapped. It took a fair measure of self control to not slap her again on the other cheek. She broke up with Ron tonight. I can't say that I didn't see it coming. Why she didn't dump him this summer after the mayonnaise incident the day of the picnic is beyond me, but she didn't. Still, to go from dumping my brother to snogging my best male friend in the course of an hour is a bit much. If the situations were reversed, and I'd dumped Ben tonight, I think I would have been able to wait a decent interval before swabbing out Harry's tonsils with my tongue. But, then again, maybe not, this is Harry that we're talking about, and opportunities like that doesn't come along very often. I hope he doesn't keep her hanging, the prat.

Speaking of which, Hedwig's at my window. Whoops, time to go – Harry wants to go for a walk. More, later.

I'm back – boy was that weird. After hearing Hermione's side of this sordid story, I've now heard Harry's version. They match up fairly well, all things considered. The tough part is not letting on that I already know most of the story. I don't think he suspects, though.

While I can't say much for Hermione's style tonight, she certainly has his attention; lucky witch. I gave up pining over Harry years ago when he became my friend. I've shared things with Harry that I haven't told another soul and vice versa. That doesn't mean that I'm completely disinterested. Although I've given up on him, I'm not completely over him. It's been odd, over the last two years, seeing him go out with other girls. Luckily, he hasn't done a lot of damage, to himself or to the girls. Susan was actually good for him, but I could tell that it wasn't going to last.

This one has me worried, though. Could they make a go of it? I haven't a clue. If he responds to Hermione, will he fall deeply in love with his best friend? Is water wet? Two years ago, I would have said it was hopeless. A year ago, I would have said it was unlikely, but now – I don't know. Harry's changed, Hermione's changed – it just might work.

Things with Ben are nice and safe. Although I doubt that it will last beyond school, if it does, I could see changing my name to his in a few years. Nothing with Harry is ever safe. Hermione is worried now, but little does she realize that she's in for the ride of her life if Harry doesn't freeze up.

Love maven writing mode on: Harry and Hermione in a relationship is a high-risk, high-yield prospect – if things worked, it would be the real deal, like Mum and Dad. If it didn't work, it would explode like one of Gred and Forge's Guy Fawkes' Day specials. I'll do what I can to help them work it out, but I'm not looking forward to picking up the pieces if it doesn't.

Well, enough for now.

GMW

~+~

It had been two weeks, not a long time for Harry to brood over anything, but it seemed like a year to Hermione. What was that saying about the coward dying a thousand deaths, the brave dying but one? He hadn't been stand-offish, or noticeably brooding, but those close to him, Ron, Ginny and Hermione, knew that he was mentally engaged in something else – it had been this way when he was fighting with Umbridge during fifth year, more of the same when he was properly learning Occlumency in sixth year – only the subject matter was different – Harry was now weighing his own heart. Hermione had given up hope that today would be any different when he caught her eye after dinner.

"Can we go for a walk?" he asked. "Alone?"

Her heart missed a beat. "Don't you have Quidditch practice at 7:00?"

"Yeah, but that leaves us with a bit more than an hour, plenty of time I reckon," he said, looking away.

"Sure," she replied, crossing her knife and fork on her plate which soon shimmered and disappeared.

They walked in silence through the halls, not close, not touching, not looking any different than any of the other students walking the halls. Harry led them out onto the grounds, cutting behind the greenhouses and through a copse of trees that Hermione never knew were on the grounds until they were on a small, plain field, away from prying eyes and listening ears.

"I can't bear the thought of losing you as a friend, Hermione," Harry began.

Hermione tossed her hair back, quickly capturing it in an elastic she'd dug up from her pocket. "You're stuck with me, Harry," she replied.

"I've thought it out," he said after a long silence walking together. "I've decided."

+++++

Copyright © 2005 – J Cornell – All rights reserved.

kokopelli20878@yahoo.com – write to me, I write back.

Author's note: I'm very picky about where I archive my fiction, which meant that this story became an orphan shortly after The Powers that Be booted it from SugarQuill.net.

Ah well.

The ending of this story is deliberately ambiguous. Did Harry say *yes*, *no*, or *not yet*?

You decide.

While I find Hermione to be a very attractive girl, I don't see much cause for inferring H-Hr from the text of the stories. Without belabouring the point, I'll be shocked if Harry is paired with anyone by the end of book seven, and doubly shocked if he's ever paired with Hermione. As Fernwithy pointed out, Hermione is *already* totally dedicated to Harry, what is there to be gained with pairing her romantically? That being said, I took up this

story to explore just what would have to be re-arranged for H-Hr to become possible. I hope that you enjoyed my little ~~thought~~ ~~crime~~ experiment.

My stuff is normally archived at www.PhoenixSong.net, although you can find WIP on my Live Journal page.

Regards, and thanks, Tim.

JEC (Kokopelli)