

Intermissions TLOS Intermission #1

INTERMISSION: PART I

INTERMISSION, PART I

It all started innocently enough, with an instant message on my Yahoo! Account.

But wait, first things first. I'm Aibhinn, one of the Founding Feathers of PhoenixSong.net, public school teacher, musician, writer, and, fortunately or unfortunately, Kokopelli's beta. It's not a high-maintenance relationship, but it has its moments, rather like this one.

As I said, it started with an instant message on my school computer. You know, the one that's not supposed to have any instant messaging software on it.

TLOSGinny : Hello, are you going to be home tonight at 7:30?

I could have ignored it; I suppose that I should have. I didn't.

AIBHINN: Yeah.

TLOSGinny : Good. I'll give you a phone call then.

Whoever TLOSGinny was, they were in for a rude surprise – there are about a dozen people in the world who have my home phone number, including my mother. It's not common knowledge, or even in the phone book—that whole 'public school teacher' thing I mentioned before. I put the message out of my mind and went back to grading papers. I desperately wanted to leave all of my schoolwork at school so I could do something else when I got home. I finished the papers, bundled up some stuff that I promised that I'd read after dinner, schlepped it all into the mighty Maus (my car, so named because it's small, grey, and fast), and drove home.

My apartment is small, cluttered, and occasionally messy beyond belief, but despite all that it's my sanctum sanctorum, the place where I eat, read, think, write, and when I get exceptionally lucky, entertain visitors. I'd made a crock-pot of stew earlier that week, and had rerun dinner to look forward to – which, when you live alone, is better than pulling meals out of little boxes that need to be microwaved. I had no practices, concerts, or other commitments, just some blessed quiet time alone. Before I hit the stairs, I pulled my wad of mail out of the box, quickly separating it into bills, which went into a big box to be dealt with later, advertising, which went straight into the trash, and magazines, which went onto the table by the couch for later reading. Rerun dinner went into the microwave (how did single people cook before these things were invented?), and three minutes later, I was settled on the couch with a bowl of stew and my favorite mindless drivel on the television.

The phone rang. I looked at the clock – it read 7:30. Caller ID was no help – it read "Incoming Call" which meant simply that whoever was calling had blocked the Caller ID. Curiosity overwhelmed me, and rather than letting the machine get it, I picked up.

"Hello," I said. Brilliant opening – always works for me.

"Hello. Is this Lissa?" I couldn't place the voice; this was definitely not someone I'd talked to before. It was a young, female voice, with a mild British accent. And she pronounced my name right, too—most people who only see it written pronounce it *Leesa*. "Please don't hang up. You don't know me, but I sent you an Instant Message earlier today. I'm Tea Loss Ginny."

"Tea Loss?"

She laughed. It was a bright, musical sound. "That's how I pronounce T-L-O-S."

"T-L-O-S?"

"The Letters of Summer – you know, Kokopelli's story. I'm Ginny, Ginny Weasley. I need to talk to you about the story. Please don't hang up, this isn't a crank call, and I'm not one of your students, really I'm not."

So anxious to talk to me she was repeating herself. Interesting. I decided to play along. "Okay, tell me something that only Ginny would know."

"Oh, gee, Hermione said you'd probably ask me something like that. Um, okay, The Big One, Kokopelli lost the first draft of the letter and had to recreate it from memory."

"Uh-huh. Keep going."

"Um, in the first draft, Harry wrote about how I got zits at a certain time of the month."

"And what time would that be?"

"Uh, on the New Moon."

There was a long silence. I was gobsmacked. As far as I knew, Kokopelli hadn't shared that detail with anyone. "Okay, 'Ginny,'" I said cautiously, "what can I do for you?" If this was a prank, it was a brilliant, world-class prank—and if I didn't have respect for world-class pranks, I'd have no business teaching school.

"I wanted to talk to you about the story, actually."

My eyebrows went up. "I'm honoured, but shouldn't you be talking to Kokopelli? All I do is edit his work. He writes it."

"Well, you see, that's part of the problem. I can't find him, so I went looking for you."

"What do you mean you can't *find* him? You're a figment of his creativity!"

Ginny began to cry, not loudly, but I could hear her sniffing on the other end of the line. "I know what I am, there's no need to be brutal about it."

Rolling my eyes, I decided that a little distraction was necessary. "Where are you calling from?"

"England, of course, it's the middle of the night right now."

"Where in England?"

"Leeds. I'm using the phone in Hermione's mum's office at the Uni."

"Why don't you call from home?" *Damn. Which university is in Leeds? I should knowthis.*

"Don't be silly," she snapped, "everyone knows that the Burrow doesn't have a telephone! You're trying to change the subject. I need to talk to you about the story."

"What about the story?"

"Well, for one thing, it's thirteen chapters into the story--fourteen if you count the prologue--and I'm still stuck at home in the middle of July, grounded for the rest of the summer!"

"I'm sure you'll not be grounded after Harry's Birthday Party," I replied glibly, hoping that Kokopelli had said something like that in one of his e-mails. Then something hit me. "Wait a minute," I said slowly, "we're only up to Chapter 11 on the web-site. How do you know about chapters twelve and thirteen?"

Ginny laughed again. It was such a pretty sound. "Kokopelli shares the stories with the people you call pre-betas. We come alive as the story is read and shared."

I winced. "So you're not going to chew me out for not finishing the betaing of chapters twelve and thirteen?"

"No, of course not, we looked at your schedule. You are one busy woman. Hermione and I are amazed at what all you pack into a week."

Looked at my— "How did you look at my schedule?" I demanded.

"It's on your computer - the one at home."

"My computer?"

"Yeah, Hermione says your firewall has holes in it big enough to drive a lorry through - I don't know what a firewall is, but I don't think that's good."

"No, it's not." *And apparently I need to make a phone call to a certain software company. And turn my computer off when I go to bed.* "Why were you looking in my computer?"

"Well, I kinda wanted to see how the story turns out."

Hm . Can't exactly blame her for that, I suppose. "And?" I had a feeling there was something she wasn't telling me.

She sighed. "Okay, I wanted to know what was happening between Harry and that - that *War Witch* Jasmine. Satisfied now?"

"I thought it might be something of the sort. Why didn't you check Kokopelli's computer? More of the story's likely to be there."

She made a 'tuh' sound of impatience. "Do you know where he works?"

"Uh, yeah, he works for the government."

"Exactly, he works for a three letter agency of the United States Government. Hermione says their firewalls are all top notch. We couldn't tap into his computer at work, and we couldn't even *find* his computer at home. Poor man doesn't have a cable modem. Hermione said something about a cheap dial-up, whatever that is."

Heh . Sounds like him. "Well, in all honesty, uh, Ginny, I don't have any chapters beyond 13, and I'm not even finished with that one yet. What can I do for you?"

"I need his phone number."

I nearly choked. After the long day I'd had and with my sense of the absurd well in gear, I had to restrain myself from telling her it was 1-900-555-BABE. "Would his work number do?" I asked.

"Yes, admirably. He's in the Eastern Time Zone, right?"

"Yeah, but he keeps kinda strange hours." I glanced at the clock. 7:45 my time was 10:45 his time.

"I'll call tomorrow, he's already home."

I gave her the number. I thought of giving her his home phone number, I really did, but no married man needs to explain to his wife of twenty-one years why he's getting long distance phone calls from fifteen year old girls. Besides, I didn't have his home phone number—just his work number (from which he'd called me once upon a time; it was on my Caller ID).

After Ginny hung up, I shot off a quick e-mail.

From: Aibhinn

To: Kokopelli

Subject: Crank Call?

I got the weirdest phone call today from a girl who may well be Ginny Weasley - the Ginny Weasley from your TLOS story. She may call you at work tomorrow. She's concerned about the story. I think she's worried about Jasmine. This is either the best-executed prank call of all time, or something really and truly strange is happening. Keep in touch; I want to know how this one turns out.

I remembered to shut the computer down after sending.

The phone rang again. Caller ID was blocked, so I took a wild guess and thought it might be Ginny again.

"Hello?"

"Lissa, it's me, Ginny. What's he like?"

"He's about six feet and an inch or so, brown curly hair and a beard. No mustache, though. Weird look."

She snorted in amusement. "No, not that, I mean, what's he like as a person?"

I blinked. "I don't know him all that well; I'm just his editor." I didn't figure saying *he's got a very dry sense of humour* would go over very well.

"Is he gay?"

WHAT? "NO!" I exclaimed. "Why would you ask that?"

"Well, he does write like a woman, you know."

"I never thought so, though I know others have commented on that. As far as I know, he's as straight as a laser beam." My best friend Helen's voice echoed in my brain, reminding me that scientists have got laser beams to bend recently. I ignored it.

"What character does he resemble?"

I shrugged—a brilliant move while on the phone. "He doesn't – he's not writing himself into any of the stories."

"Are you sure?"

Was I? I furrowed my brow. "Let me think about that." I pondered for a moment. "Okay, I take that back. You know Miller, from my story? He's kinda like Miller, only he says that that character is based upon a lawyer he worked with in the 1980s. He's also kinda like Abelard, except that he's funnier and not so creepy. Oh, yeah, and he can be moody, too. Is that any help?"

She chuckled. "Somewhat, thanks. You don't know how much this means to me. By the way, your Ginny says 'Hi.'"

"My Ginny?"

"Yeah, your Ginny, from *Heal the Pain* – we run into each other from time to time. She's really pretty."

My mind is slipping a gear here. "Don't you two look alike?"

"No! Heavens no. I'm not as geeky as Full Pensieve's Ginny, but I really do look like a fifteen year old girl, not some model from central casting."

"Neither does my Ginny!" I said defensively. "My Harry wouldn't go for anyone who did." I pause, then add, "She's not, uh, torqued at me for the

whole baby thing, is she?"

"Torqued? Oh, angry. No, I don't think so. At least *she's* getting snogged on a regular basis." There was a pause and what sounded like a voice in the background. "Thanks for all your help. I've got to go – Hermione is calling for me."

I was absurdly disappointed. If she wasn't the real Ginny, I was going to make an appointment with a psychiatrist. "Goodnight, Ginny."

"Goodnight Lissa – and thanks."

I tried to say goodbye, but the phone line is already dead. Kids, they have no sense of manners.

I can't wait to hear from Kokopelli – this is going to be good.

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Intermissions TLOS - Intermission #2

INTERMISSION: PART II

INTERMISSION, PART II

I get a lot of strange phone calls at work. In fact, most days all I *get* are strange phone calls. It's why I'm still here after all these years; if I had to do the same thing day after day, I'd quit, or at least I'd think about quitting.

Every morning when I arrive at work I trudge up the stairs, turn on my lights, fire up the computer, check the phone for voice mail, and then check my e-mail, office and personal, to see if the world has changed much since the last time I checked on it. The office e-mail had the usual assortment of cats and dogs, none of which required an immediate reply, so I opened up my personal e-mail account – most of which didn't require any reply either. There was, however, a note from my editor – or Beta, as she prefers to be called.

A bit about me is in order: by day I'm an attorney for the government. Most of what I do is kind of hard to explain, and some of what I do I just can't talk about – let's just say that it involves procurement and electronic stuff. By night, I'm a dad, husband, Webelos Den leader, reader of bedtime stories and walker of dogs. In between those two worlds, I write fan-fiction. My name? Well, for your purposes, I'm Kokopelli.

As I said before, it started with a note from my Beta.

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From: Aibhinn

To: Kokopelli

Subject: Crank Call?

I got the weirdest phone call today from a girl who may well be Ginny Weasley - the Ginny Weasley from your TLOS story. She may call you at work tomorrow. She's concerned about the story. I think she's worried about Jasmine. This is either the best-executed prank call of all time, or something really and truly strange is happening. Keep in touch; I want to know how this one turns out.

Aibhinn often makes me laugh. Sometimes she makes me think, too. This email did both.

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Like I said, I'm used to getting strange calls. I always look at the Caller ID in the window on my desk phone – I recognize a dozen or so numbers: my boss, my wife, a former colleague who calls me when he's too lazy to do his own research, that sort of thing. I recognize the area codes from our regional offices, the ones that call me a lot: San Francisco, Kansas City, Boston, and New York. When a call comes in with no caller-id, it's either my good friends at the Department of Justice, or the Auburn office, which for some reason has the caller-id suppressed. When my wife calls, I always answer either "Love of my life" or "Hey," depending upon my mood and who happens to be sitting in my office at the time. With all other calls, I answer "Counsel's Office," which is about as close as I'm willing to get to the prescribed greeting that our most recent political appointee mandated.

The phone rang and I swivelled to reach it, noting that the Caller ID merely said "Incoming Call." I picked up the receiver. "Counsel's Office," I said.

There was a brief bit of silence, what sounded like a throat clearing, and then a young-sounding British-accented voice said, "I'd like to speak with Mr. Kokopelli, please."

I wasn't ready for that, even with the e-mail from Aibhinn.

Nobody calls me Kokopelli. Well, almost nobody. I sat there blinking a bit, which was brilliant, of course, because on the phone no one can hear you blinking. "This is your lucky day then," I managed, finally. "This is Kokopelli speaking."

"Uh, sir, this," her voice squeaked horribly. "This is Ginny, Ginny Weasley; from your story."

"Uh, yeah, right," I said, sounding like I'd just stepped out of the lobotomy parlour.

"Please don't hang up, sir. This isn't a crank call, really."

"Tell me something that only Ginny would know."

There was a pause. "Probably not," she said in a much more subdued voice. "No, she's always been very kind to me."

"I don't think that *unkissed* is a word, either, but I'll let it slide for today." I was enjoying this more than I really should. As Aibhinn had said, if this was a prank, it was a world-class one.

"What about That Woman?" Her voice emphasized the words enough that I could actually hear the capital letters.

"What woman would that be, Ginny?"

"You know exactly who I'm talking about, Mr. Smartypants Author. That, that, *War Witch*!"

"What about Jasmine?" *If the Catholics are right, I'm going to spend an extra week in Purgatory for enjoying this so much. I just know it.*

"Why do you keep writing her into this story?!?" Her voice wasn't shrill, thankfully, but I still had to hold the phone an inch or two from my ear. "This is supposed to be an H-G story!"

"Actually, it's a pre-H-G story – I said so in my story application to the old Gryffindor Tower."

"What do you mean, pre-H-G?"

"Well, it's a Summer-after-Fifth-Year story, and it explains all about how you and Harry end up together, but you're not really a strong item by the end of the story."

"WHAT?!?"

"Well, you're not." I shifted the phone to my other ear, as the one it had been pressed to was beginning to ring.

"What kind of sicko are you, Kokopelli?" she spat.

"Evidently I'm the kind of sicko that receives phone calls from characters I write about in my spare time," I said dryly. "If it makes you feel better, you will have an understanding with Harry by the end of the summer."

"An understanding? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?!?"

So much for being able to hear out of *that* ear either. "You really don't need to shout," I said mildly. "I may be old, but I'm not deaf."

There was a pause, during which I could hear her taking a deep breath. "I'm going to hang up now, sir," she said carefully, "and go compose myself, and then I'm going to call you right back, if that's okay, and we can continue this conversation."

I refused to chuckle. I have too many women in my life—including a teenager—to risk that; I knew what would follow if I did. "That's fine with me. If you reach my voice mail, don't freak out. I'll be in and out of the office all day."

"Bye then."

"Good-bye, Ginny." I returned to the work they were paying me for, amused and intrigued.

Several phone calls, replied e-mails and one cup of coffee later, she called again.

"Counsel's Office," I said.

"I'm back," she said. I didn't get many phone calls from teenaged girls with British accents. I knew who she was.

"Hello, Ginny."

"Aren't you going to ask me some more humiliating questions?"

"No, I'm fairly well convinced that you are who you say you are."

"Well, that was easy."

"Ginny, I'm detecting a certain amount of hostility in your voice." I keep my own voice calm.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"You don't have to call me sir."

"Yes, sir."

I sighed. I *have* a teenager. I know all about mindgames.

There was a long silence. I considered firing up a cd on my computer, either Rachmaninoff's Third or maybe Benny Goodman at Carnegie Hall, but thought better of it.

"What happens next?" she said at last.

"Pardon me?"

"In the story, what happens next?" she asked, speaking slowly like I was a very dim bulb.

All right, then. If she's going to treat me like an idiot adult, I get to play with her brain some more. It's only fair. "Did I tell you that it's February here at this end of the phone call?"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"I'm thinking of giving up writing fan fiction for Lent."

"Lent?"

"You know, Mardi Gras, Ash Wednesday, forty days of denial in preparation for Easter, all that. It's a tradition of the Christian church."

"Forty days!?!!" she exclaimed, aghast.

"Yeah, forty days," I said. I *had* given it some thought, but for the most part I was toying with her as her attitude bothered me.

"Couldn't you give up smoking instead?" she asked plaintively.

"Don't smoke."

"Drinking?"

"Don't do that either. Don't even suggest what you're thinking, my wife would never go for it." The last part was added purely because she tweaked my ornery muscle. (I learned that phrase from Aibhinn, who uses it on occasion. It appeals to me—both the concept and the phrase itself.)

"Eeeewww, that's sick!"

I grinned. Teenagers can be so predictable. "Sorry I mentioned it."

"You're like, really old, right?" she said with revulsion.

"I'm about four years younger than your dad, Ginny."

"Oh." Another pause, during which I again tried very hard not to laugh. Experience with my own teen has taught me that dropping the subject means I've won. "Like I said, what happens next in the story?"

Her tone was much more pleasant now.

"How far have you read?" I asked, wondering if that was the right verb for how a character experiences the story.

"Chapter 13."

"Okay. Chapter 14 is a bunch of letters, setting up the next crucial junction, which is in Chapter 16."

"Does Harry write me?"

"Yeah, I am thinking that he may call you by Floo from Mrs. Figg's house too."

"Might?"

"I haven't written it yet."

"Oh. How do you know what happens next?"

"I wrote an outline."

"Oh." Amazing how many different meanings can come from the same phoneme.

"Fifteen is another chapter with Abelard."

"Is Jasmine there?" she asked suspiciously.

"Of course. She beats the stuffing out of Harry with Kendo sticks in that chapter."

"Does she kiss him again?"

"No," I said. *Not in **that** chapter.*

"Tandem broom rides?"

"Nope."

"Good." Her voice was satisfied. "What happens after that?"

"Well, Harry comes to the Burrow for his birthday."

"Harry's coming?" she squealed. My ear hurt. Again. Man, that was loud.

"Ginny, another shot like that and I'm going to have to put you on speakerphone."

"Oh, sorry."

"Harry gives you a present - it's a nice one. Don't ask, Ginny, Lissa doesn't even know yet."

"Anything else?"

"Yeah, Harry talks to your mum and dad about getting to know you better."

"What!?! " A horrified squeak.

I reached over and hit a button, replacing the receiver in the cradle. "Okay, that's it - you're on speakerphone now. Go back and re-read Harry's discussion with Laurel, it's all spelled out there."

"You're having me on."

"No, it's called foreshadowing."

"Whatever. What about The Plan?"

"It doesn't go so well."

"What!?! We worked all night on that, four of the most brilliant minds in England."

This time I let myself chuckle aloud. "Yeah, well, it kind of gets overtaken by events. The next chapter after that is called 'Cooking with Harry.'"

"What happens there?"

"You spend the day at the Burrow with him, alone."

"Thanks for the warning, I'll double up my knickers."

"You end up having a talk about your relationship."

"Yes!" Although I can't see her, I can hear her feet dancing, and can imagine her fist pumping in the air.

"Actually, you get into an argument with him."

The dancing stopped. "No!"

"Yeah, you do. There's nothing like it in all fan-fiction. I worked a long time on that chapter."

"Does he kiss me?" she asked hopefully.

I didn't answer.

"Well?"

Gotta answer, I suppose. I sigh. "No."

"No? What kind of pervert are you, Kokopelli?"

"Do you want me to pray about that question during Lent?"

Revulsion colored her voice. "No, giving up chocolate would be just fine, thank you! How does it end? TLOS, I mean."

"On the Hogwarts Express." There's a long pregnant pause. I push my chair back and pull a notebook from my bookshelf. "Hang on a minute, reading my own longhand is difficult," I said. Then I read her the last paragraph. There was a very long silence.

"That was very sweet," she sniffed. "Are you sure you're male? You sure write like a woman."

"I'm positive. Mrs. Kokopelli is positive too."

"Is that it? Does the story just end there?"

"Yeah it does. Then Mrs. Rowling writes book six."

"Oooh, what happens there?"

"You'll have to wait and find out." *As we all will*, I carefully don't say. She knows the way it works.

"Kokopelli?"

"Yes, Ginny?"

"What about Hermione?"

I blink, surprised. "What about her?"

"Does my stupid, bald brother make his move?"

I don't answer immediately. "What do you think?"

"I think he does."

I grin. Ginny's not a stupid girl, when she's thinking with her brain, not her hormones. "I think you're right."

"Kokopelli?"

"Ginny."

"I take back most of the nasty things I've said about you this week."

"Thanks, Ginny."

"Thank *you*, Kokopelli. Are there any more stories after this?"

"Lots of stories. You're in most of them."

"Well, that's good, I suppose. Um, could you quit your job and start writing full time?"

"You'd be the second to know when that happens." *And Aibhinn would kill me, but that's not precisely the point here.*

"Get back to writing."

"Actually, I've got to get back to work. I'll start writing on the ride home from work tonight."

This time I could hear the smile in her voice. "Goodnight, Kokopelli."

"Goodnight, Ginny."

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Author's notes: This is an intermission, a genre unique to fan fiction in which the characters are aware that they are characters in a piece of fiction. I first ran across this while reading ***After the End*** by Arabella and Zsenya, the best piece of fan-fic in the known universe. On the SugarQuill website one can find a slightly mind-bending Intermission in which the various versions of the characters all mill about in a carnival atmosphere. I didn't like the story at first, but it grew on me over time. It's written by Firelocks and is known as "Attack of the Clones."

Intermissions Maskirova - Stories From Sixth Year - Intermission

Stories from Sixth Year - Intermission

Monday, ten days later.

I am back at work – not as punctual as usual, but my boss is well aware of my situation and is cutting me some slack. I truly do work for the world's best boss. I pull a can of diet coke from the little fridge under my desk and fire up the computer. While waiting for Windows XP to grace me with its presence, I check my phone. The voice mail waiting light was dark. Good, no messages. It then winked on to spite me. I must have just missed the phone – it was probably ringing as I was trudging up the stairs. I punched in the appropriate codes and was soon faced with another mystery.

"Uh, hullo? Mr. Kokopelli? This is Hermione Granger. We have a bit of a situation here and I need to get a hold of you as soon as possible. I'll be calling back later, okay?"

Checking the little display window on the phone I discovered that I had indeed just missed the call. Oh well, she said she'd be calling back. On Friday, I'd left a "to do" list on the table next to the computer, reminding me of all the undone work that needed my attention. I scowled at the list, not because it was inherently distasteful, but because I was feeling under the weather. I won't bore you with my recitation of symptoms, but the only reason I was at work was the probability that I'd get more rest at work than I would at home, given the current level of chaos.

Windows finally graced me with its presence and I opened up the office e-mail and then the personal e-mail. I began to open messages, writing out quick responses where I could, and promise updates where I couldn't. The biggest part of my job was managing expectations – I was quicker than a number of attorneys in the department, but that just meant that a number of my clients had grown accustomed to immediate gratification.

Three phone calls and goodness knows how many e-mail replies later, the phone rang again. The caller ID window indicated INCOMING CALL, which meant that it was either the Government Accountability Office, the US Attorney's Office, or our office in Auburn, Washington, where it wasn't even 6:00 a.m. yet.

"Counsel's Office," I said, cradling the phone against my shoulder.

"Uh, hullo? Mr. Kokopelli? This is Hermione Granger," said a youngish voice with a cultured British accent.

"Hi, Hermione, how are things?" I replied.

"Uh, not so good, actually," she answered.

"Where did you go to school before Hogwarts?" I asked.

"Um, Belhaven Montessori?" she answered, sounding a bit odd in her response.

"In what faith was your Mum raised?"

"She's, uh, kind of Catholic?"

"And your dad?"

"He's Jewish."

"What date is it today?" I asked.

"August 7th," she answered.

"What year?"

"Uh, 1997 – yeah, 1997."

"Okay, I'm satisfied. What can I help you with?"

"Um, Mr. Kokopelli," she began.

"It's Kokopelli," I interrupted, "no mister, just like Abelard."

"Erm, okay, whatever."

My other line began to ring. It too was from INCOMING CALL. "Excuse me, I need to put you on hold," I said.

"Sure," she said pleasantly.

"Counsel's Office," I answered.

"Uh, hullo? Mr. Kokopelli? This is Hermione Granger," said a youngish voice with a cultured British accent. It was the same voice as the first caller. I looked up at the phone – the first line was still connected. Apparently I had a situation on my hands as well. I put this Hermione on hold and switched back to the first line.

"Hermione, what year did you just finish at Hogwarts?"

"Sixth year," she answered.

"Who was Captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team?" I asked.

"Why, Harry, of course," she replied as if I were dim-witted.

"Okay, one last question – name the boys you've kissed on the lips," I asked.

"What?" she barked.

"Bear with me – it's important," I said.

"Well, there was Krum in fourth year," she began.

"Yes?"

"Then there was that pig McClaggen at the Slug party. . . and finally there was Ron on the King's Cross platform in June of this year," she said slowly. I'm fairly certain that she was smiling, but that's hard to tell when talking on the phone. I suspected that there had been more instances with Ron than just at King's Cross, but I remained silent; for a long time.

"Uh, and there was Harry too, when we were doing the dance lessons in July," she said with a bit of a fluster.

"Thank you; now I know which Hermione I'm talking to," I said.

"What do you mean, 'which Hermione?'" she asked.

"You know when I put you on hold?"

"Yes?"

"That was Hermione on the other line," I explained.

"Hm, I wonder what she wants," she said. Apparently, the notion of multiple Hermiones didn't give her much dissonance.

"Let's find out – I'll conference her in," I said.

Hoping that I didn't drop both calls I pressed the conference button on the phone and then the blinking light for the second line.

"Miss Granger?" I asked.

"Yes?" two voices answered. The voices were the same.

"Hold on just a minute – I have just conferenced in another call to my first conversation. Both of you callers claim to be Hermione Granger. This is going to be a bit daunting to keep straight. Hermione?"

"Yes," they answered.

"Let me start again – the Hermione who just finished sixth year with Harry as the captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, you're Hermione A, okay?"

"Okay," one of the voices replied.

"So, the other Hermione – who was captain of your house team?"

"Ron, of course," she replied smugly.

"And the two of you are dating?"

"Yes."

"When did Ron first ask you out?"

"The night of Harry's birthday, last summer," she replied.

"How did you correspond with Harry last summer?" I asked.

"By Passbox," she replied.

"Okay, I can state with a fair degree of certainty that the Hermione who is not Hermione A is who I would call TLOS Hermione. Hermione A – did you just finish the Delacour-Weasley wedding?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

"Did Harry end up in the Daily Prophet the day after the wedding?"

"Yes, of course," she replied.

"Did you write the article?"

"Of course, but I used a penname."

"Of course," I replied. "Hermione A, I'm going to call you Maskirova Hermione or Hermione-M for short. TLOS-Hermione, I'm going to call you Hermione-T. So, ladies, to what do I owe the honour of this call?"

There was a long silence.

"Erm, it's about Harry," one of the voices said.

"Who is speaking?" I asked.

"Me, Hermione, uh, Hermione-M," she answered.

"What about him?"

"Harry came to the Burrow after the wedding – he was supposed to join us, but he had no idea what we were talking about," Hermione-M said.

"Join you in what?" I asked.

"In the search for the Horcruxes."

"And that's when you figured out that this Harry was not the Harry you were familiar with?" I suggested.

"Exactly," Hermione-M replied.

"And you, Hermione-T?"

"Same situation turned around – Harry came to visit the Burrow after the wedding, expecting that Ron and I were going off to join him on some search, but we didn't know anything about it. Ginny figured out pretty quickly that this wasn't our Harry, although she says he's really, really close," Hermione-T volunteered.

"How long has he been at the Burrow?" I asked.

"About a week," Hermione-T answered.

"Has she gotten sick yet?"

"No, evidently this Harry is close enough for those purposes," she said in an oddly embarrassed tone.

"Would you two mind cluing me in to what you're talking about?" Hermione-M asked.

"It's a long story," I said, "but I will try to answer that in a minute."

"So what's going on?" Hermione-T asked.

"Well, it seems that you two have switched Harrys," I suggested.

"How could that happen?" they asked in unison. The effect was musical – eerie, but musical.

"As to the how, I'm at a bit of a loss," I said.

"Have you had any head trauma in the last month?" one of the Hermiones asked.

"No, but, ohhh," I said as the light began to dawn.

"What?" they asked in unison.

"I had surgery about a week and a half ago," I said.

"So?"

"I was under general anaesthesia – perhaps the two of them got bobbed during the process. Tell me, did Harry Apparate to the Burrow?"

"Yes," they replied.

"That's probably when it happened," I guessed. "So, Hermione-M, how is Harry getting along with your Ginny?"

"Uh, okay, I guess. They're a couple again," she answered.

"So they're affectionate together?"

"Well, duh, of course they are, this *is* Harry and Ginny we're talking about," Hermione-M replied.

"Any out of the ordinary behaviour for either of them?"

"Well, Harry did ask to go to church this Sunday," Hermione-M said.

"And that's unusual?"

"Yeah, he's not much of a churchman," she replied.

"Did Ginny go with him?" I asked.

"Yeah – she said she liked it," Hermione-M said.

"Well, I guess this mix-up isn't a total loss," I said. "Hermione-T, how are your Harry and Ginny pair getting along?"

"They're touching, if that's what you're asking," she said warily.

"Any odd behaviour?"

"Not to mention – my Harry went to church this weekend too."

"Hm, Ginny probably talked him into it. Well, ladies, I need to make some phone calls and see what I can do to help you out with this situation – can you call me back in about an hour?"

"Sure," Hermione-M replied.

"No problem," Hermione-T said.

My head hurt before this phone call – now it really hurt. I choked down some acetaminophen tablets, hoping that life would improve. It was too early to call Mr. Intel, given the time zone difference, but Full Pensieve should be at work already, he was only one hour behind me in the Central time zone.

Full Pensieve thought I was pulling his leg when I first explained the situation to him, but then he applied some of his formidable brain power, suggesting a few things that had not occurred to me. Right out of the box, he suggested that I had a hole in my head, and that the two Harrys had fallen through the hole into each other's time/space streams. His parting comment was, "Don't cross the streams," to which I replied, "Thank you very much Dr. Venkman."

I actually got some work done before the phone rang again. It was one of my clients in the building – I told them that I'd be free to meet with them after lunchtime, which made her happy. It was close to the end of the government's fiscal year and my Contracting Officer clients were going batty with the workload. The next phone call was Hermione-T. We chatted for a bit about nothing much in particular until Hermione-M called on the other line. I conferenced her in without dropping either line. Wow, I was on a roll. "Hermione-M, is Harry available?"

"Not exactly," she replied.

"Which means?"

"I'm calling from my mum's office at the Uni – using a voice over IP line," she answered.

"Me too," Hermione-T volunteered.

"Okay, Hermione-T, where's Harry and your Ginny right now?"

"They're at the Burrow," Hermione-T replied.

"Okay, make sure that they stay together for the next hour or so," I said. "Hermione-M, can you Apparate back to wherever Harry is right now?"

"Certainly," she replied.

Good, you call Abelard's Portal. When it comes, have him send it to *his* Ginny, the one he marked. Use exactly those words. When he does that he can open the portal and he can swap himself out for the Harry that's hanging out with Hermione-T," I said.

"He's to call Abelard's Portal, sending it to his Ginny, the one he marked. I assume that this will make sense to him," Hermione-M said.

"It should. Hermione-T, it's important that your Harry-Ginny pair stay close to each other for the next hour or so while Hermione-M gets things rolling," I said.

"Got it," Hermione-T said.

"Okay ladies, call me back either way," I said, reaching under the desk for another diet coke. I really need to cut back on those, but today was not going to be the day. I started work on a memorandum my boss had asked me to write for the new General Counsel, which was a challenge as I had to summarize about fifty years of esoteric background without being boring *or* pedantic. Oh boy, my type of writing assignment. I was almost through with my explanation of post-award audits, and the most-favoured-customer discount policy, hoping that I could get away without explaining the concept of defective pricing when the phone rang again.

It was, of course, from INCOMING CALL.

"Counsel's Office," I droned.

"Hello, Kokopelli, this is Hermione-T," the pleasant voice said.

"Hey Hermione, can I assume from the happy tone of your voice that your Ginny has her Harry back now?" I asked.

"You may so assume Mister Author, you have one very happy girl here," Hermione-T said.

"Well, good, I'm glad I could be of some assistance," I said, looking back at the last paragraph I wrote with some distraction.

"Any clue on how this happened?" she asked pleasantly.

"Not a clue. One of my colleagues says that I have a hole in my head and when I was under general anaesthesia the two Harrys fell through the hole," I explained, not that it was much of an explanation.

"So, are you going to be going into surgery again anytime soon?" she asked.

"I certainly hope not," I said, "I'm still recovering from the prior surgery.

"What was it for, if I might ask?"

"I have a moderate case of sleep apnoea, the surgery was supposed to straighten out a deviated septum in my nose and make it a bit easier to breathe," I said.

"Was it a success?" she asked.

"Ask my wife in a couple of weeks. Given all the stuff that I carry around in my head it's a lucky thing that we had an even swap between stories – you could have just as easily received a Balrog or a fleet of angry Klingons," I said.

"You're a Trekkie?" she asked incredulously.

"Not particularly, but I did watch Star Trek -The-Next-Generation with near religious devotion when my son was a wee tot. It got us through colic."

"I wanted to ask you some questions," Hermione-T said, her tone changing as her voice got quieter.

"What sort of questions?" I countered.

"What's going to happen in my life questions," Hermione-T replied.

"Are you certain you want to know the answers?"

"Reasonably certain," she said.

"This is your future you're peeking into – didn't they warn you about that when you were working the Time-Turner?"

"They only warned us about trying to change the past – you can't go into the future with a Time-Turner," she explained.

"Of course you can't," I said soothingly.

"Do we win?" she asked earnestly.

"Voldemort is destroyed at the end of your seventh year," I answered.

"Does he survive?" she whispered.

"Your immediate circle survives – the crew that went to the Ministry of Magic at the end of fifth year all make it, your Mum and Dad make it."

“What about afterwards?” she asked.

“You go on with your lives.”

“What’s that mean?”

“You do a magical apprenticeship and some years at a Muggle university. You marry and have children, when your children are ready you go back to work and have a fairly successful career.”

“Do I stay married?”

I was silent for a while.

“Well?” she asked.

“Your marriage does not end in divorce,” I said, hoping that she wouldn’t press the issue.

“And after that?”

“You mourn your losses. After a measure of time you remarry and get something that few of us get in this life; a second chance,” I said.

“Was the first marriage bad?”

“No – not bad – difficult, but not bad. You were faithful, your husband was faithful, you had good times and bad times – you raised some beautiful children who were successful in their own lives,” I said.

“What about Harry?”

“What *about* Harry?” I countered. “I thought we were answering what was going to happen in Hermione’s life.”

“Harry *is* a part of my life,” she hissed.

“And he remains a part of your life. He marries and lives a very quiet life. Not as quiet as he would have preferred, but he is surrounded by friends and family. He works very hard at sheltering his family from the corrosion of fame and wealth.”

“Is he happy?” she asked.

“Is he happy now?” I counter.

“Very much so,” she said.

I didn’t say anything.

“So he stays with Ginny,” she said.

“That’s a reasonable inference,” I replied.

“I know about the story,” she said.

“What story?”

“The story that comes after *Stories from Sixth Year*,” she said.

“What story might that be?”

“*Ever after*,” she said.

I don’t say anything.

“I marry Ron, have a rocky relationship for twenty-something years and then become a widow the same time that Harry loses Ginny, then you throw the two of us together,” she says.

“Would you prefer to remain a perpetual widow?” I ask rhetorically.

“That’s just sick,” she protested.

“Your attitude will change over time,” I said.

“I still think it stinks,” she whinged.

“What do you *want* me to do, Hermione?” I asked.

“Make it better,” she protested.

"I do," I replied.

"Not like that," she croaked.

I really hate it when women start choking up on the phone. My Mum's been doing it this summer ever since Dad got really sick and died. It's not that she's not entitled to the emotion; I just don't care for it. Listening to Hermione evoked the same response in me.

"There *is* such a thing as too much knowledge," I said.

"What are you saying?" she asked.

"I can make you forget certain things," I said flatly.

"You're a Muggle," she protested.

"You'd be amazed with what I can do with a keyboard," I replied.

Hermione-T was silent.

"I think it's for the best. Do you trust me?" I asked.

"Yeah, I do – you seem to like me," she said.

"Of all the characters, you are my favourite," I said.

"Really?"

"Really – of course I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't share that with Jasmine or Gabrielle from Maskirovat," I said.

"I've been meaning to ask you about that – what's with pairing Harry with a 10 year old girl?" she asked.

"In your time stream Gabrielle Delacour is 10 this summer – in that time stream Gabrielle is a precocious almost 14, fully matured part-veela. It's one of those things that I can do with a keyboard," I explained.

"My head is starting to hurt," Hermione-T exclaimed.

"Mine's been hurting all day," I said.

"Well enough peeking behind the curtain – do what you think is best," she said.

"Goodbye, Hermione – I'm glad you called me and glad that I could help out," I said.

"You've helped more than you know," she said cryptically.

I didn't think much more about this, taking a late lunch after I finished the memorandum for the General Counsel. When I came back from my post-lunch stroll, I quickly banged off a drabble for my Live Journal. The final paragraph contained this text:

Hermione hung up the phone, a knowing smile on her lips. As she closed her eyes all recollection of this afternoon's conversation was moved into a part of her brain that was not reachable by her conscious mind. In her lap was a sealed envelop addressed in her careful neat hand: "For Hermione – do not open until your 45th birthday." She opened her eyes, looking down at the envelope in her lap. She peered at it intently for a moment before putting it at the bottom of her school chest. She had things to do and people to see; summer holiday didn't last forever you know.

I hope I did the right thing.

+++++

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Kokopelli20878@yahoo.com - write to me, I write back.

This is an intermission, similar to the two intermissions found in TLOS (the intermissions are found only on the PhoenixSong.net archive). The idea for the intermission is not mine, but borrowed from some clever stories on SugarQuill.net, the most notable being *The Attack of the Clones*. When I first read that story it made my head hurt, but it grew on me as I was slogging through *After the End*. As always, your mileage may vary.