

Prompt: It's the day before Harry's birthday, and Hermione has completely forgotten to shop. What clever gift is she going to find in the last 2 hours before both the Muggle and the shops on Diagon Alley close?

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“Many Happy Returns”

Whitehall. July 25th, 2001.

Hermione's lunchtime walk through central London with her boyfriend had just gone from perfect to infuriating.

“You bought a jar of mud?” Hermione asked while glaring at the small vessel in his hands. “I don't understand. You said you were going to look for a spare broom at the magical antiquity fair.”

Harry's responding laugh brought a bit of colour to her cheeks. "After being best friends with a pair of Quidditch fanatics for almost a decade, you still don't know anything about it, do you?"

Ahead of them, an enormous bus pulled up to the kerb. Scores of Muggles began spilling out onto the pavement. He pulled on their linked hands to guide her through the pack of gawking tourists.

Hermione felt no shame for being ignorant about such a silly subject. In fact, she might have taken it as a compliment if it didn't mean having to come up with a new gift idea for Harry's birthday. She thought of the gleaming jars of Fleetwood's Handle Polishes recently purchased from a shop in Diagon Alley and inwardly grimaced. The presents would have to be retrieved from their hiding place in her flat and returned.

"I just don't understand why *this* particular brand of broom polish is better than something you could get at Quality Quidditch Supplies today," she said as they paused to admire the beautiful architecture of the Banqueting House. "I'll admit that I've devoted my time to more *useful* subjects, but it's obvious that this is second-hand. Doesn't that make it a bit dodgy by default?"

Harry placed the jar of cloudy brown liquid into her hand and turned it around until the label was directly in front of them. The words *Besom's Broom Browner* were barely visible in an

obviously hand-written script. "Do you see this marking in the margin of the label here?" he asked.

She squinted. "Number 16 of 50. Capel Celyn, 1904."

"Ffion Besom was the most widely-acclaimed broom accessory supplier of the early twentieth century," Harry said enthusiastically. "She only produced small batches of first rate products. Barmy witch never shared her secrets with anyone, though, so once she died all of her knowledge was lost." Harry's grin grew even wider. "The best thing about it? This tiny jar will probably last me for at least a year."

Harry's knowledge of obscure history involving everything related to Quidditch never failed to impress her. Not for the first time, she wondered what his N.E.W.T. results would have been if he had brought the same level of interest to his studies at Hogwarts.

"If it's so good, then why isn't it more popular?" she wondered once she had regained her voice.

Harry shrugged and tucked the jar into his robe's pocket. "Most people are obsessed with the newest and flashiest thing. Hardly anyone develops an appreciation for something so unique. I was no different when I was younger."

Hermione couldn't resist teasing him. "I hope you don't think your girlfriend is old and dull," she said while nudging his ribs with an elbow.

Harry merely laughed again and pulled her into a short, but heated kiss that left her flustered and wanting just a bit more.

"Should we keep walking?" he asked. "I'm not due back at the Auror offices for a few hours."

Hermione gnawed on her lower lip while she thought it over. "I'd love to, but I'm neck deep in paperwork at the moment."

"Well, thanks for spending your lunch break with me," he said and steered them toward the nearest Ministry for Magic entrance. She remained silent as they walked, attempting to savour every last moment with him before the crush of responsibility returned once more.

Hogsmeade. July 28th, 2001.

With only three days until Harry's birthday, Hermione had grown doubtful of ever finding an appropriate gift. He had never developed an interest in clothes, books, or anything else that might have made her task easier. His simplicity - something she normally appreciated about him - made him almost impossible to shop for.

She knew better than to ask any of her friends for help. Ron would suggest some terrifying new invention from Weasley's Wizard Wheezes, Neville would shrug and mumble something about a voucher, and any conversation with Luna would probably leave Hermione with a splitting headache.

Desperation had proven to be a potent motivator, though, and Hermione now believed that she had come up with the perfect gift. After discarding several unworthy ideas, she had finally remembered the first thing she had ever given him: a box of Chocolate Frogs.

She could have kicked herself for forgetting about Harry's sweet tooth. How many times had she heard him complain on the Hogwarts Express about the quality of the food he had eaten over the summer with the Dursleys? Harry had filled his pockets with sweets during every Hogsmeade weekend and if she could bring back just a bit of his childlike wonder at unwrapping his first bar of Honeydukes chocolate....

"Can I help you, Miss?"

Hermione was surprised to see that she was now at the front of the queue in Honeydukes. "I'm hoping you can help me. I haven't been in here since I was a student at Hogwarts and I've got a long list."

The shopkeeper smiled and held out a hand for her list. Half an hour later, she was making her way back to The Three Broomsticks with several packages under a Levitation Charm. Hermione had not hesitated to follow every recommendation offered in Honeydukes and – before she knew it – she had purchased far more than she had originally intended.

After Flooing to her flat and stowing the purchases in a cupboard, she started to lose herself in daydreams by picturing Harry's rapturous expression once she presented him with scores of honey-coloured toffees, a large sack of Every-Flavour Beans, and several bars of Honeydukes' Gourmet Chocolate. There was little doubt in her mind that this would be a gift he would remember for a very long time.

Hermione's good mood lasted until she Apparated to Harry's flat for their date that evening. Her boyfriend looked up from his spot on the couch as soon as she appeared. "Is it nine o'clock already?" he asked and glanced at his watch. "I'm really sorry, Hermione. I got to listening to the match on the wireless and completely lost track of time." He glanced down at his red Auror's robes and cringed. "Look at me, I haven't even changed from work."

"What is *that*?" she asked tremulously and pointed to the coffee table.

Harry ran a hand through his hair and grinned at her. "It's the vegetable platter I had for dinner."

Hermione sat down numbly. "I'm trying to make sense of a world where Harry Potter now eats vegetables."

"Well, I had to come up with something now that I've give up sweets," he said with an unmistakeable note of pride in his voice.

Hermione threw him a glare that could have curdled milk. "Are you having a laugh?"

"What? No!" Harry took a nervous step back. "I thought you'd be happy. You're always going on about how I eat too much sugar."

Her anger dissipated at once. She knew that Harry would never knowingly sabotage her plan for a birthday gift, so she chalked it up to coincidence. "Come here," she said and held out an arm.

Harry sat down warily beside her, obviously wondering at her mercurial mood. Hermione burrowed into his side and rested her chin on his shoulder. "You don't have to change for me, Harry, but I'm happy nonetheless. You're great just the way you are."

She felt his lips brush across her forehead before he pulled her closer. "You're welcome."

Hermione responded by kissing his neck. They continued trading kisses until they were snogging passionately. "I suddenly don't feel like going out any more," she said breathlessly. "Let's save you the trouble of getting dressed for our date and then getting undressed all over again."

"Sounds like a brilliant plan to me."

Hogwarts. July 30th, 2001.

“I... I don’t know what to say other than ‘thank you,’” said Neville. “I *had* thought about starting some sort of reward system to supplement house points, but this goes beyond anything I had considered.”

Hermione fought the urge to check her watch again. “Well, I’m glad you can use it. I’ll be honest with you: I wouldn’t be here if I had managed to get Honeydukes to take back what I’d bought.” She struggled to keep the bitterness out of her voice. “I should have realised that perishable food can’t be returned.”

Neville opened one of the sacks filled to the brim with sweets and started separating out the contents. “Sounds like there’s a story in there somewhere,” he said.

Hermione did not have time to share it with him. Hogwarts’ new Herbology professor probably had enough to be getting on with before students arrived in a few days, and she was in a rush to find a replacement birthday gift as soon as possible.

“Well, I’m just glad that you can find a use for all of this,” she said. “I’d just assumed that you’d leave the out in the teacher’s lounge, but I think your idea is much better. I’m glad that I don’t have to eat it all myself.”

Neville winced. “Filch would likely confiscate the lot of it. If you can believe it, the man grows more irritable every day.”

“I’ve got to be off,” said Hermione. “Thank you again for taking all of this off my hands, Professor Longbottom.”

After leaving Hogwarts, Hermione spent the rest of her day off browsing the shops of Hogsmeade, hoping to find something suitable, but nothing leapt out at her. When evening came and she still hadn’t come across anything, she Apparated to Diagon Alley.

Hermione was able to reject most of the shops without stepping inside. Harry already had a wand, a broomstick, and several books on defensive magic. The only thing that she knew he lacked was an owl, but he had put off buying a new one ever since Hedwig had died and she was not about to interrupt his mourning.

In a moment of impetuosity, she very nearly popped into Twilfitt and Tatting’s. The upscale clothing shop sold a wide array of witches’ undergarments and the thought of Harry’s

reaction to a new set of stockings or a lacy teddy made a blush creep up her neck. In the end, though, she knew it would be a waste as whatever she bought wouldn't stay on her body long enough to be appreciated.

Hermione was almost ready to admit defeat when she realised that she had come to the entrance to Knockturn Alley. There, near the intersection with Diagon Alley, was a shop she had never seen before. Hermione was pleasantly surprised to see that *Borgin and Burkes* had given way to something new: *Deacon's Dark Detectors*.

The interior was bright and cheery, perhaps in an effort to distance the new owner from the old. Neatly spaced rows of Sneakoscopes, Probity Probes, and Secrecy Sensors occupied almost the entirety of the small shop. A sign along the back wall read, '*Grand Opening! Steep Discounts On All Inventory!*' Hermione breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed as if the answer to her problem was somewhere inside.

"Are you shopping for specific threat detection or something broader?" a wizard asked from behind the counter.

Hermione thought for a moment. Harry spoke often about his work, and she couldn't remember him saying that he regularly faced one particular threat every day. In fact, she knew that he loved his career largely for the wide variety of things to do.

"I suppose I'm looking for something that detects general Dark activity. Do you have a particular item you can recommend?"

The shopkeeper nodded and escorted her over to a display of brand-new Sneakoscopes. "Several manufacturers have started to make improvements on very antiquated models of Dark detectors..."

After carefully considering the benefits and drawbacks of each, Hermione selected one that she thought would look perfect in Harry's cubicle at the Ministry. The proprietor seemed overjoyed to have made a sale, but Hermione was careful to ask about their returns policy.

She had discovered that one could never be too careful.

The Ministry for Magic. July 31st, 2001.

With the Birthday Shopping Nightmare finally behind her, Hermione was able to spend most of her next workday in relative peace and quiet. Near the end of her shift, though, she felt a

tap on her shoulder. A tendril of heat worked its way up her spine when she saw that Harry wore a particularly giddy expression.

“Are you busy?” he asked rapidly. “I want to show you something.”

Without a word of warning, he grabbed her hand, pulled her to her feet, and started escorting her through the Ministry halls at a breakneck pace.

“Honestly, Harry, I’m walking as fast as I can,” she said once it became clear that Harry really had no intention of pulling her into a disused office for an afternoon snog. “What’s all this about?”

Instead of answering, though, Harry continued on until they came to the Auror offices. Hermione saw that the large, open space was far busier than usual. Everyone from the newest clerk to the most senior supervisor was bunched up toward the far wall. Harry pushed through the mass of bodies until the reason for the crowd’s excitement became clear.

“Aren’t they great?” he asked enthusiastically. General murmurs of assent rose around them.

Hermione took a step closer to see what was so important. A half dozen large wooden boxes sat against the wall. Each one held at least a score of narrow, metallic mirrors. “Are those... no, they’re too small to be Foe-Glasses.”

“You’re still the cleverest witch your age,” Harry said as he plucked one from the nearest box and held it out to her. “They *are* the newest model of Foe-Glass and we’re the first Auror office to get an advance shipment.”

Hermione turned it over in her hands and saw that it appeared very similar to a normal, full-sized Foe-Glass, but with several strange additions. Several small knobs appeared intermittently around the edge. She pressed one and reeled backwards as it doubled in size after a brief delay. Harry reached out an arm to steady her.

“They’ve been enchanted with a variety of spells, but the Shrinking Charm makes it easier to use their other functions,” Harry said and took it from her. He shrunk it down again and showed her a retractable antenna useful for detecting concealment spells or hidden magical objects.

“I can see why you’re so excited,” said Hermione. “It has the functionality of both a regular Foe-Glass *and* a Probity Probe.”

“That’s not even half of what they can do, but I don’t have much experience with them yet” said Harry.

A sudden, ear-splitting screech came from their right. Hermione snapped her head around and saw another Auror looking sheepishly around the room. “Sorry everyone,” she said. “I accidentally activated the Sneakoscope function.”

Harry continued to extol the virtues of his newest toy, but Hermione barely heard him. Once again – through no fault of her own – her plans had been effectively neutered. At this point, she wasn’t sure if it was fate or if she was the victim of some horrible prank. The joy still present on Harry’s face reminded her that this was a happy occasion, even if she was now back to square one as far as birthday presents went.

“I’m really happy for you, Harry,” she said sincerely. “Would it be possible for me to look over it this evening? I’d be really interested in learning what spells went into its construction.”

Harry smiled as if he had expected nothing less. “We’re still on for eight o’clock?”

She briefly thought of trying to push it back, but changed her mind before she could open her mouth. “That’s right. I’d better get started. I’m making all your favourites for dinner.”

He gave her a quick peck. “I’ve been looking forward to it all week.”

Hermione’s Flat. July 31st, 2001.

Hermione was discovering that she had drastically overestimated her time management skills. After returning the Sneakoscope, purchasing fresh ingredients at the grocers, and making one last fruitless run through Diagon Alley for a birthday gift, she now had only two hours left to make dinner and change into something more appropriate.

While her culinary abilities had rapidly improved after getting her own flat, Hermione knew that it would take a miracle to have everything ready by the time her boyfriend arrived. Once she had begged Molly Weasley for some advice through the Floo, though, she managed to simplify several steps and was now confident that she had just enough time to quickly shower before changing her clothes.

Hermione enchanted several spoons, ladles, and whisks to tend to the various pots and pans on her hob while she raced into the bathroom. She quickly undressed and threw her keys, watch, and wand onto the edge of her sink before jumping into the shower. As she washed, she tried desperately to think of any last-second ideas, but was too worried to focus.

Her anxiety peaked when she heard the unmistakeable sound of Harry Apparating into her entryway. “Hermione? Do you need any help in the kitchen?”

“I’ll be out in a minute!” she called and shut off the water.

After wrapping a towel around herself and charming a pair of hairbrushes to tame her unruly mane, Hermione took one last look into the mirror before going out to confess.

Just as her fingers touched the bathroom’s doorknob, though, she had an epiphany.

She retrieved her wand and cast a Doubling Charm on her flat key, then conjured a small grey box and put it inside. Another spell transformed a washcloth into some wrapping paper. Three minutes later, she was walking out the door.

Harry had made himself useful in the kitchen and was busily tasting something when she walked up behind him and wrapped an arm around his waist. He did a double take when he saw that she was wearing only a towel, then broke into a broad grin.

“Is that my present?” he asked and waggled his eyebrows at her.

Hermione pulled her other arm out from behind her back and showed him a brightly-coloured box tied with a ribbon. “Happy birthday, Harry.”

He kissed her cheek and tore open the package. Before he could react, Hermione’s fear that he wouldn’t understand it made her start rambling. “I honestly had the *worst* time trying to find a proper gift for you, so I hope you don’t think it’s too small. It is a bit silly, isn’t it? How often do witches and wizards need keys to visit each other? I mean, you Apparated in here just a few minutes ago, so it’s probably pointless, but I –”

Harry silenced her with a kiss that made her toes curl. She threw her arms around his neck and gave as good as she got. “I love it,” he said against her mouth. “It’s a brilliant gesture. I was going to do something similar for your birthday in a few weeks, so now I’ve got to start thinking of a new idea.”

With her own trial by fire finally behind her, Hermione certainly didn't envy him. She thought about making a few handy suggestions to help him along, but knew he would value the thrill of the hunt.

Just like she did.