

ALL CHARACTERS PORTRAYED WITHIN THIS STORY ARE 18 YEARS OLD OR ABOVE.

Summary: Fate was a hard cosmic being to please, yet when Harry Potter stood victorious over the corpse of Voldemort, the divine goddess couldn't help but jump for joy. Deciding her champion deserves a bit of a reward, she appears before him one night and offers Harry a chance—a chance to look through the threads of time as she does and gain a glimpse of his perfect future. Will he accept?

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Chapter 8: A Choice

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The transition into this new reality was smoother than any that had come before it.

No sudden descent into the raucous roars and screams of a Quidditch match, no dazed coaxing into consciousness by a pair of soft lips, no sense of being yanked through space as he was forced from a magic sleep. Just... warmth. A gentle shift. A moment where the world blinked and came back changed. Harry kept still for a breath, letting his mind adjust, waiting for the usual swirl of disorientation.

It didn't come.

Instead, what greeted him was a soft amber glow pouring in from the tall windows of a home he knew he had never set foot in, and yet instantly recognised as his. Or rather, would be his.

Could be.

The late afternoon light painted golden bands across honey-colored wood floors, warming the open-plan sitting room that stretched out before him. Books lined the walls in floor-to-ceiling shelves, organised in the kind of meticulous chaos that suggested a very specific system only a handful of people on earth could decipher. He was sitting in a worn armchair, its mismatched twin sitting adjacent near the fireplace, draped in a well-loved blanket and cushions just as equally dented and comfortable from years of use.

It felt lived in. Alive.

He knew this was the last future. Fortuna had been careful to make it known to him, to draw the threads taut. She had said the time was drawing near, that it was time to make a choice soon, but Harry could actually feel it now. All the other glimpses—the sunlit beaches, the stadium crowds, the laughter of other lives—were stepping stones. He'd already seen love in other forms, comfort in other arms, passion in other eyes. He knew the pattern. And yet, this one felt just as jarring as the others.

"What do you have for me this time?" he murmured to the empty room.

The house didn't answer, at least not in words, but something warm pulsed in the air. Magic. Familiar magic. A signature he knew as intimately as his own heartbeat, though he couldn't place why. It tugged at him like a soft thread tied around his wrist.

Then he heard it.

A key in the lock. A soft thump of a bag hitting the floor. A long, weary sigh—one he's heard countless times across countless years, though never quite like this.

"Harry?"

Her voice drifted down the hallway, warm and aching familiar.

His breath caught.

No. It couldn't be—

Footsteps padded closer, brisk but purposeful, and then she appeared at the edge of the sitting room.

The smile that spread across her lips hit him like a stunning spell.

"There you are," she said softly, with the intimate familiarity of someone who had said those words to him a thousand times.

'Merlin,' he thought. *'Her?'*

Hermione.

And for a moment, Harry couldn't breathe.

She stepped in, and the room seemed to shift around her. He wasn't just seeing her—he was absorbing her, every movement, every curve, every subtle flicker of emotion that crossed her face. Her curls, loose and softly pinned, caught the light, golden-brown strands framing her perfect, intense face. Her eyes were sharper than ever, alive with intellect and fire, but softened in that way only she could manage when she looked at him. Her blouse was modest but hugged her body in all the right ways, her blazer emphasising the curve of her waist. She moved through the space as she owned it, and when her gaze caught his, it softened, melted, and suddenly, the world shrank until only the two of them existed in it.

Harry's chest tightened. The pull was immediate, magnetic, and undeniable. She was beautiful. Of course, she was. He had always known that. Hermione was his first crush for Morgana's sake! But she was also his closest friend. He'd always known her as brilliant and brave, but this—this stunned him. He felt it in his pulse, in the heat of his hands, even as they rested idly on his knees. Every instinct, every memory, every longing collided in that single moment. Not disbelief. Not discomfort. Just a sudden, overwhelming pull—sharp, magnetic, impossible to ignore.

"Harry?" Her voice was softer now, almost hesitant, and it made his chest ache.

He blinked, and she was closer than he expected, dropping her keys onto the side table with a soft clink, the faint scent of tea and parchment and a trace of jasmine enveloping him. For a moment, he thought of his other friend. Of Ron. A wave of guilt threatened to slam into him, as if just entertaining this reality was a betrayal of his friend.

But was it? Something obviously happened, or at least could have, that led to this. Harry would never betray Ron willingly, and this—Hermione here with him—certainly felt like anything but betrayal.

It felt right.

Harry took a breath, pushing thoughts of his red-headed friend away as Hermione approached. He forced his composure, curling his hands into loose fists to keep from reaching out to her immediately.

"You're staring," she said, voice teasing and warm.

Harry smiled, leaning back slightly in the chair, pretending casualness while his heartbeat spiked. "Can you blame me?"

Her laugh, a soft, short sound that carried the warmth of familiarity, echoed through the room.

"Honestly, Harry. Surely there are better things for you to do than sit there looking at me like...well...*that*."

Harry's lips quirked into a half-grin, half-smirk. "What can I say? You look amazing."

And there it was—he had said it aloud. No hiding it. No clever dodge. She looked stunning, and he wasn't ashamed to admit that. It was admiration. Desire tempered with something else.

Hermione blinked, a faint flush rising in her cheeks, her eyes narrowing in mock exasperation.

"You're insufferable," she said, but the smile tugging at the corners of her mouth betrayed her.

Harry rose, slow, deliberate, and moved closer. He could feel the heat radiating from her, and it made the fine hairs on his arms stand on end. He deliberately closed the distance, slow enough to tease, fast enough to make her pulse quicken. She didn't step back; she didn't need to.

Instead, she tilted her head, letting her hair fall just so, giving him a glimpse of the curve of her neck.

"Long day?" he spoke, somehow managing to keep his voice casual—smooth, even—despite the shock knotted in his chest.

She sighed and stepped closer. Harry found himself leaning toward her without meaning to, drawn in by the subtle sway of her hips, the soft warmth she carried with her, the scent of parchment and tea and something sweet he couldn't name but desperately wanted to.

“Long week,” she corrected, “If I have to explain one more time why centaurs deserve the same standardised salary benefits that human magicals do, I swear I’m going to hex the entire Wizengamot.”

Harry blinked.

‘Magical rights activism. Of course,’ he thought with a hint of amusement. *‘She’s still the same Hermione, that’s for sure.’*

Before he could follow that rain of thought further, her arms were suddenly wrapping around his waist as a mane of semi-tame curls buried into her chest and tickled the underside of his chin. He felt his chest tighten, overwhelmed for a moment by how natural her arms felt around him. How right she fit into the space between his arms.

She pressed her forehead into his collarbone with a contented hum.

“I missed you,” she murmured against his chest.

Harry swallowed, steadying himself.

‘Play it cool. You’ve done this before. Just because it’s your best friend now doesn’t make it any different.’

“Missed you too ‘Mione,” he replied. And god did he.

He missed this closeness with her. He missed being able to just...take her in like this. As much as he loved Ron, the few months the redhead had been gone were some of the best of the entire war. Those quiet weeks with Hermione stood out in his memories like a lifeline. Moments filled with small touches, gentle embraces that edged on something more, whispered conversations when his connection with Voldemort kept them both up at night.

He remembers how close he’d been to kissing her that night—when they danced to the soft tunes playing over the wireless in their ragged tent. He had come so very close. It was only his thoughts of Ron and of Ginny that halted his lips that night.

What was stopping him now?

Unconsciously, he tilted his head down, placing a soft kiss against the crown of her head.

She pulled back to look at him, her fingers sliding down to his chest as she gazed into his eyes.

He fought to control the hammering of his heart. God, she was beautiful.

"You look incredible," he murmured, unable to contain the sentiment.

That earned him a faint blush and a very Hermione sort of amused squint.

"You're unusually charming today," she said. "Not that I mind. Just... making note."

Harry chuckled and allowed his hands to rest on her hips. "Maybe that's the point," he murmured, leaning down as if magnetised to her. "Or maybe I just can't help myself around you..."

A roll of her eyes followed by a huff.

"Flattery," she muttered, "is an obvious tactic, Mr Potter."

"Is it working?"

"No." A beat. "...Maybe."

He grinned, and her blush deepened.

Merlin, he's always loved that blush.

The words hung between them. Every instinct screamed at him to pull her close, to kiss her, to feel the warmth of her against him—but he lingered in the space, letting anticipation build.

Hermione's hands drifted to his chest, brushing lightly over his shirt, fingertips teasing. Her eyes held his, sharp and playful, daring him to act.

"Do you even realise how distracting you are?" he murmured.

She laughed breathlessly, a sound that made his chest tighten even further. "Distracting?" she echoed. "I could say the same to you, Potter. I was almost late today because of how long you *distracted* me last night. Need I even mention the day before that?"

Harry's pulse quickened, dozens of images flitting through his mind of Hermione in his arms, her mouth agape in breathless moans as he pushed his way inside her—

Hands tightened on hips. Green eyes darkened. Shock was dashed away, replaced instead by a low smoulder that was sparked to life by the woman before him.

“We could always distract each other a bit more,” he smirked, tugging her close until she was practically flush against him.

The hitch of her breath was nothing compared to the almost breathless flush that painted her cheeks.

“You can’t just say things like that after the week I’ve had.”

“And why’s that?”

“Because,” she sputtered, fingers tightening involuntarily in his shirt, “I am exhausted and vulnerable and highly susceptible to... to...”

His smirk grew. “To what?”

His right hand dipped down, leaving the curve of her hip behind to gently rest against the swell of her bum. It was a light touch, barely even there at all, really, but it was enough.

A whimper, a note of need that was quieter than a breath.

“Come here,” he murmured.

“I’m right here.”

“No, come *here*.”

He pulled her forward, closing the sliver of space between them, but stopped just before their mouths touched. Hermione let out a tiny, involuntary gasp, her fingers tightening in his shirt.

“Harry—”

“You sure you’re not too tired?” he teased softly.

Her response was immediate, breathless, and unfiltered.

“Kiss me.”

And he did.

Her moan was barely more than a low keening. A whine that slipped between her lips and whispered against his teeth. Harry drank it down, both hands pulling her closer with a firm grip on her arse. She tugged at his shirt, her nails almost digging into flesh as the kiss turned

heated. Harry responded immediately, pressing against her, matching her fervour, tasting the promise in her mouth. The world fell away completely, leaving only the pull of their bodies. With a single tug, she was in his arms, her legs finding a place wrapped securely around his waist as the kiss deepened. His tongue swiped against her lips, seeking entrance. Entrance that Hermione gave willingly as he began to carry her towards the hall.

“Harry?”

“Yes love?”

“Our bedroom is the other way.”

“...Right.”

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He somehow managed to carry her to the bedroom without stumbling around blindly. Between Hermione's lips and his lack of knowledge pertaining to the layout of this house, it was a wonder he hadn't planted the brunette on the first available surface and ripped her clothes away right then and there.

Thankfully, that wasn't necessary now that he'd found it, though he couldn't help but find the idea of shagging Hermione atop the hallway credenza more than a bit appealing.

Perhaps later.

He tried to drop her atop the large canopy bed, but Hermione's legs were too firmly wrapped around his waist, forcing them both into a tumble onto the plush mattress in a cacophony of squeals and laughter.

They rolled into a heap, Hermione planted atop him, their legs tangled together and her nose barely a hairsbreadth away from his own.

“Hi there,” Hermione whispered, her eyes sparkling with mirth.

“Hey yourself,” he murmured back, one hand reaching up to brush a few stray curly locks from her face before coming to a rest against her cheek.

Hermione's smile turned soft, her eyes fluttering closed as she leaned into his touch. She sighed. A sigh of a week's worth of tensions working loose in a single breath.

"I love you," she said, just like that. Simple, easy, almost offhandedly, as if she was mentioning the time of day, yet filled with affection and warmth all the same.

Harry felt his heart stutter at the words. She said it so easily, like it was an everyday phrase. To her, it probably was. The others had spoken those words to him, too, dozens of times in fact. It had affected him then, true, but Hermione was different. She was one of the first people he could ever truly say he loved. First as friends, and then something more. Something forged through war and bloodshed. Something he had convinced himself was impossible months ago when Ron had returned and destroyed that locket.

(It still tugged at his heart whenever he recalled the scene the locket showed them. Of him and Hermione in a loving embrace, lips joined in a way that he secretly couldn't help but yearn for.) He'd known he loved her for years, but now he could finally say it with all the right meaning behind it. Properly.

"I love you too," he whispered, his voice resolute yet still filled with awe for the woman before him.

Hermione merely smiled, tilting her head down to join their lips once more. Harry sighed, sinking into the kiss as his hands trailed down her ribs. When they reached the hem of her shirt, he stilled, some small part of his mind still feeling a bit taboo about touching his best friend like this. Hermione, though, had no such reservations.

Giggling against his lips, the brunette sat up, straddling his waist as she reached down and tugged off her blouse in a single casual motion.

His eyes immediately landed on her chest. Her bra was nothing special, just a regular cream coloured brassiere that framed her breasts, yet to him it was a sight more striking than any lacey set of lingerie could ever hope to achieve.

Hermione shifted, an embarrassed sort of laugh escaping her lips in a huff.

“Honestly, Harry, you’ve seen my breasts a million times. You don’t always have to stare like that.”

Her words registered in his mind, yet it was his body that responded. A tug, a shift of weight, a surprised yelp, and suddenly he was atop her, his hands firmly trapping her wrists above her head as he stared down at her flushed face. Hermione’s eyes were wide and glossy, her mouth stood halfway open, and her chest fluttered with quickened breaths.

“Of course I do,” he finally spoke, voice low and gravelly, “Because they’re beautiful, just like you.”

Hermione’s blush deepened, and she squirmed ever so slightly against his grasp. Harry’s grip remained firm, though. The only shift that happened was when he pinned both her wrists with one hand while he used his other to slowly trail his fingers down her throat before coming to a stop atop her right breasts.

A single pulse of magic was all it took.

The bra and the rest of their clothes melted away. Hermione gasped at the sudden invasion of cool air against her skin, but it was Harry’s lips upon her chest that truly caused the goosebumps to prickle along her flesh.

His mind was buzzing. He could hardly form a proper thought between the gasps of Hermione’s lips and the silky softness of her naked flesh against his tongue. Her legs wrapped around his waist as his tongue found the rough peak of her nipple. They tightened around his waist, enough that he couldn’t hope to ignore the furnace-like heat emanating from her centre.

Her squirms increased with every flick of his tongue, her moans morphing into a quiet plea as he sank his teeth into the sensitive pink flesh.

“Harry—*Fuck—Please!*”

He could never deny her.

He pulled back, wishing to take in the view. His breath caught in his throat at the sight. She was beautiful—No—She was *divine*. From her mused brown locks to her red flush that trailed down

from her cheeks and filled the space between her breasts. Her petite mounds moved with every breath, her glossy pink lips sat agape, red and inflamed from their kisses. His eyes trailed down, across her stomach and in between her creamy and surprisingly toned thighs. A small tuft of hair poked out, well groomed into a small patch above her womanhood. Her lower lips glistened with a ready sheen of her arousal, the light pink of her folds a stark contrast to the pale flesh of her thighs.

As if breaking from a spell, Harry snapped out of his admiration first and positioned himself at her dripping entrance. Hermione sucked in a breath, her eyes locked onto his cock as he rubbed the tip of his hardened length between her folds in fascination, his mind alight with desire, before, finally, he slowly began to sink into her.

It was a feeling like nothing else, the sheer heat and tightness of the bookworm's cunt threatened to drive him mad from the first thrust alone. It took all his willpower not to begin hammering into her like a rutting beast. Hermione deserved better. She deserved to be cared for. He would ensure all her needs were met before he thought of himself.

He began slowly, lazily pumping in and out of her tight pussy with short pumps. Each push back into her wet folds coaxed more and more whimpers of approval from her mouth. It was only a dozen or so thrusts in when she wrapped her legs around his waist and stared up at him with her brown eyes, desperate and pleading.

"F—Faster."

Harry leaned down, his lips finding hers in an intense kiss as he fulfilled her wish. He pulled out of her drenched snatch until only the tip remained before slamming back into her. Hermione cried out in ecstasy, her inner folds trembling around him as the sweet smell of her essence filled the room. The slaps and squelches of their lovemaking joined in, a harmony to her muffled moans that poured into his mouth with love.

"D—Don't st—stop," she begged, and Harry had no intention of doing so.

Her tight walls clamped his cock like a vice, and the sheer tightness dared to unravel his resolve.

Needing more leverage, he pulled himself up to his knees once more and pushed her raised legs downwards, holding onto her creamy thighs for support. Hermione's eyes bulged at this new position. Essentially folded in half, her pussy was pushed upwards slightly, causing the tip of his cock to grind against a particular rough bundle of nerves inside her folds. She grasped the sheets hard, the repeated hammering all but causing her eyes to roll back inside her head completely as she suddenly arched her back, an earth-shaking cry announcing her climax like an orchestra's finale.

Her juices coated his manhood, leaving a prevalent stain on the sheets below. The fluttering of her walls from her intense orgasm was his undoing, as soon after he slammed hard inside her with a grunt, bottoming out once more before erupting into her awaiting womb. Stream after stream of hot cum filled the brunette, her walls milking him for all he had.

Finally, after filling her to the brim with his seed, Harry collapsed to the side, drawing the half-conscious bookworm in a tight embrace. She whimpered softly, wiggling around until she was face to face with him, her brown eyes half-closed.

"I love you," she whispered again.

Harry smiled, seeking out her lips for a final, soft kiss.

"I love you too, 'Mione."

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Silence held the room in a gentle, unbroken grip. Not the sharp, needling kind that pressed between the shoulder blades and demanded to be acknowledged, but a silence shaped by familiarity. One that moved like a slow tide, smoothing over the edges of thought until minutes bled together in a warm, indistinguishable haze. A silence that allowed wandering minds and quiet breaths to coexist without expectation.

Harry wasn't sure how long it had been since he'd returned from his time with Hermione. A few hours? Longer? Did it even matter? Time moved with or without his attention.

Fortuna lay curled against him, the goddess tucked neatly into the curve of his body as if she'd always belonged there. Her cheek rested on his chest, rising and falling with the steady rhythm of his breathing. Her fingers drifted idly across his sternum, tracing loose, absent-minded circles that left trails of warmth along his skin. She didn't speak. She didn't need to. He sank into that silence beside her, letting the weight of the world slip from his shoulders one quiet second at a time.

It was a bliss that bordered on blindness—comforting, addictive, and perhaps deliberately numbing. Avoidance disguised as peace. Or maybe peace disguised as avoidance. He wasn't sure the distinction mattered. What mattered was the truth neither could ignore anymore: something waited just beyond this fragile stillness. The seconds slipping by had shape and purpose. The silence had stopped being shelter. It had become a question.

A held breath. A threshold. A precipice disguised as peace.

He supposed he'd expected something different when it came time to decide. Some great spectacle. A celestial hall lined with doors, each containing a future wrapped in metaphor and mystery. A ceremony, perhaps. A lecture about the nature of choice, delivered with dramatic pauses and cosmic grandeur.

It was foolish, looking back on it now. Life—and gods, apparently—rarely cared for theatrics.

Perhaps this was fitting. The end of the road arrived not with trumpets, but in a quiet tangle of limbs and warmth. A man and a goddess sharing the same silence they began with.

Still, even peace could not stall what needed to happen.

Harry exhaled, the sound small but sharp in the quiet. Futures pressed against the inside of his skull in gentle, insistent waves.

A life of warmth and steady affection with Susan.

A life of laughter and fatherhood with Gabrielle.

A life of seductive challenge and shared ambition with Narcissa and Pansy.

A life of adrenaline, crowds, and chaotic joy with Lavender and Parvati.

A life of change and healing with Hermione.

Each one vibrant. Each one a world of its own.

And for the first time in his life, he wanted them. Wanted a future—wanted several.

The cottage with Susan's soft mornings. The sunlit beaches and laughter with Gabby. The razor-edged wit and velvet promises of Narcissa and Pansy. The roaring stadiums and wild celebrations with Lavender and Parvati. The fight for a better world with Hermione.

Fortuna had told him he was allowed selfishness. But at what point did that selfishness rot into greed? How did one tell the difference? Greed had shaped so much of his life already—Voldemort's hunger for immortality, Dumbledore's hunger for control, the purebloods' hunger for legacy dripping into every conflict.

But power and lordship had never been his desire. He had enough strength to protect those he loved. Enough influence to live freely. Enough titles to last several lifetimes.

No—he didn't crave those things.

He craved happiness. He craved peace.

Simple words with impossibly heavy meanings.

"I want it all." The words rumbled through the stillness like distant thunder, his voice rough from sleep and disuse. "Is that even possible?"

Fortuna's hand stilled. Slowly, she lifted her head, golden eyes meeting his with a spark of something ancient and amused, like she was watching a child finally solve a riddle they hadn't known they'd been given.

"Possibility is a mortal concern, my sweet," she said softly, lips curved in a knowing smile. "I am above such things."

Confusion tugged at his brow. "But...you said I had to choose."

Her laugh was warm, light, and unmistakably fond. She rose slightly, stretching her arms overhead in a motion that made the gold of her skin catch the dim light like molten metal before she leaned down to press a playful kiss to the tip of his nose.

"I did," she admitted. "Though I never defined *how many* choices you were allowed."

He pushed himself upright, frowning. "I don't understand."

"I told you you're allowed to be selfish," she said, fingertips brushing along his cheek. "Did you think I chose those words only to comfort you?"

"You're saying I don't have to choose?" he breathed.

"Silly man." Her thumb stroked his skin. "Of course, you must choose. But whoever said your choice must be singular?"

The realisation blossomed slowly across his face, and she watched it unfold with open delight. Before he could speak, she leaned in and kissed him—soft, silencing, final. When she pulled back, she hovered close, her breath brushing his lips.

"Do not speak hastily, my sweet. Your next words will bind themselves into the fabric of what comes next, and even I cannot unmake them." Her voice dropped to a whisper, heavy with cosmic weight. "I have guided you as far as I can. The rest must be yours."

He swallowed hard. The air felt thicker now. Charged. Heavy with meaning.

"What do I need to do?" he whispered.

Fortuna's smile warmed, brightened, glowed. Her eyes flared gold like miniature suns.

"Take my hand," she murmured. "Take my hand and ask of me what your heart truly desires."

He reached out, fingers steady despite the storm inside him. Her hand fit into his like something destined. Green eyes met gold. And the words rose from him with a clarity that left no room for doubt.

"I choose it all. I choose happiness."

Fortuna's smile bloomed, radiant and triumphant. Light spilled from her skin like sunlight breaking through storm clouds, flooding the room in shimmering gold.

"As you wish, my love."

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Author's Note

One chapter remains! Hermione was supposed to come in earlier in the story, but I decided that she would be the best pick for a semi-finale for the more emotional touch.

Thanks for reading!