The Road Not Taken

by Noctis (DriveByDrabbles)

Summary

On the run from Death Eaters, abandoned by a so-called best friend. Harry and Hermione share an intimate moment one evening in the woods. (Book 7 compliant... sorta.)

Notes

Originally a response to the F--K YEAH HARRY/HERMIONE FIC FEST 2010 (http://community.livejournal.com/botherandbother/544.html) to this prompt:

'Thanks for the tea. I'll finish the watch. You get back in the warm.'

She hesitated, but recognised the dismissal. She picked up the book and then walked back past him into the tent, but as she did so, she brushed the top of his head lightly with her hand. He closed his eyes at her touch ..." (DH, pg 295, UK edition)

Wat if JKR didn't add tot he book what really happened after that innocent (or not so innocent) caress? (sic)

I took the above sentences from Deathly Hallows and wrote in a 'What if?' scene/vignette. Written in about an hour, no beta.

Originally posted over at Portkey (http://fanfiction.portkey.org/index.php?act=read&storyid=8759) and ff.net (https://www.fanfiction.net/s/6452815/1/The_Road_Not_Taken)
'Thanks for the tea. I'll finish the watch. You get back in the warm.'

She hesitated, but recognised the dismissal. She picked up the book and then walked back past him into the tent, but as she did so, she brushed the top of his head lightly with her hand. He closed his eyes at her touch, suppressing a delighted shiver at the friendly, yet intimate exchange of support; of affection. Hermione missed his expression but paused anyway.

'Here. Something to keep you company. It's actually yours,' she said, holding out a battered book.

Puzzled, Harry accepted the book and lifted it up closer to examine it while Hermione slipped into the tent. As soon as he felt the textured, weathered cover he knew what it was even without reading the title. He smiled at the thought of her reading it. *How like her to keep this one,* he thought.

The text was rescued from the Dursleys, one of many ignored and neglected belongings of his cousin: *The Oxford Collection of English Literature*. Although he tended to avoid his studies without Hermione's badgering — how easy life would be these days if that was the worse thing to look forward to! — this collection of poetry across five centuries was one of the few things he had left from his old life. During the many days locked in his stairwell cupboard, the soaring passages of freedom, of far-away fields helped keep a spark of wonder in that wizard-to-be that he was so many years ago. Poetry kept him sane.

He needed something to keep him sane these days, as worry about Voldemort, anger at Ron's betrayal and departure (that rat bastard git!), and his confusion about Hermione—

*Wait, Hermione? No, no, Ginny! I love Ginny!*  
*Do I?*

Shaking these disturbing thoughts free, he returned his attention to the book. Leafing through the well-thumbed pages, he laughed as he spotted scraps of parchment saving certain pages, and tiny notes in her quintessentially neat handwriting in the margins and makeshift bookmarks. *I'd say this is her book now more than mine* he thought. He stopped randomly at a poem with one of those parchment scraps: *The Road Not Taken*, Robert Frost.

He skimmed the passages, not really taking in the meaning but going through the exercise of reading. That is, until the last stanza:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

These sentences arrested him, but he didn't know why. Jumbled thoughts of recent events, of his friends, of the recently killed, of Voldemort — so much was changing around him, too fast for him to take in, too complicated to figure out. Except for her.

The thought struck him, like the proverbial apple on Newton's head. *She* had always supported him. *She* had always believed in him. And *she* was the only one still around for him.

As if summoned, *she* appeared through the tent flaps with a blanket in her hands. 'Harry, it's supposed to be cold tonight, I thought—'

She was cut off as Harry swiftly stood up and pulled her into an embrace. Before either of them knew what was happening, Harry pressed a kiss to a surprised Hermione who squeaked and
dropped the blanket to the cold ground. So stunned, she didn’t immediately pull back but stared at him wide-eyed and shocked at such an unexpected reaction from him. Harry touched his tongue to his lips, savouring the cherry-flavoured ChapStik from her. It was pure impulse that made him do it, and he braced himself for the inevitable.

‘Harry! What— I mean, what—’ she sputtered.

Harry squeezed her into a hug which she returned with confusion. 'I'm sorry to surprise you like that Hermione. It's just that I've been thinking— I mean, I want to thank you for being— I mean —' He couldn't quite explain it either. He took a deep breath and leaned back to look at her. Earnestly, he began again. ‘It's just like the poem. There are roads in front of us, and we choose one and accept our choices. Sometimes we look back and wonder if we picked the right road and sigh in regret, and sometimes we sigh in relief.

‘My paths were always chosen for me. Destiny. Fate. Fame. I didn't choose these. But I did get to make one choice: I got to choose you as my best friend. That's one thing I won't ever regret.’

She blinked at him, struggling to pieced together everything and associate it with the kiss she just received. She had never had one that left her so— breathless. 'I still don't understand, Harry.'

'The Road Not Taken. Robert Frost?' he said and saw a glimmer of understanding from her at last. 'He wrote about two roads before him. Just like me. I'm supposed to take the road to Ginny, you see, but....’

Hermione finally cottoned on with a gasp. 'Harry! But I— with Ron and—'

'I know. I know. But Ginny's not here,' said Harry, cutting her off with another quick, but tender, kiss. 'And Ron's not here,' he added softly.

She mewed, conflicted even as she accepted a third kiss from Harry, one that went on for a little while longer. The fourth kiss sent them tumbling back into the warmth of the tent, leaving the forgotten Oxford Collection of English Literature splayed on the frigid ground beside a tree stump.

Two roads diverged in the woods for Harry Potter and though the road he would ultimately travel was already chosen by misbegotten fate, nothing said he couldn't peek down the other path for a short while.

Nothing said he couldn't see it with a friend.

And that had made all the difference.

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