

Chilli and Chocolate

by peppermint

Remus has a secret admirer.

1

Chapter 1 of 1

Remus has a secret admirer.

Written for elsajeni in the 2008 SPEWchallenges yule exchange.

Not even remotely my characters, settings, etc.

The first line is lifted from Dickens' A Christmas Carol: "To begin with...Marley was dead."

To begin with...Remus Lupin was completely oblivious.

This irked Hermione Granger to no end. She had been trying for months without success to let him know she was interested in him. She complained as much to Ginny Weasley as they sat in a cozy corner booth at the bustling Greengrass Pub, shopping bags piled around their feet. They'd stopped in for lunch two hours ago during their marathon Christmas shopping trip and still had not left the table.

"Do I have a special talent for picking the ones who don't pay any attention?" Hermione asked, playing with the lemon peel from her last cosmopolitan. "Or do you think he realizes I fancy him, but doesn't fancy me, so he's just trying to let me down easy?"

Ginny pursed her lips for a moment, her eyes unfocused as she attempted to figure out Hermione's last sentence. "No. He's absolutely oblivious. Don't you remember how hard Tonks had to try before he realized she was crazy about him?"

Hermione sighed, thinking of their clumsy, pink-haired friend who had died in the line of duty. "It's been four years since she died, Gin. I don't want him to be alone for another Christmas if I can help it. I don't want to be alone for another Christmas if I can help it, either."

Ginny reached over, giving Hermione's hand a squeeze. "Come on, let's go back to the Burrow and talk about it over a pot of tea with Mum. She might have some good ideas."

Nodding glumly, Hermione put down a substantial tip to keep the pair in the waitress' good graces and gathered up her shopping. The witches wound their way through the crowded pub to Floo to the Burrow.

"Mum! Mum, are you home?" Ginny called, disappearing into the sitting room as Hermione dusted herself off and put her shopping off to the side. She took off her long wool coat and hung it near the door, then sat herself at the kitchen table.

"... something we can do, you sit down there and I'll put a pot of tea on," said Molly, as she came into the kitchen. "Hello, Hermione dear! Ginny was just telling me about your trouble. No, Ginny, sit down, I can get the tea myself."

Rolling her eyes at Hermione, Ginny sat down across from her. Molly set the teapot in its wildly colored, knitted tea cozy on the table along with three mismatched mugs and a plate of chocolate biscuits.

"Now," Molly said as she poured out, "it comes as no surprise to me that Remus isn't getting the message that you fancy him. He's always had more self-doubt than I thought was needed for someone as intelligent and well-liked as he is. He's always been that way...keep in mind that I've known him since he was just out of school."

Hermione curled her hands around the warm mug, sipping at her tea as she listened to Molly. "I've tried everything I can think of, Molly, short of grabbing him and kissing him. Do you know how many hours I've spent just sitting in the library at Grimmauld Place with him, just talking, or reading, or doing nothing? I know how he takes his tea, coffee, and cocoa. I know that he hates boiled potatoes, but loves them mashed or roasted. There has got to be some way to get him to see that I'm interested!"

"Have you tried leaving him a letter? You two both have your nose stuck in a book most of the time...the written word might be the way to his heart," Ginny suggested.

Hermione stared at Ginny, then leapt up and ran around the table to embrace her around the shoulders. "You brilliant woman!" she squealed. She grabbed her coat and her shopping and Apparated away as soon as she dashed out the kitchen door.

"See, I can be smart. It's not just Percy," Ginny said to her mother, and they both laughed.

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The man in question was holed up in the library at Grimmauld Place when an owl tapped at the window.

"Hello there, aren't you a handsome fellow," Remus murmured, untying the note from the bird's leg. "Thank you."

The owl just sat there and hooted.

"Ah, waiting for a reply, are we? Just a moment."

Remus sat down at the desk and opened the note.

*Remus,*

*Roses are red*

*Mistletoe's green*

*I may have gone mad*

*but I think you're keen.*

*- A secret admirer*

He smiled. He had a secret admirer? The handwriting looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn't quite place it. He reached for a quill and a scrap of parchment and scribbled a quick response.

He gave the note to the owl along with a bit of a sugar biscuit and watched it soar out of sight into the winter evening. His December was beginning to look a lot brighter.

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The screeching of the rented owl startled Hermione out of her agitated pacing on her hearthrug. Hurrying to let the bird in before her Muggle neighbors noticed anything amiss, she opened the window and was pecked on the hand for her trouble.

"Ungrateful bird! If you think you're getting Owl Treats from me, you're mistaken!" She took the note, shoved the owl out onto the sill, and slammed the sash down with a shout, "Go back to the Post Office, you mangy thing!"

Her fingers trembled as she unrolled the scrap of parchment, the string tie fluttering to the floor unnoticed.

I didn't know there still were things like secret admirers.

I'm flattered.

But I do agree you've likely gone mad.

What do you want with a lonely werewolf?

- Remus J Lupin

'What do I want with a 'lonely old' werewolf?' she thought to herself, sinking into her sofa. 'Gosh, maybe I'd like to shag him within an inch of his life!' She threw the note into the air in exasperation. An elderly Crookshanks simply watched the note drift to the floor, ineffectually batting a weary paw in its general direction.

Hermione decided a long, hot bubble bath was in order. She'd go visit Sirius tomorrow and see if he had any advice on what she should write to Remus next.

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Having sworn Sirius to secrecy (which had involved a bribe of a bottle of expensive Firewhiskey), Hermione nattered on to him about her 'furry little problem' as she helped him decorate Grimmauld Place for the holidays. "I don't know what to write to him next, Sirius. I want him to know I mean business, but I don't want to scare him off, either."

"So, how much mistletoe, Herms? Every doorway, just a few doorways, every three feet along the hallway?" Sirius interrupted.

"Don't call me 'Herms,'" she remarked, absently. "I think every doorway would be a charming touch. It's not as though there's going to be any meeting of mortal enemies during any parties this season."

Sirius leaned against the drawing room's fireplace and shook his head. "How can you say that? Snape is bound to show up. If I end up having to kiss him, I'm blaming it all on you," he teased.

Giggling, she affixed a bunch of mistletoe to the doorway from the drawing room to the hall with a swish of her wand. Before long, they had the entire ground floor and the basement kitchen decked out with evergreens, mistletoe, fairy lights and ribbon. They sat down at the kitchen table with a plate of sandwiches and glasses of lemonade to reward themselves for a job well done.

"You should warn him about the mistletoe," Sirius suggested, wagging his eyebrows suggestively.

"What do you mean, warn him? Tell him you put it up? Doesn't he know I'm here?" Hermione asked.

"No, or he would have come down. I think he's at work. I promise, he's just as smitten with you as you are with him. The two of you are ridiculous...it's obvious to the rest of us, the way you've been dancing around each other for months," Sirius remarked offhandedly.

Hermione put her sandwich down and glared at her partner-in-crime. "So, nobody said anything?"

Sirius just smiled and handed her a notepad and a fountain pen.

She shook her head, but wrote another note, warning Remus about the mistletoe. When she finished, she folded the note and sealed it with her wand.

Sirius snapped his fingers. "Winky!" he called.

The little house-elf appeared. "How can Winky be serving Master Sirius and Missy Hermione?"

"Winky, could you please put this note in Remus' room? He isn't to know who it is from. It's a surprise," Hermione asked, holding out the note.

Winky beamed, taking the note. "Winky helps Missy Hermione! Master Remus is sad, needs surprises. Missy Hermione's surprise good for him!" She snapped her fingers and vanished, presumably to deliver the note.

Hermione put her head down on her folded arms. "Oh Merlin, what have I started?" she moaned.

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When Remus came home from his day at the Department of Magical Creatures, he tiredly trudged upstairs, too exhausted to notice the decorating Sirius and Hermione had done. The full moon was in a few days, and he was feeling punk.

He had begun to peel off his clothing to take a nice, warm bath when he noticed the note on his bed. Damn, but the handwriting was familiar!

*Remus,*

*I wish I knew. I can't get you out of my head!*

*Be careful. Sirius put mistletoe up all over downstairs.*

*- SA*

Promising himself to check out the mistletoe later, he went to run his bath. Slipping into the warm water, he allowed his thoughts to wander. The notes seemed genuine, but what if someone was playing a trick on him? Did he dare hope his secret admirer was the one witch he'd been, well, lusting after? There weren't that many women who had access to Grimmauld Place...even after the war, it remained a secret-kept safe haven for the Order, with Sirius, Remus, and Harry living there full-time.

It was nearing Christmas, and Remus decided to hope that Hermione was his secret admirer, even if it seemed like she had no idea of the torture she put him through when she'd sit close to him in the library. She'd ask his opinion on a passage in whatever book she was reading or lean over his shoulder to point something out to him in his own books. She always smelled amazing, and her curly hair ended up tickling his nose.

He glanced down at a certain part of his anatomy. "Nobody asked *your* opinion yet," he muttered.

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Remus sat down to dinner with Sirius in an improved mood.

"So, I got a note earlier."

"Really? You mean you don't get eleventy-hundred Ministry of Magic official memos every day at the office?"

Remus extended a rude gesture in Sirius's general direction.

"Yes. I mean, no. I mean, I got a nice note. On my bed. From a 'secret admirer,' warning me about the mistletoe. It's the second one."

Sirius leaned back in his chair, his fingers tapping thoughtfully on the arm. "A secret admirer, hmm? How would a secret admirer get a note onto your bed? It'd have to be somebody with access to the house," he mused. "Oh! Maybe it's Snape...he's *awfully* broody whenever your name comes up."

"Oh, that's rich," Remus scoffed, but in the back of his mind, he considered the possibility. Would Snape send a secret note? Would he be serious, or would it be in jest? Remus frowned, pushing the last bits of roasted brussels sprouts around on his plate.

"Mate, I was only joking. Did you answer the note?"

Looking up, Remus shook his head in the negative. "The first one, the owl waited. But I don't know how to send it this time." He pushed back from the table, the chair legs scraping on the stone floor.

Winky glanced over at the table from where she was putting the finishing touches on a massive chocolate cake. "Master Remus will please to stay at the table, Winky is serving dessert tonight! And when Master Remus wants to write his note, Winky is delivering it!"

Remus glared at Sirius. "It's a conspiracy!" he groaned.

"Missy Hermione! Missy Hermione, is you home?" Winky called, standing in the living room of Hermione's flat.

The witch in question stuck her head out of the kitchen. "Yes, Winky, I'm here. Come on into the kitchen."

"I is having a note for you from Master Remus," Winky said, bouncing on her heels. "Master Remus is afraid your notes is being a joke, Missy Hermione. You needs to be revealing yourself soon." She held the note out to Hermione, who took it and sat at the kitchen table to open it.

Am I permitted to guess your identity? I know you must be friends with a phoenix.

Severus, if this is one of your jokes, I'll kill you. Slowly.

- Remus

"He's afraid it's a joke from Severus," she murmured, frowning. "Winky, can you keep him out of the kitchen if I come back to the house with you right now?"

Winky nodded, straightening her tea towel. She was an Elf on a Mission.

The first thing Hermione did upon descending the stairs to the kitchen at Grimmauld Place was to sit down and have a large, fortifying slice of chocolate cake with the reasoning that one must be properly prepared to reveal oneself as a secret admirer.

Then, she gathered several ingredients together and started a pan of milk heating on the stove. Winky helped by measuring the cocoa and unearthing the vanilla sugar from where Sirius had hoarded it. Soon, Hermione had a pot of rich hot cocoa. She poured a generous helping into a large mug, augmenting it with a healthy sprinkle of cayenne pepper atop the froth.

Then, she penned another note, gave it to Winky, and went to wait in the library.

Remus,

No jokes. And I do not have black, greasy hair.

I made you a cup of cocoa. It's down on the kitchen table.

- SA

Remus barely took time to scan the latest note before he was flying headlong down the stairs to the kitchen. Would she be there? His heart was fit to beat out of his chest when he reached the basement kitchen and saw the mug of hot cocoa sitting on the table, right where the note said it would be.

He knew as soon as he smelled the cocoa that he had been right. She was the only person who knew he liked a little spice with his sweets. He took a few sips, savoring the play of flavors on his tongue, before he came to his senses.

"WINKY!" he bellowed, scooping up the notepad that had been left on the table.

Winky peeked around the pantry doorway. "Master Remus is needing something from Winky?"

"Winky, I have another note for you to deliver. And you may tell my Mystery Witch that the cocoa is delicious!"

He scribbled a short missive on the notepad, folded it, and thrust it at the bemused elf. Where would Hermione be?

Where was she always? The library.

Winky could hardly hold in her delight as she held the last note out to Hermione, who was curled up out of sight in a large wingback chair.

"Missy Hermione, Master Remus is liking your cocoa! Winky thinks he is coming looking for you," she added, clapping her hands together. "Winky is going now!"

Winky was gone with a snap of her fingers.

With trembling hands, Hermione unfolded the scrap of paper.

There's only one witch who knows I like chilli powder in my cocoa.

I don't know if she's mad, but she better look out for the mistletoe. If I catch her under it, there's no telling what I might do.

- Remus

Taking a few deep breaths, she peeked around the corner. She was still alone. She went near the doorway and charmed the mistletoe Sirius had hung there to hover over her head, then stood nervously in the middle of the room. She didn't have long to wait until Remus came flying wild-eyed through the door.

His glance flicked upward to the mistletoe as he strode across the room toward her, coming to stand close.

Tentatively, as if afraid she would push him away, he cupped her face in both hands and smiled, stroking her cheekbones with his thumbs.

"So, Hermione. It is you," he breathed, leaning in to capture her lips with his.

Fin.