

Caught Somewhere in Time

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Caught Somewhere in Time

by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

When Pepper Potts is accidentally sucked into a portal, she finds herself caught in a time loop, doomed to repeat the same summer engagement party over and over again...unless she can find a way to break the loop and return to her own time. But when Pepper falls head over turquoise heels for a certain bushy haired Gryffindor, will she be able to have it all?

Written for the Marvelously Magical Summer Fling 2020.

Notes

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Thank you for taking the time to read. I hope you enjoy it.

As Avengers parties went, it wasn't a bad little summer soirée, Wanda Maximoff reflected. Granted, it had started to go downhill once Tony Stark and Dr Strange had started downing shots, but it was quite a bit of fun to watch. She had giggled into her drink when Pepper Potts had come marching into the room to drag Mr Stark off to bed. Although Wanda and her brother had cursed Stark's name for so many years, she had to admit, he really was the life of the party.

"Hey, where are you going?" Dr Strange complained, opening a portal at Tony's feet and laughing when he reappeared at Strange's side a few seconds later, still clutching his shot glass, which Strange promptly topped up with some of the Asgardian liquor Thor had left as a parting gift.

"That's enough!" Pepper exclaimed, not wanting to nurse a hungover Tony in the morning.

"Relax, Pep," Tony said, swaying a little. "Have a drink!"

"I think you've drunk enough for the both of us, Tony," Pepper declared, tugging him by the arm and leading him away from the bar.

"Wait, you didn't finish your drink," Dr Strange called, as he swayed and cast another portal which missed Tony, Pepper vanishing instead.

Tony looked around dimly, but Pepper didn't immediately reappear as he had done.

A little worried now, Tony walked back to Dr Strange, waiting for his ex-girlfriend to reappear.

"Where did you send her?" Tony asked after several long minutes.

"I'm not sure," Dr Strange slurred. "Ask me in the morning," he mumbled, curling up on a corner sofa and draping his cloak over himself like a blanket.

“Pepper? Pep?” Tony called, looking around the room anxiously. But no answer came. “Friday, remind me in the morning... look for Pepper.” Tony managed to mutter sleepily to the A.I, snagging a corner of Dr Strange’s cloak and curling up next to him on the sofa. Thor was right, he thought as sleep claimed him, Asgardian liquor really wasn’t for mere mortals.

And where was Pepper Potts? Well, she was trying to figure that out herself. It seemed she had traded one party for another. This one was much more sophisticated and sedate, with most guests attired in formal evening wear and glasses of champagne being served by bizarre looking creatures with large eyes and even larger bat-like ears, each wearing a neat tea towel tied at one shoulder.

Pepper snagged a glass of champagne from one of the creatures in passing and sipped her drink anxiously, trying to soothe her nerves. *Just don’t panic*, she reminded herself; *it’s just a mistake, it will be sorted out*.

The chime of a bell rang through the elegant ballroom where all the guests were mingling, and Pepper tried to contain a little shriek of surprise when long dining tables and matching straight-backed chairs appeared in the middle of the room. The guests drifted en masse to the tables and Pepper followed suit. Any minute now Dr Strange would show up with Tony and take her back home and apologise for their mistake or drunken joke or whatever this was, she told herself.

Meanwhile, she found herself sitting beside a pretty young woman with expressive dark eyes and wavy brown hair, attired in turquoise for the evening.

‘I don’t think we’ve met,’ the young woman said, eying her curiously. ‘I’m Hermione.’

“Pepper,” she replied politely with a graceful dip of her head. “Lovely to meet you, Hermione.”

“So, how do you know the happy couple?” Hermione asked with a grimace.

Pepper hid a little smirk; it was obvious Hermione didn't approve of the pair. That must be them at the head of the table, she surmised, studying them closely. The young man was attractive enough with his pale blond hair and aristocratic looks, though Pepper didn't much like the look of his partner, who was particularly silly and vain looking, fawning over him and practically sitting in his lap as she flaunted a sparkling engagement ring under the noses of those sitting closest.

Pepper realised she had been staring too long and left Hermione's question unanswered. "Friend of the family," she shrugged, taking another sip of champagne.

"The Malfoys, you mean?" Hermione said questioningly. "Your hair's a bit similar to Draco's, are you related?"

"Distantly." Pepper said evasively. "How do you know them?"

"Old school friends," Hermione shrugged. "I came with Harry actually," she said, pointing to a dark-haired young man sitting not far away, who was leaning his chin on one hand with a rather dejected air.

"He doesn't look too happy," Pepper observed.

"Why should he be?" Hermione said grimly. "Harry and Draco were together for *years* and then a month ago, Draco comes home and says he's marrying Lavender. I told Harry not to come tonight, but he insisted," she said flatly, watching the house elves begin to serve dinner to the guests.

Pepper didn't reply for a moment, too busy watching the creatures serving an array of dainty food, 'pretentious nonsense' Tony would have called it, she thought with a smile.

"Thank you," Pepper said politely to the creature that filled her plate. The little bat-eared thing gave her a startled curtsy and dashed away.

“Most people don’t bother to thank the house elves,” Hermione observed.

“It would be rude not to,” Pepper said smoothly, though quietly storing away the term *house elf* for later.

“Most people don’t treat them well. They’re just slaves to be used and abused,” Hermione said sadly.

“Sounds like something needs to be done about that,” Pepper told her with a smile.

Hermione’s face brightened at that encouraging comment and she began to tell Pepper about a place called *Hogwarts* where she had gone to school with hundreds of enslaved elves like these. Hermione’s cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkling with passion as she told Pepper all about the organisation named S.P.E.W she had formed, and her dreams of freeing the elves and winning them fair wages and holidays and equal rights. She even showed Pepper a sweet little sock she was knitting for an elf, though she explained it would do little good, since only an elf’s master had the authority to free it.

Pepper’s head fairly swam with information. She couldn’t help but think that Hermione reminded her a little of Steve Rogers. This young woman had enough passion to change the world one day, one knitted sock at a time.

They were interrupted when Draco stood up and tapped his champagne glass with his wand, signalling for the guest’s quiet and attention.

“If I could have your attention, please,” he called as the low hum of chatter in the room quieted. “First, my thanks to you all for coming tonight to celebrate our engagement, and second, it is now time for the signing of the Register of Intent, upon which my dear Lavender and I shall be bound by law and by magic in an unbreakable marriage arrangement. Til death do us part,” he said, kissing his future bride’s hand sweetly.

An official looking house elf presented the couple with the Register, which they promptly signed, sealing their now formal promise of marriage with the stroke of a quill and a kiss as the guests applauded.

Pepper looked to Hermione's friend Harry, who was predictably devastated. Then the room seemed to shimmer and swirl before her as she disappeared, walking out of the same portal she had arrived at the party through, mere hours ago.

Pepper looked around confusedly. Maybe it had been a dream, she thought, a strangely detailed and realistic dream. She watched the same house elves from the previous party serving the same expensive champagne, and there was the same girl she had spoken to at dinner the previous night!

Pepper strode over to her confidently, after all they had gotten along so well together the previous evening.

"Hermione," she exclaimed. "Lovely to see you again. And this must be your friend, Harry," she added, nodding to the dark haired, bespectacled youth beside her.

"I'm sorry, who are you?" Hermione said, frowning in confusion.

"Pepper. We--we had dinner last night, remember?" she said, her confidence failing in the face of Hermione's evident puzzlement.

"No," Hermione said slowly. "I was at Harry's last night. And I've never met you before in my life."

"No--we--we had dinner *here*, at that table," Pepper insisted, pointing to the tables that were just now magically appearing. "You told me all about house elves and Hogwarts and Draco breaking up with Harry to marry Lavender."

Hermione looked, if possible, even more confused and even a little angry.

“I don’t know *where* you’re getting this all from,” Hermione started. “Everyone knows about Harry and Draco’s breakup thanks to Rita Skeeter anyway, but even *she* would have the sense not to bring it up in front of him!” she exclaimed, grabbing Harry’s arm and stalking away from Pepper as far as she could get, right up the other end of the table.

Pepper watched the pair go with regret, feeling a sharp pang at Hermione’s words. She *had* met her before, only last night, she could swear it. So what was going on here? Either it was the weirdest sense of *deja vu* ever or she’d dreamed it. But then, how had she known Hermione’s name? It was a little too much of a coincidence and it made Pepper’s head spin as she picked at her food.

The chime of a glass rang through the room and Pepper’s head jerked up as she watched Draco make the same toast, signing the same Register and sealing it all with a kiss on his future bride’s lips. What was going on?

Pepper was so distracted by the strangeness of it all that she almost didn’t notice the room disappearing before her eyes, before she found herself walking into the same party again through the same portal she had been through twice now.

What the hell had Dr Strange done? Pepper wondered this and other things as she drank first one glass of champagne and then a second and a third. It wasn’t like she would be hungover in the morning, she reasoned. She had already experienced this party twice, so what was to stop it from happening a third time? Dr Strange had obviously messed up his portal somewhere along the way and gotten her stuck in an endless loop.

Pepper drank her fourth glass of champagne and watched for Hermione out of the corner of her eye. Obviously she would have to approach her more carefully than she had done at the previous version of this party. She really didn’t want to get off-side with her. On the contrary, she felt a deep pull towards Hermione, something besides her need to have a friendly person to talk to in this strange place; she was drawn to her, there was no other way to describe it.

The tables appeared in the centre of the room again and Pepper made her way over slowly, feeling a little lightheaded from all the champagne.

“Mind if I sit here?” she asked Hermione politely, determined not to overplay her hand this time.

Hermione shrugged. “If you like,” she said carelessly, dragging out the chair beside her with the toe of her periwinkle blue heels.

“Cute shoes,” Pepper remarked as she took her seat.

“Thanks,” Hermione replied, blushing adorably. “I don’t think we’ve met before, I’m Hermione,” she said, extending her hand.

Pepper gave Hermione’s hand a gentle squeeze. “It’s lovely to meet you, Hermione,” she said warmly. “My name’s Pepper.”

“What do you do, Pepper?” Hermione asked curiously as their meals arrived.

“I’m the CEO of Stark Industries,” Pepper said proudly.

“Stark Industries?” Hermione repeated blankly. “I don’t think I’ve heard of that.”

“It’s an American company,” Pepper shrugged, having assumed correctly from Hermione’s accent that they were somewhere in Britain.

“That’s an impressive accomplishment,” Hermione said admiringly.

“Thank you,” Pepper said, trying not to admit how pleased she was at the compliment. Most people back home assumed she was in her position because of her intimate relationship with Tony Stark and that particular assumption had always hurt, especially as Pepper Potts was someone who prided herself on her own independence and business skills.

“What about you, Hermione? What do you do?” Pepper asked pleasantly.

“Keep *him* out of trouble mostly,” Hermione said with a rueful grin, nudging Harry playfully.

“Best not give up your day job then,” Harry grumbled, glancing up the table to where Lavender sat, spoon-feeding Draco cake off her fork. Harry looked away from the couple quickly, not meeting Draco’s eyes. “She studies time magic in the Department of Mysteries,” he told Pepper, obviously looking for a distraction.

“That’s supposed to be a secret,” Hermione hissed reproachfully as Harry shrugged.

“Time magic?” Pepper repeated thoughtfully. “What an intriguing field of study,” she remarked, trying not to get her hopes up that Hermione might know something that could help her with her little time loop problem.

“I started studying time when I was thirteen,” Hermione admitted.

“Thirteen?” Pepper repeated in astonishment. Clearly Hermione had been a child prodigy of some kind. She was instantly reminded of Tony. “It’s a fascinating subject,” Pepper said carefully. “I wonder if you’ve come across anything about time loops in your research?”

“Of course I have!” Hermione exclaimed, her interest piqued and apparently forgetting that she was supposed to be sworn to secrecy. “There are several types of course. You could use a Time Turner to manufacture a loop yourself. Just relive the same period of time over and over. That’s what I did when I was in my third year at Hogwarts. Then there are loops that can be created by magical artefacts like the Eye of Agamotto. And of course, the most common occurrence is caused by a disruption to the natural timeline. That’s where someone has altered the course of fate itself and time will then form a loop to ensure the predestined

outcome and allocate a catalyst to endure the loop until fate corrects to its original course and the loop is broken,” she explained.

Pepper listened intently, trying to contain her rising excitement as the pieces of knowledge Hermione supplied clicked into place. She had no idea what a Time Turner was, it turned time supposedly, but she wouldn't raise Hermione's suspicions by asking about it. The Eye of Whatever It Was sounded familiar. She thought she had heard Dr Strange's necklace referred to as such, but she couldn't be sure. Hermione's third theory made the most sense. If she, Pepper, were the catalyst, that placed the power back in her hands when it came to breaking the time loop, and also helped explain why she was the only one who seemed aware that a time loop existed.

She was so lost in her thoughts that she missed Draco's toast entirely. The room dissolved again as she re-entered it a fourth time, but it was less disorienting now that she knew what to expect and had some vague notion of what she needed to do. Figure out where fate had messed up and correct it. How hard could that be?

What was the inconsistency she needed to correct? Pepper asked herself this over and over, but was no closer to an answer by the seventh or eighth repeat of the engagement party. She thought it might be something to do with Draco and Lavender, but they seemed deliriously happy, sickeningly even. And Pepper couldn't see anything there that was within her power to correct. Both were consenting adults of legal age. Granted, it was heartbreaking to see the misery in Harry's eyes as he gazed longingly at his ex-boyfriend at party after party, but surely fate didn't care for something so trivial as hurt feelings, did it?

Her eyes flickered back to the happy couple again, just happening to catch Lavender in the act of pouring something into Draco's drink from a little pink vial which the girl quickly pocketed, glancing around furtively. Pepper watched closely as Draco took a sip of his drink. She wondered if his fiancée had poisoned it. It was too late to intervene now if that were the case.

But Draco didn't appear ill. On the contrary, his expression turned rather blank and he immediately set down his glass and lavished attention on Lavender, kissing her and proclaiming her incredible beauty to everyone within earshot. Pepper frowned suspiciously. The effect had been instantaneous. It was far too sudden and out of character for someone as well-bred as Draco to be so clingy, Pepper thought to herself.

Lavender was hoodwinking him somehow, she was almost sure of it. She turned to confide her suspicions in Hermione, but too late, the room dissolved and she was back at the start of the party again.

This time round, Pepper left her glass of champagne untouched. She needed to have a clear head. She had successfully reintroduced herself to Harry and Hermione and spent most of the meal talking with Hermione and learning about her life and social circle. She was full of interesting stories about Hogwarts and various escapades she had had with her two best friends, Harry and Ron. Pepper wondered how best to express her suspicions, as Hermione began a lengthy explanation of the Hogwarts curriculum and ranked her favourite professors right down to her least favourite.

“Professor Snape was just awful to us in school,” Hermione complained as Pepper nodded along, keeping one eye on Lavender and Draco. “He was the Potions Master until our sixth year and then we had Prof--”

“Potions?” Pepper interrupted, a startling thought having occurred to her.

“Yes, it’s one of our core subjects,” Hermione continued. “I was top of the class when Harry wasn’t *cheating*, ” she said accusingly, glaring at her best friend, who promptly rolled his eyes.

“What kind of potions did you make?” Pepper asked. “Were there any--” she paused, knowing how strange it must sound, but she knew no other explanation for it, “ *love* potions?”

She waited for Harry and Hermione to laugh or tell her how silly she sounded, but both exchanged a meaningful look.

“What?” Pepper asked, looking between them.

“We didn’t *make* them,” Hermione said carefully. “But there were people in our year who bought them from certain shops. Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes for one. Harry was very *popular*, ” Hermione said with a dark look.

“I see,” Pepper said, mulling it all over.

“Why do you ask?” Hermione said curiously.

Pepper hesitated, but maybe they could help, she reasoned. “I thought I saw Lavender put something in Draco’s drink,” she said casually. “I just wondered what it might be.”

“She what?!” Harry said furiously, leaping to his feet and striding to the head of the table to confront Lavender.

Pepper didn’t hear what words were exchanged between Harry and Lavender. She could see that the young woman had leaped to her feet though, her face an angry, blotchy red. There was a flash from Lavender’s wand and a moment later, a large chandelier fell towards Harry, who was knocked out of the way just in time by Draco.

Broken glass littered the floor and Pepper and Hermione rushed over to help. Draco’s body covered Harry’s, the blond’s expression clouded with confusion as though he were trying to remember where he’d seen Harry before.

“Draco, my love, come here,” Lavender called. ”We need to sign the Register together.”

Draco stood up immediately and moved over to her, his voice robotic as he agreed with his fiancée. Like a puppet dancing on strings, Pepper thought grimly, wondering how she could end the reign of that particular puppeteer, even as the room dissolved around her once more.

Pepper sat beside Hermione for what was surely her twentieth rerun of this engagement party and sighed inwardly. She was tired of it all by now. Tired of the same food, the same problem sitting up the other end of the table spoon-feeding the other problem cake. About the only thing she wasn't sick of was Hermione. She was absolutely breathtaking. Her beauty wasn't in anything so mundane as her physical appearance or her dress - her appearance was lovely certainly. But no, her real attraction lay in her steadfast loyalty to her friends, her intelligence, fierce independence and love of learning. Hermione had more spark and fire than just about anyone Pepper had ever met and strange as it was to have shared dinner with the same person twenty times in a row and have them remember only the one they were currently having, Pepper felt she could happily dine her way through two-thousand more of these dinners for the chance to see Hermione's eyes sparkle when she talked so passionately about something she loved.

But something desperately needed to be done about Lavender and Draco, it was just a question of how to break Lavender's hold over him, Pepper thought to herself, her eyes straying to one side of the ballroom, where a blonde girl in a yellow dress was dancing alone, waving her arms over her head as though trying to catch invisible butterflies.

"Who's that?" Pepper asked Hermione curiously.

"Luna. She's a little strange, but she's one of our best friends. She has such a good heart," Hermione said softly.

Pepper nodded thoughtfully. Luna's dancing had given her an idea, a plan forming quickly. She just hoped it would be enough.

"Care to dance?" Pepper said mischievously, with a twinkle in her eye.

Hermione hesitated for a moment, but allowed Pepper to draw her gently to her feet and lead her onto the floor, beginning a gentle waltz. Hermione watched Pepper admiringly. She moved with such poise and easy grace, her eyes never once drifting down to look at her own feet. Her warm gaze was fixed on Hermione, making the Gryffindor blush a little. It had been a long time since anyone had looked at her with such admiration and kindness.

Over the next ten minutes, the other guests slowly drifted onto the dance floor to join them, Lavender unable to resist dragging Draco out into the centre of the floor to show off their couple's style.

Hermione and Pepper swayed and shimmied gracefully together, their feet never missing a step, the music coursing through their veins. It was intoxicating being so close to Pepper, Hermione thought. The woman had some ethereal grace about her, a willowy quality like Fleur's Veela cousins, only not as obviously supernatural. A tingle shot through her where Pepper's delicate hand rested gently on her hip, and Hermione forgot all her insecurities in the heat of the moment... a moment that culminated in Pepper's soft lips enveloping hers, sending a delicious tingling warmth through Hermione in a wave. She clung to Pepper and returned the kiss, lost in the feelings of bliss and need that overwhelmed her. She never wanted this moment to end.

The song finished though and the pair broke apart regretfully, Pepper's plan fading to the back of her mind in the wake of the spark Hermione's touch seemed to send through her. She looked around just in time to see Harry abandon his dance partner and march over to Draco, kissing him full on the mouth. The tender moment was interrupted by a terrific hissy fit on the part of one Miss Lavender Brown, but her hold over Draco seemed to be broken, his grey eyes and affection for Harry alone. In the rush to the dance floor, Lavender hadn't had time to top up Draco's dose of love potion, as Pepper had secretly planned.

She waited for the time loop to steal her away from Hermione, for the room to disappear, but after a few days had passed without Hermione forgetting her, she realised the loop was finally broken. Pepper had no doubt Dr Strange was looking for her in one of the many universes to undo his mistake, but it was one of the happiest chances ever to have befallen her. She had no plan to leave Hermione's side. After all, Pepper wasn't one to ditch a date. She and Hermione were already making plans for the coming weekend.

The only question that still played on Pepper's mind was fate itself. Whose had she set back on course at that summer engagement party? Harry's and Draco's? Or hers and Hermione's? Whatever the answer was, she would wait to see what fate had in store for their future together...

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