

Secret Santa

by quirkyslayer

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Lavender Brown was incorrigible.

Not only was the girl piss drunk, but also her head was full of too many crazy ideas. And she was even crazier to suggest such things at their Christmas party for work.

Hermione rolled her eyes as the girl took another shot of some strange bluish looking liquid, smacked her lips loudly, and peered at everyone with devious intent. Hermione began to feel afraid of what would happen next, especially after Lavender had cocked her eyebrow at them all with her no-good ideas brewing inside her head.

"Say, you lot, why don't we liven this party up? It's a shame that there's only six of us, but I think we can spice things up just the same," Lavender suggested in a crackled voice.

Luna Lovegood hooted in the background, obviously in agreement with Lavender's suggestion. Hermione surmised that Luna would agree with anything at this point of the night, and she was still clearly sober.

Hermione heard Ron groan beside her, and she wondered if he was mimicking her fear of Lavender's ideas the same as she was. She realized she was wrong when Ron turned around, bent over, and threw up on the bar floor. Lavender and Luna busted up laughing, Harry smirked, and both she and Neville made faces in disgust.

"I don't know, Lavender. Ron doesn't seem up to anything else," Hermione said, rubbing circles over Ron's back soothingly as he rested his head on the table and moaned. "He's clearly had enough to drink."

"Poppycock!" Lavender said, and she took off her witch's hat and held out her wand. She summoned three pieces of paper, chanted a writing spell, and jabbered off Harry's, Ron's, and Neville's names. The pieces of parchment hissed as the ink dried and then wisped softly inside her hat. "Now, look at us. We've been working for the Ministry out of Hogwarts for too bloody long. What's it been? Six years or so since we faced off with What's-His-Face? And if it wasn't for us (Hermione didn't know why she included herself; she barely helped.) we wouldn't be here enjoying our dandy selves and going on with life.

"But what a life it's been! Boring, boring, and more boring and it's Christmas, and I'm just dying to have some fun!"

"Fun ... fun? What's so bloody fun about being face down in your own breakfast from two days ago?" Ron gurgled angrily at her. Luna chuckled beside him.

"Oh, Lavender-poo, what sort of fun did you have in mind?" Luna asked airily, and Harry smirked as he caught her waggling her brows mischievously at Lavender. Lavender seemed to like the attention, and beamed widely.

"Well, since all of us are unmarried, and more so, probably lacking in the 'satisfaction' department, I think it's time we mixed things up a bit and got some action going here," Lavender responded thoughtfully, and she nodded her head defiantly as if it was the best idea she'd come up with in months.

She looked around only to see her friends, as drunk as they were, shift uncomfortably in their bar seats well, except Luna.

"Wha What do you mean, 'action'?" Neville asked, and he gave Hermione and Luna shifty looks. Then, his face seemed to turn into a big tomato.

"Oh, ho, Neville, you know exactly what I mean by 'action,'" Lavender scoffed. "Honestly, when's the last time you had a decent shag that didn't last five minutes? And I say that as a friend, dear, and not as a foe." Neville looked away, gave a small shrug, and seemed ready to bolt out the door.

"Mine was last week. It was so dreamy. I don't remember the person's name, but he was handsome. I think he had light blonde hair and a green jacket on that day. His lip seemed to curl in a particularly interesting fashion when he got upset," Luna remembered dreamily, smiling and staring into space. Ron shuddered next to her as he could only 'guess' whom this blonde person was that she had mentioned.

"Surely, you're joking, Luna," Hermione said stiffening. "You have to remember the person's name. It's just not right if you don't. It's dangerous that way!"

Luna turned to her and gave her the most feigned innocent face she'd ever seen. "Of course I remember his name and exactly who he is. But it's more fun this way to believe in some mystery."

"Humph," Hermione said, rolling her eyes and crossing her arms.

"Sometimes, you just have to stop being so proper, Hermione. You should live a little and let loose, and I don't mean with catching dark wizards, I mean with catching men," Luna suggested giddily.

"Here! Here!" Lavender said, banging on the table and giving sleepy Ron and placid Harry a start. "Like Luna said, Herms, you need to stop being a prude!"

"But Ron and I came together today ..."

"Pish posh," Lavender wrinkled her nose, glancing at Ron who was very close to being out cold to the world. "You and Ron are the most boring couple I've ever known. And don't tell me you're going out because Harry told me you'd been back to 'friends' mode' since three weeks ago."

Hermione shot Harry a glare and then turned her scowl on Lavender. "And why would you care about such a thing? Why would you care about our status?"

Lavender rolled her eyes and waved a hand in the air. "Oh please! Like it's secret. You and Ron are so totally wishy-washy. One year you're dating, and then suddenly you're back to being just friends. You've done it off and on since Hogwarts. How many times have they gone back and forth to just friends, Harry?"

"Er ... uh ..." Harry stuttered uncomfortably, and then he took a swig of his beer.

"Well, it's been seven times! It's been driving me mad!" Lavender said. "Why do you think I threw a party like this? To keep us all from going stiff and letting us all relax and enjoy life. Let's do something spontaneous!"

"And what exactly do you have in mind?" Hermione challenged putting her hands on her hips.

Lavender smiled wickedly at her. She reached out the hat in front of Hermione and said, "Why, we draw for the man we're going to take home tonight, of course."

Luna beamed. Neville was about ready to faint. Ron and Harry gave each other uncomfortable looks, and then Hermione's jaw dropped.

She was utterly speechless, and Lavender just loved it.

"Bloody hell!" Ron whined, and became paler than usual as Luna wrapped her arms around him and gave him a smooch on the cheek. Ron stiffened, and he felt awkward to the fact that Luna was quite eager and taken to Lavender's crazy idea.

"Oh, Ronald, I've never picked a man's name out of a hat before. Isn't this fun? Oh, I knew Lavender threw the best parties. So, what shall we do tonight? I'm wearing my light blue cloud knickers just thought I'd let you know," she purred in his ear. Ron turned his head to Harry and mouthed 'help,' much like he did that time they were in Aragog's nest. Ron was beginning to discern that the situations were uncannily similar.

Harry looked to his left as Hermione crossed her arms and glared daggers at Luna and Ron. He sighed. It was just as well they get into this situation. He and Hermione had never had so much as a romantic spark all the years they had known each other. As the other 'couples' got ready to leave, Harry knew it was just his luck to go home another night to a cold bed.

"You know ... Hermione ..."

And he was interrupted with Lavender's cooing, who had somehow convinced Neville to carry her bridal style around the bar. The poor man was shaking, either from Lavender's weight in his scrawny arms or out of sheer nervousness.

"Well, you lot, you better have some kinky fun tonight! I want to hear all about it on Monday. And double points if you stay at your 'hat partner's' apartment all weekend long!" Lavender roared with laughter, and she pinched Neville's cheek to direct him out the door.

"Get off me, Looney!" Ron said as Luna pulled his arm and led him out the door. She was giving him cat eyes, and by the look of her grin, Ron knew the girl was plotting something *many* things for the night that probably weren't morally right, and he wondered if he could even handle them. It was a horrible pity that he had just the right amount of alcohol in his system so he couldn't protest this crazy idea.

And as he looked at Luna's devilish eyes, he thought that maybe it wasn't such a horrible idea after all. He looked over his shoulder to a stunned Harry and Hermione, and unexpectedly shrugged his shoulders. "Night, Hermione."

Harry felt Hermione fume with jealousy beside him.

"Erm... Hermione, if you want, I can take you home. You don't have to go through with this," he said lightly, putting a comforting hand on her shoulder.

Hermione's face contorted in anger, and she nodded furiously. "You're right, I don't have ..." she turned her head to speak to him, and she had whipped it around so fast the alcohol had finally caught up with her, and she started to feel dizzy. She staggered, and Harry jumped right away to catch her.

She groaned as he held her in his arms, and she felt her whole rational world slipping away. "Harry ... what the ..."

She looked up, and his green eyes peered down at her in concern. "Always the hero," she murmured, and she looked up to catch his slight smirk.

"C'mon then, let's take you home," he said softly. She began to stare at him, transfixed on his deep green eyes and frozen to the sound of his comforting voice. Idly, she

began to run her hands frenetically over his face. He gulped uncomfortably as he tried to steady her weight against him while she touched him. He felt her trace a light finger over his scar and then her arms slumped to her sides.

"I can't move, Harry," she said finally.

"No, you have to stay on your feet, Hermione. I have to get you home," he said, trying to help her.

"No. Take me to your home," she pleaded, grabbing onto the lapel of his robe.

Harry forced a grin, trying to humor her drunken state. "Hermione, you don't know what you're saying."

"Yes, I do!" she yelled emphatically. "We can't let them win, Harry! We can't let Luna and Ron beat us!"

"Hermione," Harry sighed. "This is not a game."

"Oh, yes it is! Did you see that look on his face! How dare he? And he thinks that you're not going to do anything with me!" she slurred loudly, catching Harry off-guard with her last phrase.

"Er ... what did you say?" Harry asked, and he wasn't sure of the correct way to approach this.

"Oh, c'mon, Harry. Ron doesn't think that we'd ever have a chance to be intimate. Like we're sister and brother or something. Ha! We should show him how wrong he is!"

"Er ..." Harry gulped again. This conversation was exceedingly uncomfortable for him and wandering further into dangerous territory.

It got even worse when he felt a hand snake down his thigh.

"Hermione!" he scolded, and she responded with a fit of naughty giggles. He sighed. She certainly wasn't in the best shape to talk to him about these crazy ideas in her head. What did she mean that they could have a chance to be intimate? Harry's mind swirled with confusion, and for the first time in a long time, he started to have coherent thoughts about regarding Hermione as more than a friend. Though he was ashamed to say that he had these thoughts before, he had always pushed them back for Ron's sake.

It was true that any man would be lucky to have Hermione; though he felt that Ron had always had a thing for her and he would only get in the way. He already had glory and attention and so many other things that Ron didn't have. It was only fair that he could be a good friend and give up any chances with Hermione.

So with that, he had always pushed those feelings far away, and he was always content with only being Hermione's friend.

Then suddenly, Lavender's words echoed in his brain.

"Why do you think I threw a party like this? To keep us all from going stiff and letting us all relax and enjoy life. Let's do something spontaneous!"

Harry cautiously looked down at Hermione, expecting to see her half-dead and snoring. Instead, she was staring intently right at him.

"Hermione ... you don't have to give into what Lavender planned tonight," he tried to convince her; though he seemed to be trying to convince himself as well.

"Oh, Harry ..." she said, and for some strange reason, he always liked when she said his name like that. He felt an unexpected quaver filter throughout his body.

"Hermione ... let's take you back ..." he said, and she looked up expectantly at him. "...to my place."

She smiled prettily at him, and he only hoped that he wouldn't regret this in the morning.

By the time Harry and Hermione had gotten to his flat, she was already in her self-pitying stage of the drunkenness.

He laid her down on his bed, and she looked up to him apologetically. "I'm sorry, Harry. I shouldn't have forced you to take me here. I didn't consider your feelings at all. If you want to take me home now, I won't get mad."

Harry shook his head and smiled. "Don't worry about it, Hermione. You're already here." He laid on his side and stared at her as she rested on her back. She sighed, and she looked up at the ceiling.

"Lavender and Luna are right about me. I'm such an uptight prude. I'll probably die an old maid, just as Professor Trelawney had said," Hermione pouted, her eyes watching reflections of moonlight on his ceiling that had peaked through the window.

Harry brushed back a strand of hair from her eye and shushed her. "Shh ... now don't say that. I'd think you were mad when you start believing in Trelawney's predictions."

She turned her head and smiled at his teasing, and she locked with his eyes. She froze, not knowing what to do when Harry began watching her and looking at her with that kind of look the look she'd never seen for *her*.

"Harry, what do you think of me?" she asked, and suddenly she felt stupid for asking such a generic question.

"Hrm ... well, there's too much to tell," he said, noticing her eyes closing as she began to drift to sleep. "I doubt you'd be awake to hear everything. I could go on for hours about you, Hermione."

Hermione cocked a brow at him. "Anything good?" she teased, and he laughed lightly as his hand traced idly over hers. She took his hand into hers and squeezed it. Neither one of them wanted to let go, and remained locked together like that, relishing in a different feeling of physical contact. It had always been the same feeling in the past warmth, camaraderie, familiarity, and friendship.

Though now, Harry and Hermione felt something new rising between them.

Harry inhaled, and his smile disappeared as he looked intently at Hermione again, eyes grazing over her face and form. "There's nothing bad I could ever say about you, Hermione, never."

Hermione sighed, and she felt tears welling up at the sides of her eyes. "I feel so silly," she cried, rising up her free hand to wipe the tears away.

"You must be sobering up then," he joked, and she laughed heartily in return.

"It's probably a good thing that I am. Who knows what would have happened," she said finally.

Harry looked away forcing a smile, and then he said distantly, "Yeah."

Hermione noticed this, and then she felt his weight shift on the bed.

"Where are you going?" she asked in almost a panic.

"You can have my room tonight, Hermione," he said chivalrously. "I'll take the couch." He proceeded off the bed, but she grabbed his hand back to stop him.

"Wait!" she cried, and he stopped but didn't look at her. He was trying so desperately to hold back all those feelings he had always bottled up for Ron's sake. Hermione saw the distant look on his face, and she looked away uncomfortably. "Stay with me tonight." He turned to her and gave her a piercing gaze. She could see hope, fear, and so many other dominant emotions push to the surface of those green eyes. "Just hold me tonight, Harry."

She felt like a whiny, spoiled git, but for some reason, she didn't want to be alone tonight, and more than ever, she just wanted to be with Harry.

He nodded, and she wondered if he was staying because it was the noble thing to do or if he really wanted to. When he fell down beside her and took her into his warm encompassing arms, she no longer cared about his reasons.

It was enough for her that he was here.

Sunlight poked rudely through Harry's bedroom that Saturday morning. Harry groaned, and the rays of sun were daggers poking against his grating headache. He blinked, realizing that his bed was warmer than usual more importantly that there was someone else in his bed.

Subduing his panic, his memory finally came to him and realized right away just whom he was holding. He only hoped that his memory was reliable, and that there weren't parts of it missing that shouldn't be forgotten.

So he willed himself not to move from his spot, and he only seemed compelled to observe the situation at hand. Sleeping peacefully next to him wrapped in his arms was one of his best friends, and at that very moment, she was smiling in peaceful elation.

He watched her, noticing the small hitch in her breathing and the wild way her hair sprawled all over his bed, pillow, and even him. He slowly reached up his hand and moved a stubborn tendril of hair from blocking him from studying her face.

Though he tried to be stealth about it, his touch had stirred her, and she blinked at him with sleepy eyes.

"Harry --?" she croaked in surprise. He smiled softly at her, still watching her with interest.

"Good morning," he said in almost a whisper. Hermione scrunched her eyes in confusion, and then he finally saw them widen in surprise.

"Oh my God, Harry!" Hermione screamed, jumping out of his arms and onto the other side of the bed. "Wha what "

"Hermione, now don't panic!" Harry said, waving his hands in front of her in surrender. "Don't you remember anything from last night?"

"I ..." she began, but looked away in frustration. He realized that she was trying to dig up her memories from the previous night. She stood silent for awhile, and he was relieved when he saw her shoulders relax. "Oh."

Harry didn't know whether to laugh or cry to that statement. "Oh? That's all you can say?"

She gave him a suspicious look. "Um ... don't tell me we we didn't ..."

Harry shook his head. "No." 'But I wanted to,' he thought, but he very well wouldn't say that. He didn't need her to go screaming from his bed.

Then suddenly Hermione looked away and flushed. "Oh, well ... at least we didn't do anything irrational you know, because of the alcohol."

Harry nodded, running his fingers through his hair nervously. "Right."

"I'm sorry, Harry," Hermione said, though she didn't know really why she felt she needed to apologize.

"For what?" Harry asked confused.

"For forcing you to bring me here. I didn't mean to get out of hand last night," she replied nervously.

"Out of hand?" Harry laughed. "You're talking to someone who fought Voldemort. I must say Drunken-Hermione is surely not that out of hand."

Hermione grinned. "Oh, Harry," she said rolling her eyes. He smiled wider and felt good when she had said his name like that again. Though, he really didn't quite have courage to tell her that.

Thus, there were still many things he wanted to discuss with Hermione, and he wondered just where he should even begin. Last night was definitely a turning point for both of them. And as he thought about it, they both sat there in an uncomfortable silence.

Finally, Harry looked at her seriously and began to speak. "Hermione ..." and he dropped his gaze to his lap, too nervous to look into her eyes. "I think...I should be thanking you for last night, if anything."

"Thanking me? What for?" she asked quizzically.

Harry swallowed and cocked his head. Then he ran his fingers through his messy hair again. "It's just that ... uh ... last night you said some things that made me realize some feelings I've repressed for a long time. I don't know exactly how to deal with them yet, but you asked me to hold you, even when you were sobering up."

Hermione blushed again, and she looked away quickly. The air was so thick and uncomfortable that both of them still lacked the courage to look at one another.

Finally Harry said, "In any case, thank you."

"Um ... You're welcome, Harry," Hermione squeaked, her hands twiddling nervously in her lap.

"It's not just that," he said finally, and he looked up at her. She felt his gaze on her, and she cautiously looked up to meet his eyes. His eyes burned with seriousness, and she felt frozen in front of him. "There's something else I should be thanking you for."

"Okay," she stuttered. She realized that their faces were getting closer, and she could feel Harry's hot breath on her skin. "What is it?"

"Last night, it was the first time," he paused, and then stared at her lips. He brought himself out of a quick trance and looked into her eyes again. "It was the first time I got to hold you all night long, not just as friend, but possibly ..." He licked his lips, and Hermione felt she was going to burst from emotion. "Possibly as something more."

She inhaled that hitch in her throat, and suddenly Harry had closed the distance between them. She felt his soft lips feather over hers, cautiously at first but then exploratory as the seconds drew on. She felt his hands grip her shoulders, and she welcomed him, feeling more heated and alive than she had ever felt for as long as she knew him her best friend, and hopefully more.

THE END

