

Mother Knows Best

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Mother Knows Best

by [DramioneDreaming](#)

Summary

When Hermione spends Christmas at the burrow there is fun, a meddling mother figure and not enough beds.

Determined that Hermione will be a Weasley one day, and having finally given up on her getting back together with Ron, Molly Weasley sets her sights on another of her sons for Hermione's future husband.

Written for the Hermione's Nook There Was Only One Bed Fest.

Notes

In my usual habit of leaving things to the last minute, I did not leave time for a Beta reader before the deadline for this amazingly fun fest so do excuse any spelling errors etc!

Disclaimer: I do not own the characters or world used in this fic, they all belong to JK Rowling, this is purely for my own (and hopefully your) entertainment.

Chapter 1

“Oh, Hermione, dear! I’m so glad you’re here. Come on in, come on in, no use letting all the heat out lingering in open doorways. That’s a good lamb,” Hermione was scooped up into a familiar hug. Molly Weasley smelt of rhubarb crumble, roast beef and home.

“I’m just finishing up dinner, dear. Why don’t you take your bags upstairs and get cleaned up?” Molly ushered a smiling Hermione further into the familiar ramshackle old house, wiping flour off of her hands onto her patched and faded apron. “Ginny and Harry stepped out for a walk and Arthur hasn’t finished work yet, but everyone else is around here somewhere.”

“Of course, Mrs Weasley. Dinner smells amazing by the way,” Hermione complimented. “I’ll just go put my things in Ginny’s room, then I’ll come back down and help you get the table set.”

“Oh, heavens no, dear. You can’t share a room with Ginny! She’s a married woman now. Harry will be in with Ginny this year. We’ve just about managed to squeeze in a double bed. I do hope they will be comfortable. It’s always such a tight fit with everyone here for Christmas.”

“Oh,” Hermione said, pausing in mild surprise and confusion. Molly had always been so adamant that Ginny and Harry would not share a bed under her roof, it had never really occurred to her that her stance would change now that they were married.

She had been sharing a room with Ginny on every Burrow visit since she was 13 years old. It felt odd to think that she would be spending the week anywhere other than on the creaky old camp bed. Running through a mental check list of bedrooms and possible occupants, Hermione’s brow furrowed. Surely after refusing to even once let them share a room whilst they were dating, Molly wouldn’t put Hermione in Ron’s room now? Sure, she had spent the past year trying to convince the pair that they were perfect for each other and would end up married one day; but after several visits with no ‘subtle’ comments on how good they looked together, or ‘accidentally’ locking them in the pantry, Hermione had dared to hope that her machinations were over. The fact that Ron had been happily dating Parvati Patil for the last 6 months seemed to have finally put an end to the scheming. It seemed likely that she would get grandchildren from her youngest son after all, and the amicable terms that she and Ronald had ended their relationship on meant that she still saw enough of Hermione to happily class herself as a surrogate mother whether she was going to officially marry in one day or not.

“Sorry, Mrs Weasley,” Hermione began awkwardly, praying to Circe that Ron and Parvati hadn’t broken up without her knowledge. “If Harry is in with Ginny, then where am...”

“Oh, Merlin! I almost forgot,” Molly smiled in a somewhat manic fashion. “Well, as I say Harry is in Ginny’s room, Bill and Fleur and little Victoire are in Bill’s old room, Audrey is in Percy’s room and Charlie is sharing with Ron so that leaves you in with George, dear. I’m sure you know your way around by now.” Molly hurried into the kitchen, shouting something over her shoulder about needing to baste the roast.

Hermione groaned internally, staring after the Weasley matriarch with fond exasperation. So, this was the latest ploy, was it. Poor George. She hoped he didn’t snore.

Turning away from Molly, Hermione headed for the stairs. As she climbed the well-worn treads, she decided that it could have been worse. She could have been sharing a room with the ghoul in the attic. At least George was less likely to be clanking around the pipes and howling in the middle of the night.

Ascending past Ginny's room on the first floor, Hermione continued up another flight of stairs to the landing that held Percy's room and what had once been the twins bedroom. Although she had never been inside either room, there was no difficulty diving which belonged to which. The door to her left, although as time worn and uneven as the rest of the Burrow, was relatively neat and bare of any embellishment. The door to her right, by contrast, was so covered in stickers, posters and burn marks that it was hard to tell if it was even made of the same material.

Gingerly, she reached out to grasp the doorknob. It wasn't that she thought that George would have intentionally booby trapped the room against her, but Merlin only knew what kinds of jinxes and hexes the twins had placed on the entrance to their room to bar their sibling's entry in the past. She knew from past experience with a punching telescope that Fred and George weren't always the best at remembering to remove any spells from their possessions once the pranks had ended.

Nothing happened when she turned the doorknob and stepped over the threshold other than a broad, grinning redhead leaping from his spot lounging on the bed and bounding towards her.

"Hermione! My future wife!" George bellowed, spreading his arms wide and gesturing around the room. "Welcome to our love nest. Do try not to jump my bones right away, I'm a third date kind of wizard."

"Oh, sod off George," Hermione groaned, fighting hard to contain her smile. It was somewhat reassuring to see that George found his mother's meddling as harmlessly amusing as she did.

"Tut tut, Hermione. We are practically betrothed if my mother is allowing us to share a bedroom, how dare you treat me so callously." George brought the back of a hand to his forehead in mock hurt.

Hermione rolled her eyes and threw her beaded bag across the room at the prat. It hit him square in the stomach and he released an "Ouff" of surprised pain as he doubled over.

"Bloody hell, Granger, what have you got in that thing?" he questioned, bending to retrieve the makeshift weapon as he rubbed at his stomach. "That was like getting hit by a bloody Bludger."

"There's probably one of those in there somewhere to be honest," Hermione admitted, holding out her hand for the return of her bag. "It's been a long time since I emptied it out, and the last time I did there was definitely a couple of brooms and a Quaffle in there of Ron's."

"Undetectable extension charm?" he queried, smiling as she nodded in response. "And from a Ministry employee! What would Minister Shacklebolt say if he knew his best and brightest was breaking the law right under his nose."

"You get me in trouble with Kingsley and I tell your mother who made the Christmas pudding explode last year," Hermione threatened.

"Truce!" George yelled, tossing the bag lightly back to her. "I managed to convince her that she just added too much brandy to it, don't you go getting me in her bad books now or I'll get nothing from Santa."

"You have two days until Christmas, if you can manage to go that long without jinxing, hexing or blackmailing me then your secret is safe with me."

Hermione stood on tip toe to look over George's shoulder at the room behind him and cursed when she realized that her suspicions had not been unfounded.

"Yep," George nodded, moving to her side and crossing his arms over his chest. "One bed. I told

you, we are basically engaged. Might as well get used to the fact now, we don't stand a chance with this level of underhanded coercion."

"Surely you and Fred didn't used to share a double bed in here?" Hermione asked, eyes boring a hole into the offending object.

"Merlin, no. I don't know what kind of depraved twin fantasies you have been harbouring all these years Hermione, but... Oufffff."

Hermione had swung her bag out to the side and scored another hit in the gut. Maybe she wasn't as uncoordinated as she had always believed.

"Okay, okay, woman. You made your point," George wheezed, staggering across the room and flopping facedown onto the bed.

"I assume what you were going to say was that the double bed is a recent addition to the room?" Hermione asked, moving to sit on the opposite corner of the mattress.

"Correct," George said into the pillow.

"Wonderful," she sighed, flopping back so that her head landed somewhere in the middle of the duvet.

"If you think that's good, just wait until you find out the counter-measures she's put in place to make sure we can't turn it back into singles." George turned his head slightly, so that one bright blue eye peeked out at her from beneath his flop of red hair.

"You already tried?" Hermione asked, tilting her head to look up into his half-concealed face.

"Course I did," he scoffed. "Didn't want you thinking I was trying to make a move on you now did I."

"George," Hermione rolled her eyes at him. "I've known you half my life. I hardly think I would have believed you have just been waiting in the wings all this time for me and Ron to break up so that you could make your move by forcing me to share a bed with you at your parents' house."

"You're right," he nodded. "I wouldn't have chosen to do it here. There probably would have been some kind of scheme involved in getting you to fall madly in love with me, but mine would have been much better thought out than this."

"Your mother is not known for subtlety."

"Right you are, Hermione. Now, I know I said I already had a crack at this but let's see if the brightest witch of our age can come up with anything I missed before mum calls us all down for food."

Hermione and George spent the next half an hour fruitlessly attempting to split, duplicate, transfigure or otherwise transform the lone double bed back into the pair of singles it had once been, but with no luck. Hermione had to give Molly Weasley some credit, she had always known the witch was an ace at household spells, she just hadn't known that the mastery extended to such intricacies of interior design. They were both standing at the foot of the bed, wands in hands and brows furrowed when Ginny bellowed from the bottom of the stairs that dinner was ready.

"Blimey, I didn't even hear her and Harry come back," George jumped at his sisters yells. "Well, come on, I'm starving. Might as well go and get some food and see if we can trick mum into

telling us what she did to this thing to get it stuck like this.”

He nudged Hermione in the ribs and turned for the door. Hermione followed him with a sigh.

Chapter 2

Dinner was divine. After weeks of existing on the offerings of the Ministry canteen and the takeaway shops around the corner from her small rented apartment in muggle London, Hermione ate more than twice her usual portion of roast beef and Yorkshire puddings. She was almost too full to squeeze in the sizable portion of rhubarb crumble that was placed before her as soon as her dinner plate was cleared, but somehow found room for it.

Unsurprisingly, she had found herself seated elbow to elbow with George for the meal, Arthur at her other side peppering her with questions about her muggle neighbours. She had made to sit beside Ginny and Harry when they had all crammed into the not-quite-large-enough dining room but had ended up next to George through a series of reshuffles, excuses and demands from Molly that still had her confused. She distinctly remembered there being something mentioned about the pregnant Audrey needing to be closest to the door in case she felt queasy again, and Victoire needing to sit beside Bill or Fleur, but the rest of the suggestions seemed much more forced.

Ginny and Charlie were grinning at her and George in a way that told her that they two had noticed their mother's grand plan for the holiday season. Hermione made a mental note to ask Charlie how he had managed to stay single for so long with Molly doing her best to play matchmaker. The Weasley matriarch herself was seemingly deaf to any pointed hints or open questions from George about the sleeping arrangements, and he had muttered to Hermione over dessert that they might have better luck trying to catch her alone after they had cleared away the dishes and moved through to the living area.

Molly quickly foiled any half-formed plan they might have had however by accepting Fleur and Charlie's offers to clean up, and announcing that she was turning in for the night early. George shrugged at Hermione and accepted Bill's proposal that they have a game of chess.

Hermione offered to stay and help Fleur and Charlie clear up, but was swiftly sent on her way to the living area with a derisive laugh from Fleur that would have been offensive, had she not already been aware of her own short comings with all things domestic. Seeing that Harry, Ron and Ginny had already staked a claim on the largest and comfiest of the mismatched sofas by the fire, Hermione made her way over to join them. Ginny elbowed her brother and husband until they scooched over enough to allow Hermione to flop down in-between them.

"I can't believe mum is actually trying to get you together with George now," Ron stated apologetically as he stretched his long legs out in front of him. "I figured, once she finally stopped trying to get the two of us back together, she'd either go back to bothering Charlie again or start harping on at these two about popping out messy-haired, speccy grand-babies." He gestured to the newlyweds beside him with a thumb.

"If it's a choice between concentrating her efforts on getting Hermione and George married off, or getting me to pop out babies then I'm glad she made the choice she did," Ginny shuddered. "I'm sorry Hermione, but I've got at least ten good quidditch playing years left in me yet, I'm not quitting the Harpies to become a full-time baby making machine just yet."

"Yet!?" Harry asked, nearly spitting out his drink. "Just how many kids is she expecting us to have?"

"Well, there's seven of us, mate" Ron pointed out. "I'm sure she's hoping someone will out do her, and Fleur's already told her that a seer said she's having three."

“Seven?” Harry asked, eyes wide.

“Thanks for the concern, guys,” Hermione laughed. “But I’m pretty sure that George Weasley, prankster extraordinaire, and Hermione Granger, famous bookworm and stickler for the rules, will manage not to fall for each other just because Molly Weasley wills it so.”

“Stickler for the rules, my arse,” Ron snorted. “Remind me again who kept Rita Skeeter trapped in a jar for revenge, Harry?”

“Not sure, mate, but I think it might have been the same person that stole from a teachers store cupboard to brew Polyjuice potion and set their professor on fire,” Harry added, deadpan.

“Honestly Hermione, I think mum might be on to something here,” Ginny mused. “George is actually a pretty brilliant wizard when you don’t expect him to play by all of the normal rules, and you are less of a prim and proper nerd than you would like us all to believe. The two of you together could bring society to its knees.”

“You make us sound like some kind of comic book evil genius duo,” Hermione scoffed.

“She’s not wrong, ‘Mione,” Ron replied. “I’ve told you before, and I’ll say it again, you’re bloody scary sometimes.”

Hermione elbowed Ron hard in the ribs, causing him to splutter whilst Harry and Ginny laughed uproariously.

“Glad to see I’m not the only one she gets violent with,” George interjected, joining their group and throwing himself down on top of Ginny and Harry’s legs. “I was beginning to take it personally.”

“Just a sign of love with ‘Mione,” Ron wheezed, rubbing his ribs.

“Wow, she’s already hit me twice today. If it’s a sign of love, then maybe mum’s plan is working after all.”

“Ha-ha, very funny,” Hermione glared at the two of them.

“Gerr’ off me before I show you some real violence you giant oaf!” Ginny’s muffled threats issued from behind George’s shoulder blade as she shoved at him ineffectually.

Harry’s non-verbal levicorpus proved much more effective at removing the solid weight from their laps, and only Mr Weasley’s half-hearted reminder that his wife had asked them all to refrain from hexing each other this year convinced Harry to return George to solid ground with a thump.

“Seems like that’s my cue to head to bed,” George announced from his position sprawled on his back on the rug. “Want to have another go at fixing the bed, Hermione?”

“Sure,” she shrugged, rising to her feet and stepping over George to reach the stairs. “Night everyone.”

“You might as well give up now, you know,” Charlie suggested loudly. “When mum gets on one like this, its best just to ignore her, or let her think she’s won.”

Mr Weasley shrugged and offered Hermione a rueful smile, which could have been an apology for his wife or tacit agreement with his eldest son.

“You heard him, Hermione,” George announced as he leapt dramatically to his feet and bounded

after her. "You may as well confess your love for me now and we can be married by tomorrow. That way we all win, you especially." He offered her a cheeky wink as he raced past her to hold open the door with a gentlemanly bow.

Hermione strode past George with a roll of her eyes and proceeded him up the stairs. As the door swung shut behind them, she distinctly heard Bill asking if anyone fancied placing their wagers right away.

Hermione wasn't particularly tired when she and George had left the rest of the group downstairs, but after another fruitless hour of trying to get around Molly's transfigurations she was ready to call it a day and sleep on the Godric damned floor.

"I really don't think we are going to crack this tonight," Hermione said to George around a yawn.

"I've been thinking the same thing for the past half an hour. I'm shattered," George admitted.

"Why didn't you just say so if you are that tired?" Hermione questioned.

"I refuse to be the first one to back down from a challenge," he confessed seriously. "It would completely go against all of my principles."

"Principles?" Hermione asked, laughing at the wounded puppy look that he donned.

George walked to the side of the large bed frame and began to push. It seemed to take an effort but he managed to move it a couple of inches to the right before Hermione even thought to question his odd behaviour.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I figured that mum wouldn't have thought to stop us moving the bed around by muggle means," he explained. "She's spelled it so I couldn't levitate it over, but it wouldn't have occurred to her that we could just use brute strength to shift it."

"Okay," Hermione said slowly, still not really understanding. "But how does moving the bed a foot to the side help us here?"

"If I can move it up to the wall then that gives me enough space to make a bed on the floor," he replied over the sound of the bedframe scraping against the hardwood.

"You are going to sleep on the floor?" she asked, finally catching up with his logic.

"Well, I know you don't think much of my manners, but it would be a bit rude of me to let you sleep on the floor. Ginny would definitely bat-bogey hex me if she found out and I don't fancy being on the receiving end of that one again any time soon."

"George, you can't sleep on the floor in your own bedroom," Hermione complained. "I'll just go sleep on one of the sofas downstairs, or better yet I'll kick Harry out of Ginny's room and share with her. Harry won't mind." She turned towards the door to do just that, but froze mid action as George's spell whipped past her through the air.

"Oh no you don't!" he yelled.

"George Weasley, did you just lock us both in your bedroom?" she asked in disbelief.

"Correct," he nodded, apparently unabashed. "If you go dragging Harry and Ginny into this then

Merlin only knows what mum will try next. Charlie already warned you, its best to let her think she's winning. If she thinks that we are sharing a bed then she is less likely to try anything more drastic. I've seen how many times she's locked you and Ron into the pantry in the last twelve months. I'm not missing Christmas dinner because she's trapped us in there all day."

"Do all Weasley men only think with their stomachs?" Hermione groused.

"Not just the men," George pointed out. "Ginny would probably sacrifice her quidditch career if mum said she had to choose between the Harpies and pigs in blankets."

Hermione couldn't argue with that logic, but still felt uncomfortable letting George sleep on the floor in his own bedroom. She had been about to suggest that they just give up and sleep in the damned thing together before he started rearranging the furniture. Apparently that idea had not occurred to the redhead, and she felt weirdly shy about being the one to suggest it.

Whilst Hermione had been debating with George and her own thoughts, he had managed to push the bed flush with the wall and had begun throwing the pillows from one side onto the floor. He was rummaging around in a wardrobe looking for blankets by the time she silently admitted defeat and turned back to the bed.

Retrieving her beaded bag from where she had dumped it in the corner of the room, she placed it on the forest green bedspread and began pulling her nightclothes and toiletries out of it.

"Mind unlocking the door so that I can go and brush my teeth?" she asked George as he created his nest of pillows and old jumpers. Apparently he had been unable to find any spare blankets as he was eyeing a faded old bathrobe critically, as though determining its potential for use as a duvet.

"Oh blimey, yeah," he started, picking up his wand from the dresser and flicking it towards the door. "Sorry Hermione, I didn't mean to actually trap you in here."

She gave a hum of understanding as she scooped up the items she had removed from her bag and headed out into the hallway. The third floor of the house was made up of several toilets, bathrooms and shower rooms of various sizes. Several of the doors displayed locks clicked over to the occupied position, so she chose one of the smaller shower rooms and decided to be in and out as quickly as she could. There was no time for luxuriating in a bubble bath in the Weasley household when bathroom time was such a premium, as everyone headed off to bed or first thing in the morning.

After jumping in and out of the shower, forcing her hair into a loose bun on top of her head and brushing her teeth for precisely two minutes before flossing, Hermione threw on her favourite cosy pyjamas and dodged past a waiting Percy on the landing as she headed back to George's room.

Pushing the door open with an elbow, Hermione stepped inside and almost dropped her bundle of clothes and wash things. Apparently, she needed to learn to knock on doors before entering when sharing a bedroom with a male. You would think that she would have learnt that lesson after accidentally walking in on Harry changing more times over the years than she dared to count, or even remember, but clearly she had not.

George Weasley stood less than a foot away from her, bare chested and in the process of pulling on a pair of flannel pyjama bottoms. He was facing away from the door as she entered, meaning that she only caught a brief glimpse of his surprisingly toned arse before he jumped and hurriedly pulled the garment the rest of the way up. She had a brief moment where she couldn't decide if she was thankful or disappointed that he hadn't been facing the other way when she barged in, before blushing scarlet and chastising herself mentally. She should be apologizing to George, not

imagining what the rest of him looked like. Where had that come from?

“Bloody hell, witch. Give a man a little warning before you come crashing in next time,” he laughed awkwardly, a pink flush creeping up his own neck.

“I’m so sorry, George!” Hermione exclaimed belatedly, not quite sure where to look as he moved around the room to hunt for a top. She should probably step back outside and give him space to dress properly, she decided. As she turned to leave again, she dropped her wash bag onto her foot and stumbled into the doorframe, banging her head hard.

“Blimey, I hate to think what you were like sharing a tent with Harry and Ron for 9 months if you get that flustered walking in on a bloke getting dressed,” George joked, reaching out to take her shoulder and turning her to face him. “You are going to have a right bump there, Hermione,” he winced. “Two seconds, I think I’ve still got some bruise paste around here somewhere if mum hasn’t hidden that too.”

As he stepped back to look for the healing balm, Hermione noticed that he still hadn’t quite managed to finish dressing. Apparently he had been in the middle of donning a pyjama shirt when she had decided to make a spectacle of herself. One of his arms was shoved into a sleeve, but the other remained bare, leaving the unbuttoned shirt dangling from a shoulder and his torso exposed. He retrieved a small black pot from a shelf and pushed his right arm into the second sleeve as he stepped back towards her. The open buttons revealed the majority of his chest. It was broad, toned, and covered in a smattering of light freckles like most of the rest of him. Possibly all of the rest of him, she was sure she had spied a few freckles on his arse before he had managed to cover it.

Hermione was unable to meet George’s eyes, and instead stared down at her lap as he maneuvered her to sit at the edge of the bed. Perhaps she could blame this sudden fascination with George Weasley’s pale, freckled skin on the head injury she had recently obtained. Although given that she had been staring at him before attempting to concuss herself, perhaps not.

George gently brought her chin up with a calloused finger, forcing her to meet his eyes. He wasn’t blushing any more she noted, he was instead looking at her with genuine concern.

“Are you okay, Hermione?” he asked, brows furrowed and blue eyes soft as he looked deep into her brown ones.

“I’m fine,” she almost whispered.

“Okay,” he nodded, looking unconvinced. “Well here, let me put some of this bruise paste on your head. Don’t want everyone asking questions in the morning or you will have to admit that you were so awed at the sight of me you lost all control of your faculties.”

Hermione batted his hand away from her forehead, but he just grinned and went back to applying the cold, thick paste. She was glad that he was cracking jokes at her expense, it was a good sign that he hadn’t noticed her weird behaviour.

“There,” he announced after another minute of tilting her head around to make sure he hadn’t missed anything else. “Good as new. Now get tucked up in bed before you do any more damage.”

Hermione acquiesced, scooting further up the bed and pulling the duvet up around her chin.

“Thanks,” she said. “For the bruise paste I mean, not the unexpected peep show.”

George smiled at her attempt at a joke even as he pouted at her from across the room.

“Alright, alright. I promise you will not see so much as a flash of bare skin for the rest of your stay. I’ll get changed in the bathroom. Or at the very least I’ll chuck you out of the room and lock the door next time.” He made a point of buttoning his pyjama shirt right up to the collar and pulling his cuffs down to his wrists. Hermione retaliated by throwing a pillow at him. He grabbed it lazily from the air and added it to his floor bed, before blowing her a kiss and lowering his long limbs awkwardly down to the floor. “Sleep tight,” he called before wandlessly extinguishing the lamps in the room and plunging them both into darkness.

Hermione laid awake for a long time after that, listening to the sounds of the various other house guests moving between floors as they prepared for sleep. The occasional shuffling sounds from the floor alerted her to the fact that George was having no better luck dropping off, but neither of them made any attempt at further conversation. She wasn’t sure what to say and ultimately decided that feigning sleep was the better option.

Chapter 3

Hermione must have fallen asleep eventually, because she was jolted into sudden alertness at what felt like a truly ungodly hour of the morning by the melodic screaming of a small child. Victoire was awake, and judging from the sounds of floorboards creaking and doors slamming on the floor above, so was at least half the household.

“W’ time’ sit?” came a sleep muffled voice from the floor.

Hermione reached under her pillow and withdrew her wand, casting a quick tempus charm and squinting at the bright numerals.

“Almost seven O’ clock,” she informed the floor.

“Bloody hell, I remember now why I moved out,” George grunted.

Hermione flung an arm over her face and considered trying to force herself to go back to sleep for another half an hour.

“Circe’s tits,” George moaned, dragging himself to his feet and bending and twisting around to crack his stiff joints. “Is it possible to sprain something in your sleep?”

“Probably, if you are stupid enough to sleep on the floor,” said Hermione.

“It’s a good job I’m so chivalrous, or I’d make you swap places with me tonight and then you would know exactly what I’m complaining about.”

Hermione didn’t answer, choosing instead to pull the duvet over her head. She didn’t intend for either of them to have to sleep on the floor that evening. Either she would find a way to fix the bed situation, or they could suck it up and share. It wasn’t like Molly’s plan would work and they would suddenly fall all over each other just because they were forced to share a room.

“Oh no you don’t,” George chuckled, grabbing a corner of the duvet and pulling it off of her. “No going back to sleep. Mum will have started breakfast if everyone is up, and we are all going to have a game of quidditch over on the top field after we’ve eaten.”

“You might be playing quidditch, I will be curled up by the fire reading,” Hermione corrected. “It’s freezing out there, and I hate flying at the best of times.”

“I know, that’s why it’s so funny when you play with us. Anyway, you have no choice. If you decide to stay, I’ll tell Percy that you wanted to talk to him about international imports of Nundu urine for pest control and you won’t get a single page read all day.”

“You wouldn’t,” she gasped.

“Oh, but I would,” he grinned, grabbing a pair of jeans and a sweater and exiting the room.

Groaning, Hermione felt her dreams of a cosy morning doing nothing much disappearing as she forced herself out of bed and fumbled around for her beaded bag.

Half an hour later, Hermione felt much fuller and more awake as the cold December wind whipped around the group making their way from the burrow up the winding path to the spot where they played their games of field quidditch. They hadn’t even made it to the broom shed at the bottom of

the garden before Hermione was contemplating making an excuse to turn and head back to the warmth of the Burrow. She could feel that her cheeks were pinked from the icy air, and the wind was causing its usual havoc with her hair despite her best efforts to force the stubborn mane into a ponytail. She cast another quick warming charm over herself and Harry, who never remembered to do such things himself, as Ginny handed her a particularly battered looking broomstick. She frowned down at the object in her hand. She hated flying at the best of times, there was no way she was going to fly around on that obvious death trap.

“Don’t look too thrilled Hermione, people might actually start to believe you enjoy these annual games of Christmas Eve Quidditch,” George laughed as he sidled up to her.

“It’s not just Christmas Eve and you know it,” she refuted, breathing clouds of steam in his direction. “You lot manage to rope me into these games at least once a month.”

“More like every other month,” he grinned. He removed the navy-blue knitted hat from his head, and Hermione attempted to bat his hands away as he gave a flick of his wand and removed the over-stretched elastic holding her hair back. “Here, you look bloody freezing and you’ll be no use to my team if you can’t see where the Quaffle is through all that hair.”

George pulled his hat down onto her head, tucking as much of her hair as possible behind her ears in the process.

“George, I don’t need your hat!” Hermione protested, despite instantly regretting not bringing her own. “Whether I can see or not is hardly going to have much impact on my quidditch performance, and you’ll end up freezing.”

“S’alright,” he shrugged. He brandished her ratty hair elastic and pulled his own shoulder length hair back, tying it at the nape of his neck. “See, seems like a fair trade to me.”

George moved forwards to grab his own broomstick from Charlie, and Ginny shot Hermione a sly smile that let her know that the youngest Weasley at least was all too aware that the pink flush in Hermione’s cheeks could no longer be solely attributed to the freezing wind. Hermione stuck her tongue out at her friend and turned her attention to the closest person. Unfortunately, that happened to be Percy, and she was treated to a ten minute explanation of why Nundu urine was not the most effective deterrent for British pests due to their unfamiliarity with the East African predator. Damn George Weasley.

It was almost a relief when they reached the secluded stretch of land that some long ago Weasley had erected Quidditch hoops on, and Hermione had an excuse to step away from Percy. She probably got along with the straight-laced Weasley sibling better than most of the others did, but being cornered and forced to endure one of his lectures on a subject that held zero interest for her was not the way she wanted to spend her afternoon. Neither was passing around a Quaffle and dodging murderous Bludgers whilst hovering about a foot off the ground, but she’d never been quite so willing to mount a broomstick before. Ron and Harry jokingly tried to cajole her into flying up higher with the rest of the group, but she maintained that someone needed to cover the lower ground.

With no snitch allowed due to their proximity to a muggle neighbourhood, Harry and Charlie were both forced to forego their favoured Seeker positions and join Ginny and Hermione as chasers. The two boys held their own, but Ginny could have wiped the floor with all of them any day, so she was forced onto the slowest broom and told she could only play left handed. She still managed at least ten times more Quaffle possession time than Hermione, who was more likely to dodge the ball when it came near her than attempt to catch it.

Fortunately, she was on the same team as George so didn't have to worry much about dodging the actual Bludgers, but Bill definitely seemed to be sending more of them flying her way than usual. As George sped into a rather impressive downwards spiral to send the latest shot from his oldest brother shooting back across the pitch towards Harry, she made a mental note to ask someone later on if she had said or done something to cause the curse-breakers ire. Everyone usually gave her an easy time when they had to rope her in to even up the numbers, but at this rate she might need to do more than hover uninterestedly at one end of the pitch for a change.

Without the capture of the snitch to call an end to their game, they had opted to set their usual 90-minute timer. Harry had once explained that this was the normal length of a muggle football game, and it had seemed a good compromise between those that wanted the game to last all day and those of the party who were slightly less enthusiastic about this prospect (namely Hermione and Percy, who resented being put in goal but had only marginally more skill at the game than the muggleborn bookworm).

Ginny had just scored her thirtieth or so goal past an increasingly sulky Ron, who was claiming that the position of the sun that morning placed him at a distinct disadvantage, when there was a blast that sounded like a canon being fired, and all of the brooms instantly dropped to the ground.

"Bloody hell!" shouted several Weasley's at once, as Hermione yelped and Harry leapt off his broom, drawing his wand before he hit the ground.

"Which fucking plonker was responsible for setting the game clock this time?" Charlie asked, rubbing his coccyx.

"Erm, my bad," Ron mumbled, holding a hand up as he stood. "Didn't think it would be quite that abrupt."

"Abrupt?" Harry asked, "I thought we were about to be ambushed by rogue Voldemort sympathisers."

"You always think you are about to be attacked by dark wizards in all fairness," Ginny said, jumping to her feet and dusting snow and mud from her robes. "So who won, anyway?"

"You did," Charlie rolled his eyes at his sister as he pulled an unimpressed Percy to his feet. "Want us to stoke your giant ego more by telling you the score?"

"Of course I do," Ginny scoffed.

"I lost track when your team was about 100 points up," Ron grumbled.

"It was 270 to 130," Percy announced. "Assuming that we are not counting own goals as usual."

"Was it really?" Ginny asked in faux surprise. "I had no idea, Harry my love, did you realise we were so far ahead?"

"Hadn't a clue Gin," Harry deadpanned, throwing an arm around his wife's shoulders and kissing the top of her head.

"I wonder who gets player of the match this time?" Ginny asked innocently, still not done rubbing in her almost single-handed victory.

"I was going to nominate Hermione," Charlie piped up. "You actually caught the Quaffle twice and didn't fall off your broom this time! It was a serious improvement."

“That’s only because George was circling her for the whole match,” Bill laughed. “By the end of it, I was trying to knock her off her broom just to see if he would jump off his own to catch her.”

Bill’s teammates and half of her own laughed in agreement, but Ron’s eyes darted between the pair in confusion, and George himself remained quiet.

“Well, if I’m not getting my well-deserved crown this time, I second the nomination for Hermione,” Ginny shouted over the laughter. “If we’d known that it all it would take was her own personal bodyguard to keep her on a broom, I’d have told mum to set her up with George years ago.”

“Hey!” shouted Hermione, George and Ron at the same time.

Ginny just laughed again and scooped up a palm full of freshly fallen snow.

“Last one back to the broom shed has to tidy up!” she yelled as she launched the frozen projectile at her husband and took off running.

Harry slung his own broom over his shoulder and raced after her.

“Sod that,” Bill shouted, grabbing a fistful of snow himself and aiming it over his shoulder as he followed after the pair.

Hermione yelped as snow was shoved down the back of her robes. She spun around helplessly as the freezing powder melted down her spine.

“George Weasley, you absolute arse!” she shouted at the red-heads retreating form.

Grabbing up her broom, she realized that even Percy had taken off down the timeworn path at a trot and sighed, resigning herself to clean up duty. Athletic she was not, and if Percy had a head start, she was not remotely confident in her ability to out run any of the others. Pulling her wand from her sleeve, she directed the abandoned balls to follow her as she meandered down the path. Up ahead she could hear the sounds of a competitive snowball fight starting up. So much for racing to the broom shed. No doubt Ginny had been tackled by her husband or one of her many brothers and was face first in a snow drift, regretting her hasty challenge.

Sure enough, as she continued on her walk, Hermione encountered several stray broomsticks, a scarf and even a solitary wellington boot. By the time she reached the bottom of the hill and left the shelter of the trees, Hermione was trailed by a multitude of lost possessions, at least half of the broomsticks and one very cold looking chicken.

Dumping most of the levitated objects at the door of the shed, Hermione ignored the shrieks of laughter making their way homewards and headed for the chicken coop. Tucking the stray occupant back indoors and casting a few warming spells, she locked the door to the coop and turned back to lock away the quidditch things. As she reached the shed however, she realised that the disorganised pile had vanished. Stepping into the broom shed, she found that George had already hung the brooms back in their places and was shutting the balls away in their wooden chest.

“I thought you would have been front and centre in the snowball war going on out there,” Hermione commented.

“I just thought it was a bit shitty of them all to leave you to tidy up after us all,” George shrugged. “Besides, I already trapped Ron and Ginny inside an igloo and sent a snowman chasing after Bill. “

“That was quick,” Hermione laughed.

“They are amateurs,” he smiled. “You are looking at the man who was one half of the duo that sent a parade of snowballs bouncing off Voldemort’s face, this is child’s play.”

“You did what?” Hermione spluttered, choking on thin air.

“Yep,” he grinned in triumph. “Didn’t realise it at the time of course, but it occurred to Freddy and me later that when we were in third year, we charmed a bunch of snowballs to follow Quirrell round and whack him in the back of that smelly old turban he always used to wear. At the time of course we just thought we were being hilariously mischievous little mites, but don’t forget who was hiding under that turban before Harry did us all the favour of getting rid of the wanker.”

“Merlin’s pants!” Hermione shouted, bringing a hand to her mouth to stifle what was either a giggle or a scream.

“Yep,” said George, puffing his chest out proudly. “I think that will always be one of our prouder moments.”

“Godric, you are lucky Voldemort didn’t paint a target on both of your backs the second he got his own body!” Hermione stated, without realizing what she had said for a moment. There was a brief awkward pause in which Fred’s death at the hands of one of Voldemort’s followers sat awkwardly between them.

“I’m sorry George, I didn’t...”

“S’okay,” he half smiled. “I forget sometimes too.” The usually jovial red-head closed the lid on the trunk before him, standing to brush dirt and snow from his trousers before clearing his throat and walking out of the shed.

Hermione cursed herself for a good minute before following after him.

Chapter 4

After an afternoon spent playing increasingly competitive muggle boardgames with the extended Weasley clan, Hermione was seriously considering banning Harry from introducing the group to any further such entertainment. Playing Monopoly was bad enough when the worst you had to contend with was Aunt Sue capitalising on her role as banker, but add in duplicating charms increasing the amount of cash and property pieces in play tenfold and a distinct lack of understanding of paper currency and it took at least half an hour to pass go once.

After several hours and half a bottle of firewhiskey; Bill and Charlie had managed to convince Mr Weasley that going to jail meant he had to forfeit all of his claims to property and will it to his children, George had a thirteen-level tower block built on Regent Street, and Victoire had eaten her father's get out of jail free card. The game was about to devolve into the usual holiday season family argument, when Mrs Weasley thankfully called them all through for the traditional Christmas eve dinner of steak and chips.

By the end of the meal, all tension around who had or had not overcharged in rent was left behind, and they managed to enjoy a fairly civil evening listening to Celestina Warbeck serenading them through the Wizard's Wireless and telling tales of Christmases past. They all, by some unspoken agreement, managed not to mention any memories that related to the years in which Voldemort's return had caused a rift in the family. Hermione could never help but recall the Christmas eve that she and Harry had spent together in Godric's hollow in their teenaged years. Catching his eye throughout the night, she knew that he was remembering the same disturbing events. It wasn't easy to forget the image of a 12-foot serpent emerging from the corpse of a withered old woman as Christmas carols sang out in the distance. She smiled sadly at him as he nodded and pulled Ginny closer into his side.

"Hermione, dear," Mrs Weasley began, causing Hermione to jump to attention at being suddenly addressed directly, "I know that you have been working hard recently, but I do hope that you will start spending more time around the Burrow again. You are looking far too skinny at the minute."

"Oh, um, I'm sure that I will be able to come by more often for Sunday lunches in the New Year Mrs Weasley," she smiled at the older woman. "I've definitely been eating better in the last couple of days thanks to your wonderful cooking."

"Oh, you are kind, dear. It's never a bother. In fact, I have been saying the same thing to George, it's not healthy living alone like the two of you do. Maybe you could both come by for homecooked meals a few times through the week as well as Sunday lunches."

"I don't know if..." Hermione began.

"Oh pish-posh, it wouldn't be a bother at all. I always cook far too much food for me and Arthur to manage," Molly assured her. "After so many years of cooking for a household, it really is difficult to judge how much mashed potato to make for just the two of us."

"Well, that's very kind Mrs Weasley, I'll certainly think about the offer," Hermione hedged.

"You do that," Molly nodded, seemingly satisfied.

"I don't know if he's mentioned it, but George is actually in talks with the ministry at the minute about some future joint endeavours," said Molly.

“No, actually, he hadn’t mentioned it,” Hermione said, looking over her shoulder at the clearly eavesdropping George.

“Oh yes, well you know of course how well all of those shield cloaks and hats that he and Fred created were received by the DMLE,” Molly went on. “He’s been creating bits and pieces for them ever since. They offered him a full time position a year or two ago, but you know George, he’s never liked the idea of working for the ministry like Arthur and Percy.”

Hermione felt like she should make some comment, but wasn’t sure if Molly was digging for censure of George’s refusals to get a ‘real job’ or praise of her son’s entrepreneurial successes. She gave a non-committal hum that Molly could choose to interpret however she liked.

“He really is such an intelligent and creative sort,” Molly continued. “Much more magically gifted than Ronald. I’m sure that he could have achieved wonderful grades had he applied himself a little more.”

“Yep, I really am a catch Hermione,” George interrupted, coming to stand beside his mother and offering Hermione a dazzling smile. “I’m even relatively well house trained, isn’t that right mother? I don’t think I’ve caused any explosions around here for at least a few years now.”

Hermione held in a laugh as George bent slightly to place a kiss atop his mother’s head.

“Thanks for the food and for hyping me up to everyone,” he told his mother. “I was just coming over to say that I’m heading up to bed now.”

“Why don’t you take Hermione up with you too?” Molly asked. “She looks positively exhausted, and I’m sure you could both do with a good sleep before tomorrow. No doubt Bill and Fleur will be getting us all up early to see Victoire open her presents from Santa.”

“I don’t know, mum,” George sighed. “Last night Hermione positively swooned at the sight of me changing for bed. I don’t think spending Christmas eve night in St Mungos because she fainted at the sight of me bare chested would be a good idea.”

“Oh, did she?” Molly asked interestedly. Eyes glittering as she looked between the pair.

“She did indeed,” George stage whispered. “I think she’s got a secret crush on me.”

Hermione was dying to hit George with the nearest pillow to shut him up, but thought it would be bad form in front of his mother. She should have known better than to think that he would keep her little embarrassing moment from the night before between them. Molly was going to be unbearable now if she thought that her interfering was starting to pay off.

“Not that I can blame you of course, dear. He’s always been rather charming,” she said to Hermione, before turning her attention back to her son. “Though I do wish you would let me cut your hair for you. It’s getting awfully long again.”

“On that note, I’m off!” George exclaimed, ducking under his mother’s arms as she reached to touch his hair. “Coming, Granger?”

“Actually, yes,” Hermione nodded. There was no way she was getting stuck talking to Molly after that little display, and she needed to have a stern word with George about encouraging his mother. “I am rather tired; I think I’ll turn in too.”

George held a hand out to her, and she took it before she had the chance to think about how odd it was. He laced their fingers together and gave her hand a tug, pulling her towards the stairs.

“Night all!” he shouted to the room at large. “Hermione and I are just off to sleep with each other, again. See you in the morning!”

“George!” Hermione yelled, attempting to wrest her hand free of his larger one. Ginny and Harry burst into a fit of laughter and Ron looked slightly queasy. Charlie rolled his eyes at his younger brothers’ predictable antics, but as Hermione caught sight of Bill before being dragged from the room, she noted that he was watching them both speculatively.

“George Weasley, you complete and utter arse! Let go of me at once!” Hermione demanded, stumbling after him up the staircase.

“If I let go of you now, you will just hex me. My self-preservation instincts are stronger than you would think for someone who tests all of his experiments on himself first.”

George didn’t let go of her hand until he had closed the bedroom door behind them. Hermione raised a hand to hit his shoulder in annoyance, but his reflexes were better than hers and he caught her wrist in his grip, grinning down at her.

“You really need to work on that temper of yours, you’ve got a worse violent streak than a blast ended skrewt,” he joked.

“Well maybe if you weren’t so bloody annoying all of the time...” she began.

“Not all of the time, surely. You heard what mum said. I’m an absolute catch.”

“Arse,” she muttered.

“Now now, less talk of my arse please. I know you enjoyed ogling it last night but I’m not a piece of meat.”

Hermione released a low growl of frustration and pushed past him towards the bed. Sitting on the end of it, she kicked off her slippers and crossed her arms over her chest.

“Alright, calm down witch.” George held up his hands in surrender and came to sit beside her on the mattress. “I was just winding you up. And you know what Charlie said about letting mum think that she’s winning.”

“I really don’t think encouraging her was the way to go.” Hermione was being petulant, and she knew it. She was more embarrassed than she cared to admit that George had apparently noticed that she had been ogling his arse.

“You might be right,” he shrugged. “But she’ll be a nightmare anyway, might as well have some fun with it.”

“Aren’t you even slightly annoyed that she’s trying to push you into dating me?” Hermione asked.

“I could think of worse things, honestly. At least she’s temporarily stopped getting on at me about getting a real job,” George stated nonchalantly before rising to his feet and stretching. “Now, turn around whilst I get changed.”

Hermione quickly span to face the wall, not quite sure how to process what he had just said. Behind her she could hear George removing his sweater and t-shirt, and she had to try very hard not to remember how he had looked bare chested the evening before. She fiddled with a loose thread on the bedspread to distract herself as he continued stripping off his clothes just feet behind her.

“Okay, I’m decent,” he stated after a few minutes of awkward silence.

Hermione cleared her throat and turned back to see that he was already pulling half of the pillows from the bed and piling them on the floor.

“You can’t sleep on the floor again,” she protested.

“It’s only for a few nights. Don’t worry about it,” he disagreed.

“No, really, George. I’m not letting you,” she shook her head and reached out to take the best pillow from his hands. “You are being stupid. It’s your bed, you don’t have to make yourself so uncomfortable just for my sake.”

“I’m hardly going to let you sleep on the floor, am I? Honestly, Hermione, it’s not that uncomfortable. I was just being melodramatic this morning.”

“I didn’t mean that I would sleep on the floor,” she tried to explain. “I just meant… well, it’s a double bed. By its very nature it’s made to sleep two people. I’m sure we can both be adult enough about this to share.”

“Wow, mum’s tricks are working better than expected if you are already begging me to sleep with you,” he grinned.

“Oh shut up,” Hermione huffed. “Do you want to sleep in the bed or not?”

“I don’t know, Hermione,” he tapped his chin as he looked down at her thoughtfully. “Are you sure you can keep your hands to yourself?”

“Bugger off,” she grumbled good-naturedly, throwing one of her own pillows across the room at him. “I’m going to go and brush my teeth before you say anything else annoying and I change my mind.”

“It’s so cute that you insist on doing that the muggle way, by the way,” George noted as he began picking up the pillows he had scattered on the floor and placing them back on the bed.

“Hmm?” she asked distractedly as she began gathering her bed things.

“The whole toothbrushing thing,” he shrugged. “It’s like you forget that you are a witch sometimes.”

“I don’t forget,” she contradicted. “I just prefer doing some things the muggle way.”

“Like I said, cute.”

Hermione frowned at him, not sure if he was poking fun at her or not.

“Stop over thinking things and go brush your teeth,” George told her. “I’ll sort everything out in here.”

By the time that Hermione had completed her nightly routine and returned to the now familiar bedroom, George had created a dividing wall of pillows down the centre of the bed and was tucked into one side, the covers pulled up to his chin so that only his grinning face was visible.

“Is this necessary?” Hermione asked, gesturing to the makeshift barrier.

“Don’t want you getting all handsy and taking advantage of me in your sleep,” said George,

smiling like he had been waiting the whole time she was gone to see what her reaction would be.

“Your mother would be delighted, I’m sure, but I think you are safe from my wondering hands.” Hermione climbed into the other side of the bed and peeked at him over the feather-stuffed wall.

“How disappointing,” he pouted, and she snorted in response. “It’s more for your protection anyway. Not that I’m intending to take advantage of you, but I am an incorrigible snuggler in my sleep. I think I’ve woken up spooning everyone in this house at some point, Harry included. I didn’t think you would appreciate it as much as he did.”

“And you think me brushing my teeth is cute,” Hermione laughed. “Who knew that George Weasley was such a secret softie.”

“Only in my sleep. I assure you, I wouldn’t dream of cuddling up to any of my family members during my waking hours.”

“I’m not really much of a snuggler, so I think I would probably just roll you off the bed if you tried to spoon me anyway,” she told him.

“Probably for the best that I created this lovely divide then, or I’d end up spending the night back on the floor again.”

They looked at each other over the pillow wall for a few long moments, both oddly uncomfortable and unsure what else to say.

“You okay if I turn the lights out?” George asked eventually, clearing his throat.

“Um, no that’s fine. I mean, yes, go ahead,” Hermione babbled.

Nodding, George swept his hand in a small arc and wordlessly extinguished the lamps. Hermione stared in his direction in the darkness, she was just able to make out his silhouette as her eyes adjusted to the lack of light. She thought from his position that he might be watching her too. They both lay, unmoving and silent, for a few long minutes before George cleared his throat again and rolled to face away from her.

“Night, Hermione,” he said into the darkness.

“Goodnight, George,” she half whispered back.

Chapter 5

Hermione jolted awake on Christmas morning to the sounds of a screaming Victoire coming from the floor below. It was only the second morning of it, and she was already heartily impressed with Bill and Fleurs resilience if this was the way that they were woken every day.

Groaning, she buried her face into her pillow, and froze in shock when her pillow let out a rumble of laughter and shifted beneath her. Lifting her head, she stared in alarm into the amused blue eyes of George Weasley.

“Morning, Hermione,” he grinned down at her. “Thought you weren’t much of a snuggler?”

Hermione flushed scarlet in mortification and tried to push herself off of George’s chest.

“Aw, don’t get all shy now, love.” George tugged on her arm, causing her to flop back down on top of him. “I was actually quite enjoying it. Could get used to waking up like this.”

Hermione groaned in embarrassment and buried her face in his chest again. He wrapped an arm around her shoulders and held her to him.

“How long have you been awake?” she asked his sternum.

“Only twenty minutes or so,” he reassured her.

“Why didn’t you just roll me off you?”

“I believe you were the one that threatened to roll me onto the floor,” he reminded her. “I told you I like snuggling.”

“You said you only liked to snuggle in your sleep,” she pointed out. “If you have been laid there awake for that long, I’m beginning to doubt your truthfulness.”

“I believe I said I wouldn’t be snuggling up to my family by conscious choice. I said nothing about my desire to snuggle you. Besides, you’re one to talk about deceptions when you claimed you didn’t like to cuddle. You have been wrapped around me like a venomous tentacular for half the night.”

“Please tell me you are making that up,” Hermione begged.

“Fraid not. I woke up thinking I was being smothered at one point, but it was just your hair trying to suffocate me. I tried to move you back to your side of the bed, but your grip is stronger than I gave you credit for.” George laughed again, and she could feel his warm breath against the top of her head.

“I should really move,” she stated, not making any move to do so.

“Probably,” he agreed. “Mum will have breakfast ready soon now that Vicky is up.”

Hermione hummed in agreement. She really should get up; this was entirely inappropriate. George was her ex-boyfriend’s brother after all, and despite all of his joking, he had made it clear that he had no romantic interest in her. His chest was surprisingly comfortable to lay on however, and she was wonderfully warm with her legs wrapped around his and his strong arms draped across her. She hadn’t been lying to him the night before, she really wasn’t usually one for cosying up in bed,

but she would definitely have to make an exception in his case. Besides, if she moved then she would have to deal with how awkward the rest of the day was going to be trying to act normal around his family.

“Please don’t tell your mother about this one,” Hermione begged him.

“Wasn’t going to,” he reassured her. “She’d only get her hopes up. And then I’ll have to deal with her disappointment for the next six months when she realises that you aren’t actually interested in me like that.”

Hermione wasn’t sure what she was about to respond with when the door to the room swung open and any words froze on her tongue.

“Hah! I knew it!” Bill crowed in delight from the open doorway.

“It’s not what it...” Hermione began, launching herself off of George’s chest and scrabbling back to her own side of the bed.

“Bugger off, Bill,” George growled in a more menacing tone than she had ever heard from him. “Get out, right now.”

“Relax, mate. I just came to tell you both that we are going to let Victoire open some of her presents before breakfast if you wanted to come give her yours.” Bill held up his hands in surrender, but still wore a smug expression that made Hermione want to hide under the duvet.

“Get. Out.” George enunciated, before waving his hand and slamming the door straight into his brother’s face. “Fucking wanker. There’s no way he barged into anyone else’s rooms like that.”

Hermione didn’t respond, just watched George as he stood from the bed and ran a hand through his already sleep mussed hair. Turning back to look at Hermione, he bit his lip and sighed in frustration.

“Sorry, Hermione. That was totally my fault,” he said, glaring at the door. “I should have let you get up when you wanted to, not made you stay there just because I was enjoying playing pretend for a few minutes. I’ll go talk to him. Explain it’s not like that.”

Hermione still hadn’t spoken a word when the door swung shut behind George’s retreating form, leaving her alone in his bed with her racing thoughts. She had always got along well enough with the eldest Weasley child, but right then she could have happily hexed him into next week.

As Hermione began to reluctantly prepare for the day, George’s words swam around and around in her head. Was she misinterpreting things? Or had he heavily implied that he might have more than a platonic interest in her? Did she want him to? If anyone had asked her just last week if she had any interest in dating George Weasley, she would have laughed them off. They were wildly incompatible; he the consummate joker who never took anything in life seriously, and she who couldn’t help but always catastrophise. He was relaxed and easy going, and she always needed to have a plan in place, and a contingency plan for if her plan went wrong. He held so little stock in academic achievement that he had quit Hogwarts in a blaze of protest before even completing his NEWTS, she had petitioned the School Governor’s for her right to return and complete her education after the final battle, despite having job opportunities thrown at her from every direction.

She cursed Molly Weasley for putting the idea into her head at all. If the blasted woman hadn’t interfered so blatantly, she would have happily spent Christmas this year laughing at his jokes but

never looking at George long enough to seriously consider that she may have developed an affection for him somewhere along the line that was more than she should reasonably have for the brother of her ex-boyfriend. She mentally kicked herself. She never thought of Ron as her ex-boyfriend in any other context. He was one of her best friends. Someone she had grown up with and come to depend upon as much as she did Harry. Sure, they had dated for a while, but it had really been more because everyone expected them to by that point, the pair of them included. There had been no real passion in the relationship from the get-go, and she could never quite move past the fear that he would abandon her when times got tough again, like he had on the Horcrux hunt with Harry and so many times before that at Hogwarts. So why was it that she was so stuck on the idea of him as her ex-boyfriend now? Was she just trying to give herself reasons to keep the rest of the Weasley boys in general, and one in particular, at a safe distance?

By the time that she had dressed, visited the bathroom, and attempted to restrain her unruly hair, Hermione was still no clearer on how to approach George, but decided that she couldn't reasonably spend any more time loitering upstairs than she already had.

Heading down the stairs, she could hear the sounds of cutlery scraping against plates, and Victoire babbling happily as Arthur entertained her in the living area. Poking her head into the sitting room, she wished Mr Weasley a merry Christmas and smiled at the dramatic re-enactment of Babbity Rabbity he was performing for his first grandchild's entertainment.

As she stepped into the kitchen, Hermione found Fleur and Mrs Weasley already at the sink, scrubbing pans and plates as Fleur complained that the potions she had been recommended by her own mother to combat teething seemed to be having little effect. Molly greeted Hermione distractedly as she began to make recommendations for superior products. A quick glance around showed that Ginny, Percy, Audrey and Harry had already finished their own breakfasts, and what little was left on the table was being fought over by Bill and Charlie. Deciding that she should have known better than to delay arrival to a meal around the infamously hard to fill Weasleys, Hermione resigned herself to a breakfast of the always overlooked Muesli.

Pulling up a free chair at the table, Hermione began to scan the scant leftovers when a plate was quietly slid across the table to her. Looking up, she realised that George must have saved her a plate. He wasn't looking her way, engaged in a conversation with Harry about the latest trade rumours in the British Quidditch League. She silently accepted the plate of bacon, eggs and fried tomatoes and began to eat. She wondered if George had known that she didn't eat sausages with her breakfast, or whether their omission from her plate had more to do with their presumably limited availability.

After she had swallowed several rashers of bacon and a fried egg, Ginny plonked herself ungraciously in the seat to her right.

"Are you going to finish those eggs?" The red-head asked in a would be casual manner. Rolling her eyes, Hermione nudged her remaining fried egg onto the plate that Ginny was holding out hopefully.

"How many have you eaten already?" she asked.

"Only four!" Ginny defended, as though that perfectly reasonable quantity of egg hadn't also been paired with a mountain of beans, sausages and toast.

"I thought it was the off season," Hermione commented. "You normally only eat this much when you've been in training non-stop."

"Mmmm," Ginny agreed around a mouthful of Hermione's breakfast. "Well, yeah, but I need to

prepare my stomach for the feast Mum will have cooked for Christmas lunch later. This is like a warmup event.”

“You know that makes no sense, right?” Hermione asked, amused.

“Don’t ruin my favourite Christmas tradition of eating enough food to satisfy a small Erumpant,” Ginny retaliated, stabbing her fork into Hermione’s last piece of bacon and taking a bite before she could object.

“If everyone eez finished, we would like to give Victoire ‘er presents,” Fleur announced, casting a meaningful glance down at the plate sitting between Hermione and Ginny.

“All done!” Ginny announced, holding the plate in the air as fleur huffed and levitated it over to the sink.

Hermione raised a questioning brow at Ginny. “I thought you two were on much friendlier terms these days?” she asked.

“We tolerate each other much more, sure,” Ginny shrugged. “I think she just resents that mum lets me get out of doing all of the wifely household chores that she gets roped into. Honestly, she’d be much better letting Harry give them a hand. Merlin knows he’s the only reason our place is ever tidy”

Hermione laughed, nodding her head in agreement. Mrs Weasley’s love of keeping a house and feeding up guests had certainly not rubbed off on her only daughter, who was much more likely to order a takeaway than cook a meal on the rare occasions she hosted a get together.

“Come on, we better head through to the other room before Phlegm starts whinging at us,” Ginny whispered, using her old nickname for her sister-in-law.

Hermione followed Ginny’s example and pushed out her chair to follow the rest of the family through to the next room, but was surprised when Bill took her hand and pulled her to her feet.

“I was hoping to have a quick word before we head through actually Hermione,” Bill stated.

“Oh, um, sure.” Hermione was surprised by the request and turned to look at Ginny who had paused in the doorway to stare back at them.

“We’ll just be a minute, Gin,” Bill reassured her. “It’s just about what we discussed last night.” The siblings exchanged a meaningful look, before Ginny gave a short answering nod and departed.

“What’s wrong, Bill?” Hermione asked, more confused than ever after that exchange. She had assumed that he was going to question her about the scene he had walked in on that morning, but if this was something that he and Ginny had been discussing the night before then that didn’t make sense.

“I’m going to get straight to the point and ask you what exactly your intentions are with George?”

“My… my intentions?” Hermione spluttered, thrown by the blunt question.

“For lack of a better word, yes,” Bill confirmed, crossing his arms over his chest and frowning at her. “I was planning on having this discussion with you before I walked in on the two of you this morning, but it seems like it might be more necessary than I thought.”

“I don’t know what you mean, Bill. I don’t have any ‘intentions’ with George,” she denied, feeling

heat rising to her cheeks again.

“Which is kind of my point,” he sighed.

“What?” Hermione asked dumbly. She had never felt so out of step in a conversation before.

“Look, I like you Hermione. Really, I do,” Bill reassured her. “But if you don’t have any interest in George then I think it might be best if you stepped back a bit. Ginny’s already said that you can stay in her room for the rest of the holidays like you used to. She’ll make an excuse that mum will believe.”

“Stay with Ginny?” she asked, still feeling behind.

“Yes,” he stated blandly. “George has been through a lot in the last few years. I don’t think that this is doing him any favours.”

“Bill, I’m sorry if I’m being stupid here, but I really have no idea what you are talking about.” Hermione could feel her ire rising. Bill was making it sound like she was doing something wrong by just spending time with George. It wasn’t even her fault they had been stuck together in the first place. Surely if he should be having a word with anyone, it should be his mother.

“Merlin, Ginny was right,” Bill groaned, drawing a hand down his scarred face. “You really are clueless aren’t you.”

“Excuse me?” she squeaked in annoyance.

“He likes you, Hermione,” Bill told her bluntly. “He has for years. He’s just never mentioned it because you and Ron spent all of your teenage years tiptoeing around each other. And if you haven’t noticed that by now, then you clearly don’t think of him like that. You need to step back before he gets hurt. He might seem like the happy go lucky one of us, but he’s actually a lot more damaged than he lets on. I can let you off for messing with his emotions if you really didn’t know, but if you spend another night wrapped around him and then walk out of here on boxing day like it was nothing, then we will be the ones left to pick up the pieces, and I’m not going to let that happen.”

Bill gave Hermione a hard look, whilst she fumbled around for anything to say. She hadn’t yet managed to process the massive bombshell that Bill had just dropped on her, let alone decide how she felt about it. So George had apparently liked her for years... but surely Bill was wrong. She would have noticed. Wouldn’t she? But if he and Ginny had been discussing it, then maybe she was the only one that hadn’t known, or hadn’t looked close enough to notice.

“Bill! ‘Ermione! What eez taking so long? We are waiting to give Victoire ‘er presents!” Fleur shouted from the other room.

“Coming,” Bill shouted back. He stared assessingly down at Hermione for another long moment, before sighing and turning to open the door.

Hermione followed Bill into the adjoining room, affecting a smile as she squeezed into a spot on the sofa between Ron and Charlie and settled in to watch Victoire open her gifts. The toddler seemed more interested in chewing the paper than examining her new toys, but Hermione joined in with the cooing and excitement from the rest of the family group. She had never felt more like an outsider in the Burrow than she did as she sat amongst them, wondering how many of them were judging her for her behaviour with George over the last few days.

After the youngest member had opened her presents and been passed around to dish out sloppy

kisses of thanks, Molly handed each of them a lumpy looking package and they began to open their traditional annual Weasley jumpers. Hermione almost cried as she pulled on her own lilac and cerulean jumper, already far too emotionally exhausted for 9am on a Christmas morning.

There was some confusion as Ginny unwrapped an emerald green jumper that was clearly much too large for her, and Mrs Weasley began to protest as she pulled it on over her t-shirt. As Ginny reassured her mother that the knee length jumper was perfect, George excitedly began tearing the paper from his own gift. With a devious smile, he hastily removed the pyjama shirt that he was still wearing and donned the golden yellow knit.

“Well, this is just perfect mum!” he exclaimed, jumping to his feet and giving a dramatic twirl. “It’s just my colour, and the fit is much more flattering than usual, don’t you think?”

“George Weasley, you switch back with your sister this instant!” Mrs Weasley shouted as the rest of the room burst into laughter.

“Whatever do you mean, mother?” he asked innocently.

“You know perfectly well that that is your sister’s jumper, now take it off before you stretch the sleeves out!” Molly demanded jumping to her feet and placing her hands on her hips menacingly.

“But this is mine!” George protested. “You handed it to me yourself and everything. And Ginny likes hers too, don’t you Gin?”

“Honestly, its pretty comfortable,” Ginny shrugged, rolling up the too long sleeves on her own jumper, tucking her knees up to her chin and pulling the loose item over them so that the ‘G’ in the middle bulged oddly.

“See?” George pointed at his sister. “Ginny’s happy, I’m happy. What’s the problem?”

“The problem George Weasley, is that no one else in this house wants to see your bared midriff for the rest of Christmas day.” Molly was now pointing her wand at her son, as he danced around the room, ducking behind his siblings to avoid her.

“Save me Ron!” George yelled, pulling his younger brother from the sofa and placing him between him and his mother as a human shield.

“Gerroff me!” Ron cried, cringing away from the end of his mother’s wand and struggling to break free of George’s grasp.

Ron span on his heel so that George, still clinging to his elbows, was forced to turn with him, exposing his back to the less than amused Molly Weasley. She took her opportunity and quickly froze the troublemaker in place.

Hermione couldn’t hold in her laughter as Ron managed to break free of the now paralyzed George’s grip, sending him toppling to the floor at her feet. He looked entirely ridiculous, face frozen in an expression that was a cross between amusement and vague panic. The jumper, which would have been a perfect fit on his much smaller sister, left most of his stomach exposed. Hermione had a flashback to seeing him shirtless the other night and might have blushed again had she not been so busy giggling at his expense. Taking pity on him, she waved her wand over him, unfreezing him and he beamed gratefully up at her. Bill scooped George’s discarded pyjama shirt from the floor at his feet and launched it at him over their mother’s head. George caught it and sighed dramatically, before making a show of removing the offending jumper and donning his shirt once more.

He held out the jumper to Ginny, but she shook her head at him.

“Keep it, I think I prefer this one,” she stated. “And you seemed to like that one just fine.”

“I’m going to wear it every day,” he stage whispered as Mrs Weasley looked on disapprovingly.

Harry quickly unwrapped his own initialled jumper and gushed over the unusual colour choice to distract his mother-in-law before any further argument could ensue.

Chapter 6

The rest of Christmas morning was spent passing out and unwrapping various gifts from one another. Hermione received tickets to the next lecture series from her favourite transfiguration author from Ginny and Harry, and a scarf from Ron that was probably more suited to his mother's taste than her own. As she watched the Weasley children open presents lovingly picked out by their parents, she tried not to feel sad that she would never again receive Christmas gifts from her own parents. It was enough to know that they had survived the war and were happy. She had known that the memory charms she had placed upon her mother and father would likely be irreversible and she was willing to accept the consequences of her actions, but at times like these it still stung a little to know that they would be celebrating Christmas together, completely unaware that they had a daughter half a world away.

At dinner, Hermione was forced to admit to Ginny that her practice of consuming a large breakfast on Christmas morning to stretch her stomach for her afternoon meal may indeed have had some merit. Certainly, Ginny had managed to consume twice as much food as Hermione herself, and almost as much as Ron.

Victoire did not appear to have been quite as impressed with her grandmothers cooking as the rest of them, if the amount of mashed potato that found its way onto the floor was anything to go by. Hermione offered to assist Molly in cleaning the kitchen after the meal was over, but was once again waved off.

Christmas afternoon seemed like it was set to proceed down the same lazy path as Christmas eve had. Hermione spent an hour or so after lunch chatting to Harry and Ron, but when they suggested a game of Wizard's Chess, she quickly made her excuses. She had been defeated by Ron enough times over the years to know that she wasn't the best chess player, and even Harry could normally put her in check in an embarrassingly short amount of moves these days. Ginny was trying to convince Charlie that she could outstrip him in a flying race around the house with her hands tied behind her back, and she decided to stay well away from that conversation for her own safety also. Mrs Weasley and Fleur were chatting amiably in one corner of the room, Percy had taken Audrey upstairs for a nap, and Mr Weasley was once again playing on the floor with his granddaughter. She would normally have joined in the conversation that Bill and George were having about Bill's latest overseas trip to help out with a team of curse-breakers in Istanbul, but she was deliberately avoiding both of them after the morning's events.

For lack of anything better to do, she decided to carry her newly acquired possessions up to the room she had been sharing with George. After folding the scarf neatly into her beaded bag, she glanced around the room, hoping to find something else to occupy her time. She was beginning to feel distinctly awkward and was wondering whether she should try and pull Ginny to one side to discuss the bombshell Bill had dropped earlier.

After needlessly straightening the pillows and sheets on the bed, Hermione gave herself a shake and decided that hiding upstairs wasn't doing her any favours. She was about to leave the room when she heard a soft knock at the door.

"Come in," she called, wondering if Ginny had come to hunt her down and warn her off of her brother too.

George stepped into the room, giving her a small smile.

"Is it just me you are avoiding, or all Weasley's in general?" he asked.

"I'm not avoiding you," she lied quickly.

"You're a terrible liar, Hermione," he told her. "I've actually been trying to get you alone all day, but you keep finding an excuse to leave any conversation as soon as I join it."

"I'm sorry, George," she cringed. "It's just that..."

"I get it," he held up a hand to stop her. "You really don't need to explain. I just wanted to give you this." He held out a neatly wrapped package towards her, not meeting her eyes. "I get if you don't want a present from me after...well. I've had it for ages though, and I can't exactly return it or give it to anyone else, so here."

George stepped closer to her and placed the package on the bed, still not looking directly at her, and quickly left the room.

Hermione was tempted to run after him and argue that he didn't 'get it' at all, but she still wasn't completely sure that she got it herself yet, and didn't know what she would say to him besides telling him that he was wrong.

Deciding instead to take the excuse she had been hoping for to stay upstairs alone for a little longer, she sat on the corner of the bed and pulled the present onto her lap. It was a small box, too small to be a book, which was the usual default present that most people gave her for Christmas or her birthday. It was neatly wrapped in gold paper, with a deep red ribbon tied into a bow around it. She was oddly surprised that George would give out such well presented gifts. She had imagined his wrapping skills to be lacking like his younger brother's for some reason. She wasn't sure why as she considered for the first time that someone had to design the packaging for the various lines of Weasley's Wizard Wheezes products.

Realising that she had been sitting examining the package for longer than was normal, she gave the ribbon a gentle tug. It fell away, and she placed it neatly on the bed beside her before peeling back the golden paper to reveal a slim box. Opening the box, she looked down at a small gold chain with a single Sapphire charm. Removing it, she held the bracelet closer to her and took in the intricate details. She wasn't normally one for jewellery, but she could see why George would have picked her something with a sapphire, it was her birthstone after all.

As she made to move the box from her lap, she noticed that there was a folded slip of parchment tucked in below where the bracelet had rested. She slid it out, and found a note written in George's familiar ostentatious cursive font.

Hermione,

Before you think I'm being weird buying you jewellery, you should probably know that the thing you are holding is also a portkey. A rather brilliant portkey, if I do say so myself.

It's charmed to be activated by a pass phrase, rather than just touch. Pretty nifty bit of spellwork, I know, but not unheard of. The really ingenious part is that it's reusable and goes both ways. I know, I'm a genius.

If you hold the stone and say either of your parents' names twice it will drop you into a secluded cavern on the beach 50 feet from their condo. To come back, you just grab it and say "There's no place like home" twice like that muggle film you like and you'll end up behind the Leaky.

I'm assuming that someone like you will already be aware of the perils of international portkey travel, but I would like to add that you might want to check tide times in Perth before you test it out.

I was almost shark bait the first time I gave it a go, and I really wouldn't recommend it.

Probably best you don't go flashing it around as well. I've been working on something similar with Kingsley for the Auror department but technically speaking I don't think I'm supposed to make them international and I'm far too pretty to end up in Azkaban.

George.

Hermione stared down at the delicate chain in awe for a heartbeat before bringing it to her chest and letting out a small breathy sob. Of course, he hadn't bought her jewellery. Of course George, who understood grief better than most of them, would understand her need to have a connection to her parents, no matter if they knew her or not. International portkeys to travel as far as Australia were notoriously expensive and difficult to come by. She had been to see her parents a handful of times over the last few years, but it always took months of planning and saving to manage. He had given her a way to travel straight to them without all of the red tape and waiting around associated with doing it by the Ministry's books. There weren't words to explain how grateful she was.

Resisting the temptation to activate the portkey straight away, she wiped away a tear and carefully laid it back in the box. She couldn't disappear in the middle of Christmas day without any warning, just to go and stare through her parent's window at their happy little couples Christmas without her. She would have clasped the bracelet around her wrist right away, but knew that someone would notice the out of character addition to her outfit and ask her about it. Tucking the box carefully into her beaded bag, she decided that she would pay them a discrete visit before she returned to work in the new year. Right now she needed to pull herself together and go back downstairs.

As she walked into the living area of the house, she spotted Ron, Harry and Mr Weasley all staring out of the window and laughing.

"Ridiculous girl," Mrs Weasley tutted. "She won't be laughing when she falls off that broomstick and has to drink a bottle full of skelegrow."

"Actually, dear, she appears to be winning," Mr Weasley informed his wife, causing her to tut again, louder than before.

Hermione caught a glimpse of two red haired blurs zipping past the window as she passed, heading for the corner of the room where George was now sat bouncing a giggling Victoire on his lap opposite Bill and Fleur.

"Erm, George, could I have a quick word?" she asked, pulling his attention away from the adorable little strawberry blond girl.

"Sure, what's up?" he asked.

"Maybe in the, um, in the kitchen?" she suggested. Bill was looking at her assessingly again and raised a brow before reaching out to retrieve his daughter.

"Here, she's probably ready for a nappy change anyway and you really don't want to have to deal with that," Bill said. "She might look cute but she makes a heck of a big stink for someone so small."

"Bill!" Fleur chastised him.

"Go on then stinky butt," George told Victoire, passing her back to her father and standing.

Hermione smiled awkwardly at Fleur, before turning on her heel and marching to the kitchen. She

could hear George's footsteps following her, but didn't turn to look at him until she had closed the kitchen door behind them.

"Everything okay?" he managed to get out before she threw her arms around his waist and squeezed any breath right out of him. "I take it you liked the present?" he asked.

"It's honestly the most wonderful thing anyone has ever given me," she told him, feeling tears coming to her eyes again. "I'm even willing to accept the fact that you broke at least a dozen laws and possibly risked the statute of secrecy by giving it to me."

"Good to know you aren't going to be handing me over to the dementors," he laughed.

Hermione still had her arms wrapped tightly around his waist, but she noted that he had made no move to hug her back. His long arms hung limply at his sides and he remained perfectly still.

She realised that he was probably feeling awkward, but she had no intention of letting him go. This man was quite possibly the most wonderful human being she had ever met, including her best friend who had rid the world of Voldemort as a teenager. She just needed to find enough courage to tell him that she thought that he was perfect. And maybe not just perfect in a general sense, but perfect for her in particular.

"I'm not avoiding you." It was woefully inadequate, but it was the only thing she could think to say to him right then.

"Clearly since you've been clinging to me for the past five minutes now," he joked.

"I don't want to avoid you," she attempted to clarify. Merlin, when had she become so ineloquent?

She felt a small puff of air on her head as he released a reluctant laugh, but she smiled as he finally moved one arm to wrap around her back gently.

"Good to know," he said.

The door to the kitchen swung open and Mrs Weasley stood in the frame, affecting an expression of surprise to find anyone in the kitchen. Hermione groaned and tipped her head forwards to rest her forehead on George's chest briefly. He sighed good naturedly and gave her a small squeeze before releasing her.

"Hi, Mum," he greeted.

"Oh, George! Hermione, dear! I had no idea that you were in here!" she exclaimed. "No idea at all."

"I was just thanking George for my Christmas gift," Hermione felt the need to explain.

"Oh, he gave you a present, did he?" Molly asked, smile widening. "He really is such a considerate boy. Well, don't let me interrupt you anyway," she waved a hand in their general direction and began to back away from the door. "If you could just bring some wine and a few butterbeers through when you come back in. No rush though! No need to hurry, dears. You take your time."

"I think you've just made her Christmas, hugging me in public like that," George told Hermione once they were alone again.

"We were hardly in public," Hermione corrected him.

“I see how it is,” he pouted at her. “I’m good enough to cuddle up to behind closed doors, but not out in the open.”

“Shut up,” she groaned, elbowing him in the side.

“We really need to work on that violent streak of yours if I am going to be spending more time with you, or I’ll have to develop a better bruise paste.”

“Or you could just be less annoying,” she pointed out.

“Impossible,” he shook his head sadly. “I’m afraid it’s inevitable that I will find a way to wind you up at least once per conversation.”

“Better get working on that new and improved bruise paste then,” said Hermione.

“Are you wearing the ribbon from the present I gave you in your hair?” George asked, bringing a hand up to her hair to touch the velvet bow.

“I didn’t want to put the bracelet on and have everyone asking questions,” she shrugged.

“So you decided to wear the wrapping instead?” he asked. “Does this mean that you are my Christmas present?”

“I am not a possession to be gifted, George Weasley, and you would do well to remember that,” she told him.

“Damn, I was really hoping that was going to be an easy way to ask you out there,” he sighed. Flicking his wand, he levitated the waiting tray of butterbeers from the counter and out into the living room, leaving Hermione blushing again behind him.

Grabbing the bottle of wine he had left behind, Hermione hastily found a glass and poured herself a drink before following after him.

By the time that she had placed the bottle on the coffee table and offered to pour glasses for Mr and Mrs Weasley, a shivering Charlie and victorious looking Ginny had made their grand entrance back into the communal space and they were all quickly swept up in laughter and talks of rematches.

Hermione bounced from conversation to conversation for the rest of the afternoon, feeling much less out of place than she had earlier that day. She didn’t talk to George again, but it was less intentional this time, and when she made eye contact with Bill, he gave her a small nod and a smile instead of the serious frown he had been gracing her with.

Hermione’s good mood followed her through to the evening, and she didn’t even mind when she found herself discussing how the different weighing systems used internationally for laboratory equipment effected the efficacy of various potions with Percy and his wife Audrey.

George was on top form, waltzing his mother around the room when her favourite song came on the wireless, and creating a small indoor snowstorm for Victoire that he seemed to enjoy more than the sleepy toddler.

As the night drifted on, Ron fell asleep on the sofa after too much fire whiskey, and Harry had to take Ginny up to bed before she could challenge any more of her brothers to a drinking contest. Other couples began announcing their intentions to head up to bed after that, and Charlie reluctantly agreed to levitate his youngest brother up to bed in the room they were sharing on the

fifth floor.

Suddenly feeling awkward again about being left alone with George, Hermione dithered about the room, trying to find something that Molly hadn't already tidied to delay the inevitably weirdness of sharing a bed after almost-but-not-really admitting that she might have developed some kind of 'feelings'.

"I can hear your brain whirring from here, Hermione," the Weasley in question told her as he rose from the sofa with a stretch. "Don't over think anything, okay? I can sleep on the floor again." He left the room and headed up the stairs before she had to answer, which was probably for the best because she couldn't decide if that sounded like a good idea or maddeningly disappointing.

Giving up on her delay tactics, Hermione sighed to herself and followed him out of the room, extinguishing candles and lamps behind her as she went.

By the time she reached the bedroom, George had already changed into a fresh pair of pyjamas and was gathering up pillows again.

"You don't have to sleep on the floor," she told him.

"I know," he shrugged, still gathering the pillows.

"No, I mean..." she hesitated. "I mean I don't want you to sleep on the floor."

"Sure about that?" he asked.

She wasn't really, but she nodded anyway. Smiling slightly, he pushed his collection of pillows into the middle of the bed to form a dividing line again. She extracted her own Pyjamas from her beaded bag and gave a small cough.

"Turn around," she told him. He raised an eyebrow at her but did as he was told, turning to face the wall.

"Not opting for your usual muggle bedtime routine?" he asked her without turning around.

"I'm too exhausted tonight," she told him honestly as she quickly removed her clothes and pulled on her PJs. "It's been a long day."

He hummed in agreement. She hurried to make herself decent and climbed into her side of the bed.

"Okay, you can turn around," she told him.

He quickly extinguished the lights and slipped into the other side of the bed. He felt far too close and yet also too far away with the mountain of pillows separating them.

"George?" she asked a minute later; in case he had somehow fallen asleep in the intervening seconds of silence.

"Hermione?"

"I don't think that the pillow wall is really necessary, do you?" she asked.

"Wanting to snuggle me again?" he joked but began to remove some of the pillows.

"Actually, yes," she admitted.

He froze in the motion of tossing a pillow from the centre of the bed to the floor and it instead hit him in the face.

“Oh,” he said, removing the pillow and turning towards her in the darkness.

“Would that be... I mean... If you would rather not...” Hermione began, her tiny bubble of confidence bursting.

“No!” he exclaimed, and she felt a pang. “I mean, no I wouldn’t rather not,” he clarified.

“George, there were too many double negatives in that sentence,” she chastised in mild annoyance.

“Just get over here, you pedantic witch,” he sighed, reaching out a hand towards her and pulling her in to his side.

Somewhat relieved that she hadn’t just been rejected, Hermione laid her head on his chest and tucked one of her legs over his. He stroked the fingers of one hand lightly up and down her ribs over her flannel pyjamas and she sighed contentedly.

“Hermione?” he asked after another minute.

“Hmm?”

“I’m going to kiss you now,” he told her. “Is that okay?”

“Yes,” she breathed instantly, tilting her head up towards him.

His lips crashed into hers with more force than he had probably intended, blinded by the darkness as they both were. She released a small breath of surprise into his mouth, and he groaned, wrapping his arm tighter around her waist.

He somehow tasted like spearmint toothpaste, she thought somewhere in the back of her mind, as she reached a hand up to tangle in his hair and pull him closer to her, deepening the kiss. He nibbled at her bottom lip and she parted her lips, allowing him to slip his tongue into her mouth. She slipped her own out to tangle with his and taste more of him. She wanted to taste all of him.

Suddenly needing more than just to kiss him, she rolled them slightly so that instead of just having a leg wrapped over him, she was straddling his hips. Breaking the kiss, she looked down at him, breathing hard. She couldn’t see much in the darkness, just the light reflecting off his eyes, but she could feel that he was breathing just as hard as she was.

He reached up and brushed a hand lightly along her jaw and up her cheek before plunging it into her untameable curls and pulling her back down to him. She went willingly, peppering kisses on his slightly stubbled jaw before he brought her lips forcefully back to his.

The hand that was wrapped in her hair tugged lightly and she broke the kiss, arching her back slightly as he took the opportunity to kiss down her throat, nipping gently at her collar bone. Unthinkingly, she ground her pelvis down into him, feeling him already hardening beneath her. He groaned again and brought his free hand to rest on her hip, using the leverage to rock her into him once more.

Hermione whimpered quietly and he rose up to swallow the sound. Moving his hand from her hip to wrap around her spine, he clutched her tighter to him, so that her chest brushed up against his and she could feel each stuttering breath that he took. She rolled her hips again, enjoying the increased friction that his change of position had brought. He was definitely hard beneath her now,

and she ached to wrap her hand around him and feel him. Kissing from the corner of her mouth up to her ear, he took the lobe between his teeth and bit down gently. She jumped slightly in surprise, but he held her tighter to him and ran the tip of his tongue over the shell of her ear.

“If you want this to stop, tell me now,” he whispered, lips still brushing her ear.

“Don’t stop,” she breathed back.

“Oh, thank Merlin, I really didn’t want to stop either,” he chuckled, slipping his hand beneath her top to ghost over her bare skin.

“Prat,” she laughed, feeling goosebumps raise on her skin where he touched her.

“You love it,” he told her, nibbling at her ear again.

“I’d love it more if you shut up and kissed me again,” she corrected, smiling into his mouth as he obliged her and brought their lips crashing back together again.

She rolled her hips again, and this time he growled into her mouth and flipped her so that she was flat on her back and he hovered above her.

“Keep doing that and I’m going to embarrass myself.”

“Maybe I enjoy teasing you.” Hermione smiled slyly up at him and brought a hand down to feel him through his increasingly tight trousers.

“Oh, but I’m the much better tease between us, love,” he grinned, reaching down to clasp her wandering hand and pin it beside her head.

“Is that a challenge?” she asked.

“Godric, yes,” he promised.

Hermione felt butterflies gather in her stomach as he began undoing the bottom buttons of her shirt.

“Is this okay?” he asked, pausing with his fingers on the small button that lay between her breasts.

She nodded and he made quick work of undoing her last remaining buttons, pulling the two sides of her shirt apart and baring her to him.

“Fuck, you’re beautiful, Hermione,” he told her, still hovering over her and making no move to touch her.

She liked that he was clearly making a big thing of consent between them, but she was aching to be touched at this point. Grabbing his hands from where they rested limply at his sides, she brought them to cup her breasts. She was pleased that the dim room meant that he couldn’t see all of her scars, but she knew that he must be able to feel them now. George didn’t seem to pay her scars a second thought however, taking her cue and gently massaging both of her breasts, rolling her nipples with his thumbs.

Her heart was beating so loud that she was sure he could hear it as he lowered his head and brought his mouth to one breast, gently lathing his tongue over a nipple before pulling it into his mouth. She let out a whimper, and his appreciative groan caused wonderful sensations to run through her from where his mouth was wrapped around her nipple. He sucked at it lightly, still rolling the opposite nipple with his thumb.

Realising that whilst his mouth was occupied, he once again had a free hand, Hermione reached for it and bravely dragged his fingers down her stomach and under the waistband of her trousers.

“Are you...” he began, releasing her breast and rising slightly to look at her face.

“Yes, I’m sure,” she interrupted, tangling a hand into his hair and bringing his head back down to her breast. He laughed slightly, causing another amazing sensation to run through her as he took her nipple back between his lips.

He didn’t attempt to question her again, slipping his fingers down further beneath her waistband until he met her tight curls. He shifted slightly above her to allow him a better reach and she let out a muttered curse as his fingers slipped between her wet folds.

“Shit, Hermione,” he groaned. “You’re so wet already.” He removed his hand from her trousers and pulled away from her breasts and Hermione felt suddenly bereft. Before she had chance to question him however, he was hovering over her and yanking her bottoms down over her arse and slipping them off her legs.

She was completely exposed to him now, but didn’t have a second to overthink the vulnerable position before he settled her thighs over his shoulders and ran his warm tongue up the length of her slit. Hermione jumped a little in shock, but he just brought an arm to wrap over her waist, pinning her to the bed as he repeated the action.

He repeated the motion a third time, this time ending the sweeping lick by circling his tongue around her clit. Hermione let out another whimper that was much louder than any noise she had yet made and she felt him laugh against her.

“You need to be quiet, love. Unless you want half of the house figuring out what’s going on in here.” He pulled himself up from between her thighs to place a soft kiss to her lips. “Think you can be quite for me?”

Hermione nodded, unbelievably aroused at the taste of herself on his lips.

“Good girl,” he told her, ducking back down and running his tongue between her folds again. Hermione squirmed against his face, but managed to remain almost silent, even as he dipped a finger into her entrance.

He made good on his promise to tease her for several long minutes as he alternated sporadically between long lazy licks of her slit and more erratic darting motions over her clit, pumping first one then two fingers in and out of her in a tortuously slow pace that had her panting. She tried to simultaneously push down onto his fingers to gain more friction, and to arch herself up against his mouth as she dug her hands into his hair. She was so close, she just needed him to... Circe, she wasn’t sure what she needed, she just knew that he was intentionally driving her insane and she didn’t know how much longer she could take it.

“Please,” she groaned quietly. “George, please.”

“Mmm , how can I resist when you purr my name so nicely.” It seemed like he had been waiting for her to beg, and as soon as she said the words, he increased the pressure of his tongue on her clit and delved his fingers further into her, crooking them slightly to achieve the perfect angle that had her shattering all over his face in moments.

He stroked her through the waves of her climax, and raised himself up onto an elbow to hover above her. She could see her own juices glistening on his face in the darkness and decided that she

wanted to taste them again. With a hand still tangled in his hair, she pulled his mouth down to hers and devoured him, even as her body still shuddered beneath him.

“I want to taste you,” she admitted, reaching a hand down between them to touch his length for the first time. He was long and hard, the skin of his shaft unbelievably soft, a bead of precum already crowning its tip. She circled her fingers around him and pumped them up and down a few times before making to roll him onto his back.

“Hermione, you have no idea how good that sounds right now,” he said breathily, “but if you put me in your mouth I won’t last two minutes, and that’s really not how I want tonight to end.”

“No?” Hermione asked with a small frown.

“No, love,” he laughed. “I’ll definitely take you up on the offer another time, but right now I want to sink my cock into that beautiful cunt of yours and make you moan my name again.

“Oh,” she breathed, clenching her thighs together as she felt desire burn through her again despite having found her own release only moments ago.

“Oh,” he nodded, bending to kiss her again. “Would you like that, Hermione?” he asked.

“Yes,” she breathed, hand pumping him absently again as he nibbled at her earlobe.

“You want me to fuck you until that brilliant brain of yours shuts down and all you can think of is how much you want me to make you come again?”

“Merlin, yes,” she gasped, her pelvic muscles clenching as though to clamp around his absent cock.

“Then lay back, Granger, I want to watch you whilst you try to stay quiet.”

It was a good job he had reminded her of the need for silence, because as he lined himself up with her entrance and drove into her slick folds in one swift motion she almost screamed out his name. Biting down on her lip instead, she reached up and pulled him down so that his forehead rested on hers.

“Okay?” he asked, pulling slowly out of her and easing back in as he kept his head resting on hers, his breath ghosting across her flushed face.

“Perfect,” she told him, kissing him hungrily.

He brought a hand up to cup her breast, the slow way he was playing with her nipple heightening the sense of pleasure that was already building up inside her as he drove into her, hard and fast.

“Fuck, Hermione,” he moaned. “You feel so good. I want to spend the rest of my life exploring every perfect inch of you, but right now I’m going to fill you up with my cum whilst you try not to scream.”

“Yes,” she panted, not sure which part of his declaration sounded better to her in that moment.

“Do you think you can come for me again, love?” George asked, reaching his hand between them to stroke her clit as he continued to pound into her.

She made an incomprehensible noise that he seemed to take for encouragement, and he increased his pace as she began to pant heavily beneath him.

“Fuck, come for me Hermione, please,” he begged, clearly holding back his own orgasm through

strength of will alone. She shattered beneath him as though his words were all that had been required to push her over the edge, and he followed her with a few more erratic thrusts and a grunt that she was sure would have been heard by most of the Burrow. She kissed him as he crumpled on top of her, chest slick with sweat and heart hammering in his chest.

“So much for being quiet,” she laughed quietly, stroking the sweat dampened hair back from his forehead as he traced absent patterns against her ribs minutes later.

“S’alright,” he mumbled sleepily. “Everyone will probably just assume you’ve been beating me up again. You’ve got a terrible reputation for violence towards those you care about.”

She laughed lightly, flicking him between the brows.

“See what I mean?” He grabbed her wrist with one hand and brought her hand to his mouth to kiss the tip of each finger. “Violent.”

“Maybe you will have to help me think of some other ways to vent my frustration,” she told him.

“Oh, I can think of several ways to do that already,” he told her. “In fact, give me about ten minutes and I’d be willing to show you my first idea straight away.”

“Ten minutes?” she asked, laughing.

“Maybe five if you play your cards right,” he amended, kissing her lightly and shifting so that she was sprawled atop his chest. “You might want to put up a few silencing charms this time though, because you definitely won’t be able to keep quiet for what I have in mind.”

“I’m intrigued,” she told him. “But I believe that I owe you one Christmas present, George Weasley, and I seem to recall you promising to let me taste you. Maybe if I have my mouth full, I’ll be better at staying quiet?”

“Merlin, witch,” George laughed breathily as she pulled her wand out from under her pillow and cast a locking charm on the door. “You are going to be the death of me.”

“Good way to go though, right?” she joked.

“I’m willing to find out,” he told her, as she pulled back the covers and began to trace kisses down his chest.

Chapter 7

Hermione woke up sprawled across George's chest for this second morning in a row, but this time there was less awkwardness and a distinct lack of clothing between them.

"Morning gorgeous," he said as she tilted her head to look up at him. He was smiling down at her and stroking her hair, looking very satisfied with himself.

"Morning," she replied. "I don't suppose you could be convinced to keep last night between us until we see where this is going?"

"Well, I was kind of hoping that it would be going back to my flat later this afternoon when everyone heads home for a few repeat performances, since I happen to know you don't have to work until the new year." George kissed the top of her head and tickled her ribs lightly, causing her to squirm.

"You know what I meant," she said, attempting to bat his hands away.

"Am I your dirty little secret now, Granger?" he asked, in a voice that fell flat of the joking tone he had been going for.

"Merlin, no. Nothing like that George, I promise," she reassured him, kissing his chest. "I would just rather not have to deal with all of your family's reactions at once."

"Ah, in that case, discretion is my middle name," he told her, grinning again.

"You are about as discrete as a mountain troll," she countered.

"Fair point," he laughed. "You better get ready to do some explaining then."

"Could you at least try and wait to mention it to everyone until I'm gone?" she asked.

"I won't tell anyone unless they ask," he compromised.

"That's a better deal than I thought I would get from you," she admitted. "I'll take it. I should probably at least tell Ron before its common knowledge."

"Planning on keeping me around are you?" George asked.

"That all depends on how unbearable you are about the fact that we're together."

"So, we are together then are we?" he questioned with another lopsided grin.

"Um, well, I just assumed that..." she began, feeling herself blush. Maybe he had just wanted a quick shag the night before and wasn't actually interested in a relationship with her.

"I'm just confirming that you weren't using me for my body, Granger," he told her, kissing the top of her head again. "Godric knows I've only been half in love with you for the past decade. I'm not letting you go now that you finally came to your senses and realised we were made for each other."

"Stop exaggerating," Hermione said, butterflies gathering in the pit of her stomach at his casual admission.

"Oh, I'm not exaggerating. Fred had to put up with me pining after you for years, and Ginny has

been telling me to ask you out ever since you and Ron split up. For someone as intelligent as you, your powers of observation when it comes to flirting are really quite terrible. I should probably thank mum; I was beginning to think I would have to put out a double page spread in the prophet to catch your attention before she started this little ploy.”

George bent to kiss her before rolling her off of him and standing. Hermione took the opportunity to fully appreciate his naked form in the light of day. She had been right about the freckles on his arse, she noted.

“I’m going to go take a shower before everyone else is up to fight me for one,” George said, covering himself with a bathrobe. “I would highly recommend you do the same unless you want to walk around smelling like sex and giving the game away.”

Hermione threw a pillow at him as he left the room, but he darted behind the door with a laugh and her projectile fell short.

After showering and dressing, Hermione headed down to the kitchen to find Molly already at the stove and Ginny and Ron knocking back hideously orange hangover drafts. Everyone else seemed to be scattered between the living room and kitchen. George was playing with Victoire again and flashed her a dazzling smile as she caught his eye.

“Morning,” she greeted them all. “Bad head this morning you two?” she asked Ginny and Ron.

“Please don’t talk to me until this thing has kicked in,” Ron groaned, lowering his head to rest on the dining table.

“Well, I wasn’t as drunk as that idiot,” Ginny asserted. “But I’m feeling less than fresh this morning.”

“The lack of sleep probably didn’t help,” Harry yawned, coming up behind her and taking the seat beside his wife.

“Definitely not,” Ginny snorted.

“I was out like a log, and it doesn’t seem to have helped me much,” Ron mumbled into the wooden surface.

“Yeah, well, consider yourself lucky,” Ginny told him. “Some of us were kept awake half the night by the room above us.”

“What, Percy?” Ron asked blearily.

“Nope,” Harry said, giving Hermione a significant look.

“Definitely not Percy,” Ginny confirmed. “He would have at least have had the sense to throw up silencing charms.” She gave a small shudder. “No one should ever have to listen to noises like I heard for hours coming from their own brother’s bedroom. I think I need to see a mind healer.”

“What the hell are you two going on about?” Ron asked, raising his head slightly to squint at his sister.

Hermione tried to discreetly back away from the table, but was thwarted in her attempt escapes by a pair of strong arms being flung around her waist from behind.

“We had sex!” George announced, at a far louder volume than was strictly necessary.

“What happened to discretion!?” Hermione groaned, trying to wriggle free of his grasp.

“You’re right, love, it’s really not my style,” he told her, spinning her to face him and placing a kiss on her forehead.

Ron choked on thin air and Ginny gave another shudder.

“Well, that was a massive overshare,” she commented grimly.

“So, are you two, like, a thing now?” Ron asked, eyes darting between his brother and ex-girlfriend.

“We certainly are, little bro,” George confirmed. “Turns out Hermione here is madly in love with me.”

Hermione groaned and buried her head in George’s chest as she heard someone else bustle over to the table.

“Did I hear something about George and Hermione being a couple?” Molly questioned, thankfully not commenting on the rest of what she had no doubt overheard.

“You did indeed, mother,” George grinned at her. “I really couldn’t say what pushed us into the realisation, but it turns out we actually quite like each other.

“Oh, George, I’m just thrilled,” she gushed. “And it will be so nice to see more of you around the here again Hermione! I must go and tell Arthur the good news.” Mrs Weasley hurried from the kitchen to locate her husband with a grin on her face.

Hermione removed her face from the shelter of George’s shirt to look questioningly at Ron. He was eying her speculatively, and after a moment gave a small shrug.

“I’m just glad I didn’t have to hear whatever those guys did last night,” he told her. “Maybe keep that stuff to your own flats, yeah?”

“Deal,” Hermione agreed, breathing a small sigh of relief that there wasn’t going to be any awkwardness between them if she began dating George.

“Speaking of which, what do you say we skip out on the boxing day family walk and get out of here?” George asked Hermione.

“That sounds wonderful,” she agreed, standing on tip toes to place a light kiss on his lips.

“Great,” he grinned, taking her hand and pulling her towards the floo. “I’ll catch up with you all later,” he shouted over his shoulder to his family. “I’m just off to shag my girlfriend on every surface in my flat.”

Hermione gaped at him in shock as he grabbed a handful of floo powder. Ron spluttered and Ginny made a wretching sound behind them. As he pushed her into the fireplace, she saw Bill and Charlie exchanging galleons in the kitchen doorway, and then everything went green as she was whooshed away, clutched in the arms of her infuriating new boyfriend.

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