

Boss

by Hanagasume

Confident... Handsome... Charming. Three words that Hermione Granger would use to describe her boss, Bill Weasley. But just how does the smartest witch of her age intend to resist his charms when her boss decides to go on the prowl? Written for the Mayhem in May Challenge '10, Prompt Two: 'Your desk is hardly the place for that, sir!'.

Part One: Temptation

Chapter 1 of 6

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Beta'd by the lovely and most wonderful WriterMerrin. Many hugs and thanks to you!

The sunlight filtered through the glass of the window, spiraling around the room in different directions.

Hermione sat at her desk in the office that she shared with six others, watching the dust particles dance in the beams of light. She sighed, resting her elbows on the table before her and dropping her chin into her hands. It had been a long day at work. The night before, she had gotten caught up in Rune translations and hadn't really slept all that much before she had gone into work for the day. Tilting her head slightly to look down at the pages in front of her, she winced. Those pages of translations would be needed by the end of the week, and she was starting to feel the pressure.

She had been working for Gringotts for six months after resigning from her job at the Ministry early in the year. It had been a job that had paid well, but after five years, she had lost her passion for it. Her department had been in charge of organizing Victory week annually to commemorate the defeat of You-Know-Who and remember those who were lost in the heat of the final battle. At first, it had been a good job one that she enjoyed and took pride in. But after so long in the position, she didn't feel that she was learning anything new or gaining any more experience or knowledge.

She happily replaced herself with the former Lavender Brown, now married to one of her closest friends, Ron Weasley.

Now, sitting at her desk that was cluttered from all of the parchment on it, Hermione was beginning to wonder whether she had been wise taking on her current project. It was the first time she had been back in London since she had begun working for Gringotts. She had originally been contracted to do field research, but because Harry and Ginny's wedding was only two weeks away, she had decided not to go back overseas until after her two friends were happily married and her duties as the Maid of Honor were complete. After that, she had made plans to travel to China to do a preliminary dig at a recently discovered burial of whom was believed to be a Ming Dynasty emperor.

Her eyes flitted down to look at the parchment right in front of her when a sharp knock on the corner of her desk beside her startled her out of her musings. She lifted her eyes to see her boss, Bill Weasley, standing right beside her with a charming smile on his handsome face. Shortly before she took the job at Gringotts, Hermione had been informed that Bill had been promoted to the Head of Research for the bank and no longer worked in Egypt as he once used to. So essentially, she was employed to fill the place that Bill had left on his promotion.

Ordinarily Hermione didn't see Bill all that often with her travels and would send him weekly reports on her progress, but with her being home again, seeing him in the office was practically unavoidable. Which really was a shame, as being around the man was terribly distracting. Of all the Weasley boys, Hermione was all too ready to admit that she found Bill to be the most attractive with his long hair, the stud in his ear and his overall attitude that simply screamed rebel.

'Hi there, Hermione,' he greeted, flashing a big grin at her.

'Hello, *Mr. Weasley*,' she said, putting an emphasis on his surname. While Hermione had learned long ago to try and keep her work and social life separate, Bill continually ignored her subtle reminders. 'How may I be of assistance?'

'I just got an owl from Mum reminding me to ask you over to the Burrow for dinner tonight,' Bill replied, handing her the letter.

'Bill,' she said in a hushed tone, sweeping her eyes over the office to see that the other co-workers were sneaking glances at the two of them. 'Look, thanks for the reminder, but you need to stop coming over here to talk to me about things that aren't related to work. People are starting to get funny impressions about it.'

'Whatever do you mean, Hermione?' he asked, sitting on the corner of her desk and folding his arms across his chest casually.

Hermione's mouth went dry as she took him in. Why did he always have to look so sexy? It had been a constant form of annoyance to her, having to come into work every day that week and to see Bill wandering around the office in dark jeans and a shirt that was unbuttoned at the neck and rolled to his elbows. Taking a breath to steady herself, she opened her mouth to try and make her point.

'Everyone already thinks that I got this job because of my affiliation with Harry and your family. I don't need them to speculate any further,' she hissed, looking back at her work pointedly. 'I don't want everyone else to feel like you are playing favourites just because we are friends.'

'Hermione, it is hardly anyone else's business whether we are friends or not. Everyone knows that the goblins handle all of the human resources on their own, and they are never influenced to hire based on whether or not you have clout in the Wizarding world,' Bill reasoned, but Hermione refused to look at him. 'You got here on your own merit. In fact, you're more qualified than anyone else in the department for this job. They're just being jealous.'

Sighing, Hermione knew that she would get nowhere with her argument. Bill had been reluctant to listen the first three times she had warned him that week, and it seemed he was still being stubborn. So she would put up with the gossiping behind her back for the next two or three weeks until she would be back in the field and wouldn't have to deal with it or Bill any longer.

'Please let your mother know I'll be at the Burrow at seven,' she said dismissively, keeping her eyes on her notes and picking up a quill to begin her translations again.

She didn't look up to see Bill nod with a slight frown on his face as he stood up from her desk and walked away.

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It was a mere week away from the Potter-Weasley wedding, and things were getting hectic both at the Burrow and at Grimmauld Place.

After having submitted her runic translations only just on time, Hermione had then taken some unpaid leave from work to help Ginny with the final preparations for the wedding. As Maid of Honor, naturally it was her duty to do as much as she could in order to keep the wedding party calm and under control when things started to appear as though they mightn't run smoothly.

Molly, bless her heart, had been under the impression that Hermione was not capable of fulfilling her duties and had spent the better part of the month before her return planning things. Now Hermione loved the Weasley matriarch very much, but that still didn't stop her from giving Molly a piece of her mind when she had finally irritated her to the point of no return. Instead of doing her planning in the Burrow, Hermione had moved camp to the library in Grimmauld Place, drawing a number of the other Weasleys along with her.

As she readied herself for a day out shopping for shoes, lingerie and confirming the bridal party dress-ropes, Hermione smiled. Luckily for her, Bill had not been included as a part of the bridal party and was at work much of the time, and she did not need to be around him. During the day she was free to concentrate on that task at hand instead of getting distracted by thoughts of her attractive and sweet boss.

Checking her watch, she grabbed her wand and slipped into a deep purple set of casual robes before Apparating out of her house and over to the Burrow.

When she arrived, everyone was already up and busy. Letting herself in through the back door, she waved to Arthur and Charlie, who were seated at the kitchen table, and hurried up the stairs to Ginny's room. While Ginny had been living in a flat in London, she had given it up and moved temporarily back to the Burrow before the wedding so that afterwards, she would move right into the new house that Harry had built in Godric's Hollow for the two of them.

'Ginny, are you ready to go shopping yet?' Hermione hollered as she knocked on the door to the room.

It was flung open in a matter of seconds, and the pretty red-head dashed out into the hallway followed by Luna Lovegood-Malfoy.

'Sorry, I was having trouble with my hair this morning,' Ginny stated as they began the descent down the stairs. 'Luna had to use some charms to get it to behave at the back.'

'It was rather tangled,' Luna offered with a slightly dreamy smile.

Shaking her head, Hermione followed the two younger witches down the stairs silently, ushering them out through the front door for them to Apparate. Soon the three of them were in Diagon Alley and set off to Madam Malkin's to check on the status of their wedding attire. Once inside, Ginny was promptly pushed towards the dressing room with the box containing her robes. Moments later she returned, dressed in the ivory silk robes that they had pre-ordered two months before. They fit her perfectly, and only a few minor alterations were made to the embroidery along the front edges of the outer robe.

Hermione and Luna both tried on their robes too, and once everyone was happy, they paid and had them sent to Hermione's house for keeping. After that, the three headed to the shoe shop and purchased matching shoes and took those with them to 'The Naughty Witch' lingerie shop down the very end of the Alley.

'I'm so excited! But I hardly even know what Harry will like,' Ginny exclaimed as they walked through the front door.

Hermione rolled her eyes but kept her mouth shut. Harry, like any other man, was hardly going to care what Ginny was wearing on their wedding night. The sooner he got her out of the flimsy thing she bought, the better. The younger woman was probably better off going without undergarments. Smiling, she figured that while they were there, she might as well get something nice for herself. Nobody was going to see it but her, but at least she would be feeling sexy.

Their trip concluded after they had lunch at the Leaky Cauldron and stopped by Hermione's house to drop off all of their purchases. They were much safer there than anywhere else, and far from the prying eyes of the boys and most especially Molly, who had yet to see Ginny's wedding robes. After Ginny and Luna had Flooed back to the Burrow, Hermione let out a sigh of relief.

Much as she liked the two women, she really hated shopping.

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The alarm clock went off with loud, consecutive beeping noises directly into her ear. With a moan of annoyance, Hermione lifted an arm sleepily, and after three attempts, managed to hit the switch on her clock that turned it off. Rolling awkwardly onto her back, she stifled a yawn with the back of her hand and rubbed her eyes. Peeking through one eye, she looked at the time and saw that it was five minutes past seven, and she already regretted setting it earlier than she needed to. Blinking both eyes, she forced herself to the edge of the bed and swung her legs over to stand.

She walked like a zombie through all of her morning ablutions until she was finally under the spray of the shower.

When she was fully awake, she removed herself from the shower and pulled on some jeans and a light sweater, pocketing her wand before mentally preparing herself for the day. At three o'clock that afternoon, Harry and Ginny would be exchanging their vows, and there was still so much to do before then. Gathering together all of the robes, shoes and other things that the bridal party would need that she was in charge of, she Apparated to the Burrow. She went straight to the back door and walked inside, greeting the twins as she passed them. All of the Weasley boys as she passed them were in various states of undress. She snorted, remembering that the men had waited to throw Harry a bachelor party right up until the night before. Hermione, meanwhile, had organized the Hen's party for four days before the wedding so that Ginny and the rest of the ladies weren't waking up with hangovers on the day.

As she approached the stairs, she looked up to see Bill descending them, looking as handsome and energetic as ever. Clearly he had been somewhat more sensible the night before, or he simply had a greater tolerance than the rest. A lazy smile spread over his lips, and he reached out to tuck a curly tendril of her hair behind her ear.

'Morning, Hermione,' he greeted cheerfully.

'You're awfully chipper this morning,' she commented as she passed him and began to struggle up the stairs with the bags.

Unsurprisingly, Bill took half of the bags from her and helped her carry them up the stairs to Ginny's room. When she knocked on the door, she received no answer and assumed that Ginny was probably still asleep. Propping the bags against the wall, she opened the door and peeked in to see that she was correct. Unwilling to disturb the bride just yet, she left the bags just inside the room and followed Bill downstairs and back to the kitchen where Molly was now cooking up a storm for the boys.

'Are you hungry, dear?' Molly asked, waving her wand at the frying pans that all started emptying their cooked contents onto various platters.

'I ate before I left home,' Hermione lied. She hated breakfast, and much more than a cup of tea in the morning made her feel ill.

'Here,' Bill said, pressing a mug into her hands and ushering her over to the table. 'At least have some coffee. You've got a big day ahead of you, Maid of Honor.'

Hermione laughed dryly at that comment. 'Tell me about it.'

She sipped at the hot liquid and felt it beginning to warm her stomach. She was about to drift into a day-dream when the chair beside her made a scraping noise as it was pulled out, and she turned to see Bill drop into the chair beside her. He had a plate full of sausages, bacon, scrambled eggs and fried tomatoes. He chuckled at the face she pulled on seeing it.

'If I didn't know better, I would think you didn't like breakfast,' he commented idly as he stabbed a cherry tomato with a fork.

'Sometimes I forget that you weren't around all that often while I was holidaying here over the summer when Harry, Ron and I were at Hogwarts,' she said, gulping a mouthful of the coffee. 'You wouldn't know my eating habits like they do.'

'I know how you take your coffee,' he said with a grin and a shrug.

'That's only because you insisted on hanging about at work all week and making it look like you were playing favourites by getting me coffee and talking to me,' she said with a huff of annoyance.

'I told you, Hermione. It isn't even a big deal. It's not as though I am even the one in control of whether you get promoted or get a raise or anything,' he explained. 'The goblins like to keep control of what is theirs.'

'When you say it like that, you make it sound a whole lot less appealing,' she said with a small smile before finishing off the last of her coffee. 'Well, I had better go and wake up the bride, or she won't be ready in time for her wedding.'

Bill nodded. 'I will see you later then,' he said. 'Promise you'll save me a dance at the reception?'

Hermione sighed. 'Certainly,' she replied before depositing her mug in the sink and leaving for upstairs.

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The wedding went off without a hitch.

Which was unsurprising considering Hermione was involved. The flowers for the ceremony had arrived at Hogwarts on time, and the entire outdoor set-up beside the lake had been as perfect as Ginny or Harry could have ever imagined. After Hermione had woken Ginny and forced some breakfast into her despite her pre-wedding jitters, she had ensured that all of the Weasley boys and Harry had received hangover potions if they needed them and even checked in at the tailor to ensure that the suits for the groom's party had gone to Grimmauld Place.

The rings for the exchange in the ceremony had been safely entrusted to Ron, who for once, seemed to have everything he needed under control. Ginny, Luna and Hermione had all been dressed, made-up and had their hair styled on time and had arrived at the gates to the school grounds even a little early. Even the photographer was there on time and was taking lots of photos.

And now, sitting in the Great Hall at the Wedding party's table, Hermione admired her handiwork as she gazed around at the tastefully decorated hall.

Harry and Ginny were slow dancing to the music in the middle of the floor along with various other couples, and everything was as it should have been. That was, of course, until Bill swept across to where she was sitting and pulled up the chair beside her. Hermione stifled her groan. Did the man have no idea what his presence did to her? Over the past few weeks, she had been fighting her attraction to him, reasoning that it was wrong to have feelings for one's boss. But he was always there, and he was always calling upon her and imposing his charming presence on her.

'You owe me a dance, Miss Granger,' he said with a very serious expression on his face. It didn't last for long, for when she raised an eyebrow at him, he broke into a wide smile and grasped her hand in his. 'Come on, let's go dance together.'

Unable to say no, she allowed him to draw her out of her chair and across to the dance floor, immediately placing a hand on her waist and grasping the other hand. He slowly swayed them around in the same fashion as everyone else who was dancing, and she slowly relaxed into his touch. Just as the song drew to a close, she made an attempt to escape his arms, but he held her firmly and coaxed her into another slow dance. Hermione was screaming on the inside, asking Merlin what she had done to deserve this torment.

About halfway through the song, she felt Bill begin to stroke up and down her back with the hand that had been at her waist. She looked up at his face with a question in her eyes, but he just smiled and let his hand drift back to her waist where it continued to rub her gently. Hermione frowned at that, trying to pry her hand from his so that she could leave the dance floor.

'Bill, please let me go,' she said, desperate now to get away from him. Her body was on fire beneath his touch, and it was driving her mad. She needed to get away fast.

'Hermione, surely you can see that I am attracted to you,' he murmured, refusing to release her. 'And it seems to me that you are attracted to me too.'

'It's inappropriate,' she said a little more sharply than she had intended. 'We work with each other.'

'I don't care,' he said, rubbing his hand up her waist so that his thumb could brush the underside of her breast over her robes.

Hermione yanked her hand from his then and crossed her arms over her chest. 'I never gave you leave to touch me like that,' she hissed before turning away from him and walking off the dance floor.

She rushed to the nearest bathroom, and once inside a cubicle, she leaned her back against the door and let out a shaky breath. Her pulse was racing and her stomach was in knots. She was very aroused and all from a simple touch like that. What was Bill playing at, making a pass at her like that? Feeling very confused, she quickly relieved her bladder and washed her hands, leaving the girls' bathroom and heading back to the Great Hall. It didn't matter that Bill had touched her it was Ginny and Harry's day, and she wasn't going to let her arousal and confusion get in the way.

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To be continued.

Part Two: Consumed

Chapter 2 of 6

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Many thanks, as usual, to WriterMerrin for continuing to support me with her mad beta skills.

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Her mind whirled when she looked down at the sheets of parchment in front of her.

The month that Hermione had spent planning felt like it had been for naught. Her trip to China had been postponed by the goblins, who had insisted that she remain in London until at least the end of the month, which was three whole weeks away. Her field research wasn't really going to suffer just because she arrived a week after the dig began. After all, with the delicacy of ancient tombs, the slower the team worked, the better. But that didn't help with her other problem at work either her boss.

Bill had become even more of a nuisance at work since the wedding. He brought her coffee, sat on the corner of her desk and chatted to her for longer periods of time, and on the days when she didn't leave the office during the lunch hour, he always brought her something to eat. Granted, it was nice not to have to go in search of sustenance when she was busy with her translations; it was strange behaviour all the same. Every evening he would ask her to go to dinner with him, and she always replied in the negative. She knew for a fact that everyone else was taking notice of his attentions.

In fact, if Hermione didn't know any better, she would think he was going out of his way to be obvious around her on purpose.

Bill, unlike many of his siblings, was a very take-charge being who always came across as confident and exuded charm and masculinity. He was a man. And Hermione was unbelievably drawn to him for this very reason. He was well travelled, ordinarily had very good manners and was intelligent in a way that very few of the Weasley boys were. Not that the other Weasleys were unintelligent, but his kind certainly appealed to her. However, Bill was making her life very difficult at that moment by tormenting her with his presence.

That evening, as everyone else was finishing up for the day, Hermione was still at her desk scribbling away when her tormentor approached her desk.

'Go to dinner with me,' he said simply, holding out a hand to her.

'Bill, you need to stop doing this, especially while we are at work,' she said, her frustration evident in her voice.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw that a couple of the others were watching them closely. 'I will stop when you agree to go on a date with me,' he replied.

Closing her eyes and taking a deep breath, she fought down the urge to just stand up and deliver a blow to his perfect nose. 'If I agree to go to dinner with you, will you stop harassing me for the next three weeks?' she asked.

'I'll stop harassing you at work at the very least,' he said with a grin. 'I can't promise you that I'll leave you alone when we're not at work though.'

'Fine,' she said, shuffling the parchments in front of her into a neat pile and putting them all in her briefcase. 'I'll go to dinner with you, but it is not a date. It's just dinner.'

'I'll take what I can get,' Bill replied with a smirk.

Grabbing her robes off the back of her chair, she shrugged them on before snatching up her briefcase and ignoring the redhead's proffered arm. 'Lead the way,' she said, aware that they were still being watched by the two other people in the office.

'Stubborn witch,' he muttered under his breath just loud enough for her to hear as he stalked out of the office.

They walked a short way through the Alley before Bill stopped at a small café that had a nice atmosphere and was slightly secluded, much to Hermione's appreciation. Even though she was practically being coerced into having dinner with him, the part of her that was deeply attracted to Bill was rejoicing. They were seated by a young,

acne-covered boy who brought out two menus before moving off to the side while they made their selections.

Hermione was just about to open hers up when she felt it being tugged from her hands gently. 'What are you doing?' she asked, confusion clearly written all over her face.

'Well I should think it was obvious,' he said, beckoning the waiter over.

Hermione opened her mouth to protest his presumptuous behaviour, but snapped it shut when the pimply boy arrived at their table. She had no intention of making a scene and making herself look bad in public. He was goading her, but she would not be caving in to the temptation. It was all just a part of his game. As Bill placed their order, Hermione sat stiffly in her chair, playing with the edge of the table cloth and scowling.

'You won't regret it, trust me,' the redhead said on seeing her expression.

'You are going to regret your behaviour so far this evening, William Weasley,' she hissed under her breath as a new couple walked into the café.

'Hermione, I am merely trying to allow you to take a break,' he said smoothly. 'Doesn't it get exhausting having to be in control of everything all of the time?'

Hermione sniffed at that. 'I have not experienced any weariness yet as far as control over my life is concerned,' she said coldly.

Her internal battle was growing far more serious with each passing moment. She still liked him! The man was positively infuriating, and yet all of his charm, sexiness and other good qualities kept reminding her why it was that she was attracted to him why she admired him. So many times already she had to hold back the torrent of angry words that were trying to launch themselves at him like a nuclear missile. But instead, her head throbbed from the effort of keeping them to herself.

Dinner arrived at the table during her musings, and she looked down, surprised to see that he had ordered the two of them spinach and feta ravioli in a creamy pesto sauce. It was one of her favourite dishes, and she wondered vaguely how he had known to order that. She guessed it probably had something to do with either Ginny or Harry. She was probably going to send them something horrible in the mail for that. The last thing she needed was Bill trying to distract her even more by doing nice things for her.

'You're quiet,' he murmured as he ate.

'I don't like to talk with my mouth full of food,' she replied after swallowing the bite in her mouth.

After that, they lapsed into silence once more. It was odd. Before the Potters' wedding, Hermione had very little trouble conversing with Bill at all. They had a lot of common interests. But since then, everything had seemed so stilted. She hated the way that he made her feel, but relished it at the same time. Hermione waved off dessert when the waiter collected their plates and offered it, and Bill paid for their meals and escorted her outside.

'Let me see you to your house,' he said, holding out a hand to her. 'No strings attached, I promise.'

'Alright,' Hermione agreed.

He Apparated them both to her door and leaned in to place a soft kiss just beside her own trembling lips. 'May I kiss you, Hermione?' he asked.

'Just one kiss, I suppose,' she breathed, unable to deny him then.

His warm lips pressed against hers gently, his hand sliding up to cup her cheek as he deepened it only a little before pulling back. Her breathing hitched as he withdrew, and with a final gentle caress, he turned and Apparated into the night. Clutching a hand to her chest as her heart fluttered madly beneath, she unlocked the door and let herself into the house. And as she went through her nightly hygiene routine, Hermione thought that it was going to be difficult for sleep to find her.

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The weekend was coming to a close, and with it, the fabric of Hermione's patience was beginning to fray around the edges.

Since dinner on Friday night with Bill, she had been driven to distraction by the redhead in question. The day before, she had intended to finish doing her preliminary research on the dig in China. Instead, she spent the day in idle thought, wondering what she was going to do about the difficult situation she now found herself in with her boss. So, instead she had set out to complete her research that day, but to no effect. Her Sunday had been wasted thinking about dinner at the Burrow that night. He was going to be there, and there was no way she could avoid him.

The last thing she needed was his family to suspect that something out of the ordinary was going on between them. The moment news like that was leaked, it would be impossible to get everyone off her back. Molly especially would be overexcited about the prospect of Hermione becoming an official part of the family that she would push the two of them until they were barmy.

Her cheeks heated the moment her mind drifted to the kiss.

It was unforgettable to say the least. She wanted to keep on kissing him, and she desperately wished he had touched her or held her or stayed. But he had kissed her and left her standing in front of her house, desperate for more of what he had started. Closing her eyes, she willed her thoughts away. When she opened them, she looked at the clock on her mantel and saw that it was already half past six, and she was expected at the Burrow by seven.

She dashed upstairs to her room and took a quick shower, towelling herself dry on the way back into her room. Slipping on her cotton knickers and her bra, she found a navy sweater and a pair of jeans in the drawer and donned them also. Grabbing her wand from beside the basin in the bathroom, she went downstairs, slipped on a pair of loafers and Apparated directly to the back door of the Burrow.

Before she could enter the house, however, a pair of arms slipped around her waist from behind, and she was drawn back towards Arthur's tool shed. She spun around, already knowing who it was, and had the breath knocked out of her at the sight of him. He was wearing a black cashmere sweater with blue jeans, and his long red hair was hanging in slight waves around his face instead of tied back as usual. The change was stunning and strangely beautiful.

'I missed you,' he declared quietly before pressing his lips to hers without bothering to ask for permission that time.

She gasped softly when he broke the kiss. 'It's only been a day and a half,' she whispered back, staring at his black-clad chest.

'It feels like longer,' he murmured before leaning in for a second kiss, pressing his tongue against her lips to part them before exploring her mouth thoroughly.

When she was about to moan, she caught herself and pulled back, flushed and panting. He was seducing her so totally. She was finding it difficult to maintain control when he was around. Managing to wrench herself out of his arms, but not before his hand pressed against her breast over her sweater, she took a few deep breaths before trudging back to the Burrow. She looked over her shoulder to see Bill following her a few steps behind. The look in his eyes frightened her a little. Not because he was angry oh no the look was that of a predator stalking its prey.

And Hermione felt just like a deer in the headlights.

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'Snap out of it!' Ginny said loudly, waving her hand in front of Hermione's face. 'You're almost like a zombie these days.'

Hermione blinked rapidly and focused on her friend. 'Oh, I'm so sorry, Gin!' she exclaimed, grasping the redhead's hand across the table. 'I've been rather out of sorts a lot

lately.'

'More than that,' the younger witch stated bluntly. 'There is something on your mind, Hermione Granger, and it's been on it for a while. Now spill.'

Sighing and releasing her hand, Hermione stared at the wood of the table, taking in the contours and the lines. Well, it seemed as though the cat was out of its metaphorical bag. Apparently Ginny knew her better than she thought.

'It's Bill,' she answered finally. 'Things are getting complicated at work because of him. I'm nearly ready to resign, actually. I can barely even get through the day without thinking about him. He is constantly hovering over me like a bird of prey.'

'You fancy Bill?' Ginny said, gawking. 'Well fuck me, I had no idea it was going to be that kind of secret. Well actually, I suppose it does make sense. Bill always was the best-looking boy in the family, so I can understand your attraction. And it does explain him asking about your favourite foods, flowers and places to go in London.'

'What? You mean he was asking all of those questions and you didn't suspect this thing between us before now?' Hermione asked, feeling a little frantic.

'I suppose Harry and I have been a little distracted too,' Ginny said with a blush. 'It's still all rather new for us. Marriage has only made the sex even better!'

'Ginny, I hate to say this to you, but I really don't want to know about Harry's sex life. He's like a brother to me.'

'But Bill isn't like a brother to you, is he?'

'Shut it.'

'Just make sure you use contraception no matter what. He is still a Weasley after all, and we're an unbelievably fertile bunch,' Ginny teased.

Hermione rolled her eyes. 'I'm starting to reconsider your status as my best friend.'

'Who are you trying to kid, Hermione? You love me!'

'Fortunate indeed or you'd be dead by now from all that teasing,' she replied.

Both women smiled and grasped each other's hands across the table. Everything would work out somehow.

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Bill walked over to her desk and placed a stack of parchment in front of her.

Hermione picked them up and looked them over. They were her travel approval papers for the dig in China. She looked up at her boss with a confused expression on her face. Just one week before, the goblins had rejected her proposal to leave, and now sitting before her was the approval to leave two weeks before their agreed date. Why did Bill have that strange smile on his face?

'How is this possible?' she asked.

'I resubmitted your application for you and spoke with the goblins a couple of days ago,' he answered, seating himself on the corner of her desk as usual. 'I know how much you wanted to begin work in China.'

'You didn't have to do this,' she said, feeling her breath catch in her throat.

'After all of the torment you've endured over the past few weeks, this was the least I could do to make it up to you,' Bill said quietly. 'I know I've been a bit of an arse, but if I could do anything to make it up to you, I would.'

'Bill...'

'Well, I will just leave you to it then,' he said with a look of discomfort, pushing himself up off her desk and heading out of the office.

Hermione stared at the door for a long time after he left. If she was confused before, then she was even more so after the awkward exchange that had just passed between them. It took her a moment to realize that while she had been staring out after her boss, two of her colleagues were looking at her with suspicion in their gazes. Feeling more than a little fed up with the hostility, she stood up from her desk and marched over to her silent accusers, crossing her arms over her chest.

'What is your problem?' Hermione demanded coldly.

'We certainly don't have one, but perhaps you do,' sneered Marietta Edgecombe.

Hermione briefly recalled the blonde woman holding something of a grudge with her since her fifth year at Hogwarts. 'I don't believe that who I chose to talk to is any of your business, let alone anyone else in this office,' she snapped loudly, looking around the rest of the office quickly to see a few of the other staff look down at the paperwork in front of them.

'You sure have a lot of nerve, Granger. You've practically been throwing yourself at the boss the entire time that you've been back in the office,' Marietta replied. 'We all know that the only reason you're going to China is because of him. You've been riding on the coattails of others to get everywhere your whole life.'

And this was the kind of scene Hermione had been desperately trying to avoid, but apparently the fates were just not on her side.

'I am only going to say this to you once, so you had better listen damn well,' Hermione said as she reined her temper in as best she could. 'Yes, I am friends with the Weasley family, and I have always had a friendly relationship with Bill. Yes, Harry Potter just happens to be one of my best friends. But that in no way has any affect on my work, whatsoever. I gained my position here and my previous position for the Ministry all on my own merit. Can you say the same for yourself?'

With that parting shot, she turned on her heel, leaving the rest of the people in the office gawking at her. Gathering her papers together, she put them in her briefcase and left the office, regardless of the fact that it was early. It didn't matter to her. The goblins didn't care what time in the afternoon they left, as long as they put in their appropriate hours for the week eventually. Hermione had extra hours owed to her already, so once she was clear of the building and back in Diagon Alley, she Apparated straight home.

Leaving her briefcase in the hall, she stomped upstairs and straight to the bathroom. With a flick of her wand, the bath began filling itself, and sweet-smelling bath salts and oils were added. Undressing, she tossed her robes into the hamper and sunk into the steaming hot water, relishing the sensation. It had been too long since her last long soak in a bath tub, and she felt that after the last little while at work, she was more entitled to it than she had ever been.

Forcing the thoughts about her co-workers out of her head, she let her mind wander to her other problem.

Bill. Her mind provided his name so quickly. He had been so out of sorts in the office. She was just beginning to grow accustomed to his cocky, presumptuous behaviour, when suddenly it was as though his conscience had decided to make an appearance once more, and he seemed almost remorseful for his actions over the past few weeks. His twists and turns and unpredictability, while annoying, still held some appeal to her. If this was an indicator of how he was going to be in a relationship, she knew that she would likely never be bored.

Sighing, she sunk down so that the water covered her shoulders and stretched her arms out, brushing them against the sides of her breasts as she did. At the movement, she felt a slight tingle begin at her breasts, travelling down her body until it pooled as heat at her centre. Had it been so long since she had taken a lover that the thought of Bill and an accidental brush against her skin caused her to become aroused? It might have been a month since her last encounter, but that was hardly an age.

Groaning, she let her hands drift up over her flat belly and further to cup her breasts. She felt another jolt of arousal and knew better than to deny her body more. Grazing her thumbs over her already hardening nipples, she moaned softly. Leaving one hand to play with her breasts, she moved the other down to rub through the curls at the apex of her thighs. Her fingers arrived at their intended destination and quickly slid between the soft, warm folds of her labia.

Rubbing gently, she worked her way back up to her clit and, with two fingers, stroked in the way that she knew her body craved. Her other hand left her breasts, and she slid two fingers inside her tight channel, fingering and rubbing herself. As she approached her peak, she rode her fingers harder before climaxing hard, her body trembling in the aftermath. Removing her hands from herself, she lazily went about the business of bathing and washing her hair.

After she was clean and dry, she went to bed, sliding under the covers and falling into a sated sleep.

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To be continued...

Part Three: Affection

Chapter 3 of 6

Confident... Handsome... Charming. Three words that Hermione Granger would use to describe her boss, Bill Weasley. But just how does the smartest witch of her age intend to resist his charms when her boss decides to go on the prowl? Written for the Mayhem in May Challenge '10, Prompt Two: 'Your desk is hardly the place for that, sir!'.

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Many thanks and hugs to WriterMerrin for her beta skills and encouragement.

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All of the preparations for the China expedition had already been made.

After all, Hermione was, if nothing else, organized and efficient. Her Portkey was booked to leave at six in the evening on Monday, which was still two days away. It was Saturday morning, and she was both excited to be finally heading to the dig site, while anxious because she would be leaving behind the man that she had come to admire quite a lot during her time working for Gringotts.

Her research there would probably keep her away for months at a time, so she would hardly ever be seeing any of her friends or family. Over the past month, she had become so used to seeing Harry, Ginny and the Weasleys all of the time that she was going to find it hard going back to seeing them sporadically. Her chest especially ached at the thought of not seeing Bill until Christmas. It was only the beginning of October, and the Christmas break seemed so far away.

Huffing out a breath, Hermione decided enough was enough for that day. She would not spend her last weekend in London moping around her house feeling sorry for herself. Grabbing a set of turquoise robes from her cupboard, she threw them on, fastening them with the silver clasp over her jeans and sweater, and Apparated from her house to the gates of Hogwarts. She hadn't been there since the Potter wedding, and even then, she hadn't really caught up with Minerva due to her busy schedule as Maid of Honor.

She trudged along the path, staring at the brown, red, yellow and orange leaves that were scattered all over the grounds. It was truly her favourite season, just for the colours of it alone. She arrived at the castle after ten minutes and walked through the main doors, closing them behind her to keep the wind from blowing leaves inside and making a mess for Filch, or a poor student with detention to clean.

'Hermione!' a familiar voice yelled from just ahead of her.

She looked up at the stairs and saw that Neville was standing right on the top step. He quickly made his way down them and enfolded her in a tight hug. If only one good thing had come from the end of the war against Voldemort, it was that Neville had lost most of his shyness, and his confidence in himself had grown a substantial amount. He was, after all, the one who had finally avenged his parents on the event of slaying Bellatrix Lestrange. Smiling, she patted his back, then took a small step away from him as their hug ended.

'It's so good to see you, Neville,' Hermione said honestly.

'It's good to see you again too,' he replied. 'If you haven't eaten, breakfast is still on in the Great Hall. I was just heading there, so if you join me, we can catch up for a while.'

'That actually sounds really nice, Nev,' she replied, beaming at him and allowing him to escort her on his arm into the Great Hall.

They walked along the outside edge of the hall past the Hufflepuff table, but even from there, Hermione could see all of her old professors smiling at her. It was almost like coming home again. The pair took a seat towards the middle, where the staff who were already there moved to accommodate them so that everyone could ask questions to their prized former student. Albus Dumbledore saluted her with his goblet of morning pumpkin juice and a twinkle of his eyes as most of the other staff fawned over her.

It was no wonder people were starting to feel like she was a favourite. Even half as much attention as she was receiving at Hogwarts would cause anyone pause. She thought just about the only one who hadn't given her much more notice than a nod of his head was Snape, who continued to partake of his morning meal. Minerva McGonagall had left her seat and practically assaulted her with a tight embrace.

'It's so good to see you, my dear,' she said excitedly. 'I know now isn't the ideal location to try and catch up better, so why don't you come by my office after breakfast?'

'Of course I will,' she replied before her old Head of House returned to her seat, and the rest of the staff continued to badger her with questions about her life.

After breakfast was over and the bewildered students started to clear out of the hall, Hermione hugged Neville goodbye and walked with Minerva back up to the fourth floor. Once safely ensconced in one of the two comfy armchairs by the fire, Hermione closed her eyes for a moment and relaxed. It had been a long time since she had been interrogated like that, and it left her feeling overwhelmed.

'Those other ninnys don't know when to stop asking questions,' the Deputy Headmistress said as she placed an order for a tea tray with the kitchens, and a moment later, it appeared on the coffee table in front of the two armchairs.

'It was a little overwhelming,' she admitted. 'It seems that overwhelming is becoming a part of my routine these days though.'

'Oh? How do you mean?' Minerva asked as she began to prepare a cup of tea for herself.

'Ah, well things at Gringotts have been very... well to be honest, the other staff in my office have been a little hostile towards me since I returned for Harry and Ginny's wedding,' Hermione replied with a heavy sigh, leaning forwards to get her own cup of tea.

'Oh my,' Minerva exclaimed. 'What could be the reason?'

'Oh, I know the reason. I had a bit of a confrontation with Marietta Edgecombe the other day, actually. She let me know exactly what she and the other staff thought was going on,' the younger witch answered. 'Apparently everyone there feels that I didn't earn my place through honest means, and that I was somehow using my friendship status with both the Weasleys and Harry to my advantage. And on top of that, she accused me of being overly friendly with the boss.'

'You with William? Well, I suppose I could see something promising there, but I'm certain with the way Gringotts politics works that any relationship could not possibly have an effect on your position.'

Hermione smiled. 'That is what Bill said, actually, when I tried to discourage him from talking to me while we were at work,' she said. 'Things are a little complicated with him, at the moment.'

'And are those complications to do with your purported relationship with him?' Minerva inquired, taking a sip of her tea.

'I tried so hard to fight it, but it seems Bill was a lot more interested in pursuing me than I originally thought possible. And just as I was getting used to his persistence, he has decided to back off,' she replied, sipping her own tea.

'I see. Yes, you seem to be confused about this, and I understand why you would be. I've known William since he was just a boy, and he was always such a charming, lovely young thing. He hasn't changed a bit. Sometimes he lets his feelings get the better of him, and I suppose you were the recipient of his persistence,' the older woman mused. 'The last time he had strong feelings for a witch, it was just the same as this he pursued her at first, but when he came to feel something more than simple attraction, he stopped badgering the girl, and as a result, she slipped through his fingers.'

'I think I am falling for him, Minerva,' Hermione said quietly. 'And I am just about to leave for China. I have the worst possible timing. I won't even get a chance to properly reassure him that I want his attention.'

'Just because you are going away, doesn't mean you can't tell him that you have feelings for him,' Minerva said wisely.

Hermione smiled sadly at her. But it did mean that she couldn't say anything to him. It wasn't fair to Bill if she were to confess her feelings to him, only to leave him straight away to go overseas. It wasn't fair to her either. After finishing her tea, she bid Minerva goodbye and left the castle. Stopping by Hagrid's on the way back to the gates, she visited with the man for a brief time before heading home. On arriving back at her house, she curled up on the chaise in her study with a throw rug and a book.

She would spend her second-last evening in London enjoying one of her favourite pastimes.

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Monday morning arrived much too soon.

Hermione had woken that morning slowly, stretching herself out and looking to her nightstand to see that it was only eight o'clock. She had so much getting to sleep the night before that she had been forced to take a Dreamless Sleep Potion. All of the belongings that she was taking with her had been packed into trunks and already sent straight to the place where she'd be staying the day before. All that was left was for her to dress and go about her day before her Portkey that evening.

After she had gotten out of bed, showered, and dressed, Hermione potted about her house. She had some toast and tea for breakfast. Later she went out to her small back garden to check that her garden shed and makeshift potions laboratory were secured with anti-theft and locking charms. Finally, when there was nothing left to do at her house, she grabbed her travelling robes and secured her property before Apparating to Godric's Hollow.

She walked from the park across the road over to Harry and Ginny's house and up their front path, which was lined on both sides with the petunias that the younger woman had planted. Pressing the door bell, she stepped back to wait. A moment later, a female voice yelled from somewhere in the house, and the door flung open to reveal the redhead in the doorway.

'Hermione! Oh, I thought I wouldn't get to see you before you left,' Ginny exclaimed, throwing her arms around her and hugging her tightly.

'Well, here I am. I'll be leaving for the Ministry straight from here when I've got twenty minutes until my Portkey leaves,' Hermione answered. 'I hope you don't mind a visit while I wait.'

'Not at all! I look forward to your visits,' the younger witch replied. 'I am going to miss you while you're away. And I'm not the only one. Harry, Mum, Dad, Ron and especially Bill will be sad to see you go too.'

Hermione laughed softly. 'I will miss you all so much; it's just that, this is really important to me. And a few months is hardly a long time. You'll see I will be back before you know it,' she said, trying to convince Ginny while convincing herself of the same.

'I hope so,' Ginny replied. 'You know, now that I've had a few years to establish my career, work and do some things for myself, Harry and I have decided that we're ready to settle down and begin making a family together.'

Hermione followed Ginny through the door and into the sitting room where they sat down on the lounge together.

'So, you and Harry are thinking about children already?'

'Yes, well I know we've only been married for a few weeks, but we've been a couple ever since Hogwarts. We've had plenty of time together with just the two of us,' the younger woman explained. 'But Harry never got the chance to have a real family of his own before, and I want to give him that while we're young enough to enjoy it. After all, when our kids have grown up and moved on, we'll have time to be a couple again.'

'That's very thoughtful of you to do that for him,' Hermione said with a smile. 'I know he's always wanted a family of his own to love.'

'Yes, and that's exactly why I decided to go off my contraceptives this week. I don't want to waste any time it will take a few weeks for the long-term effects of it to wear off and we'll be able to conceive.'

'I'm happy for you.'

Ginny smiled at her and reached over to grasp her hands. 'So tell me, how are things going between you and my brother? I assume, as I haven't heard anything from my mother about it, that you two haven't come to an agreement of any sort yet,' she said.

Hermione winced. She had hoped that this wouldn't come up, especially as she was leaving in just a few hours. 'It's still as complicated as it ever was,' she answered. 'He started off all cocky and like he was really interested, but the last time we spoke, he apologized for practically forcing himself on me and walked away.'

'He was here on the weekend, you know,' Ginny said. 'He's crazy about you I could tell. I heard him talking to Harry when they thought I was cleaning up in the kitchen.'

'Ginny, you know I might even be in love with him a little bit, but at the moment, because of this China expedition, I just can't do anything about it,' Hermione said quietly, looking down at their joined hands. 'If there is still something there later, we might get a chance to do something about it.'

A little while later, they had some lunch, and Harry arrived home from work shortly before she was due to leave for the Ministry. Hermione was sad to leave her friends, but at twenty to six, she Apparated from the park across from their home, straight to the main foyer of the Ministry before making her way to the Portkey Office. Along the way, she bumped into her former adversary, Luna's husband, and Harry's partner in the Aurors' division, Draco Malfoy. They paused for a moment to exchange greetings as he was on his way out. Continuing onwards, she thought about her trip. Christmas was not so long away, and she had been away from her friends and family for longer than three months before. Why did she feel so morose? This trip was something she had spent planning and anticipating for months in advance, even while she was still on her last overseas trip.

When she reached the office, she went inside and was told to take a seat by the woman sitting at the front desk.

'It won't be long,' she informed Hermione. 'They'll just finish up with the current Portkey and walk you through the safety procedures before you can go.'

Hermione nodded and sat to the side with the numerous others that were waiting for their Portkeys that night. A few minutes later, she heard her name called out, and she got up to follow the receptionist through to the Portal Room. She was just passing by the door when she heard her name being called out again from behind her. Spinning around, hair whipping the side of her face with the suddenness of her movement, she saw Bill standing in the doorway, panting and looking a little disheveled.

'Bill?' she asked, slightly confused.

He walked over to her and grasped one of her hands in his. 'I came to see you off,' he said, still slightly out of breath. He must have run to catch her.

'Thank you, I suppose,' she said. 'My Portkey is now.'

'I know,' he murmured.

He pulled her slightly closer to him and dropped her hands to cup her face between his palms. Leaning into her, he pressed his lips to hers, kissing her with such tenderness that she swore she could feel her heart breaking. After a few moments, he broke the kiss, brushing the pad of his thumb across her cheekbone lightly.

'I'll see you at Christmas then,' he told her with a small, but dazzling, smile.

'See you then,' she agreed, lifting up her hand to a lock of hair that had escaped the elastic tying the rest back. She tucked it behind his ear and leaned up to kiss his cheek.

Without another word, she turned around and continued to follow the receptionist into the next room.

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Hermione looked out at the ruins before her.

Amazing was the only word that she could think of that described her view. Looking down below the treetops, she saw the dig and all of the witches and wizards that were busily and carefully digging up the ruins. She had been there one week already, and it continued to amaze her how similar Muggle Archaeology and the Wizarding technique was. Very little magic could be used there because of the delicacy of all the old buildings and the occasional treasures that they found along the way.

One of her favourite things about being in the country so far was wearing the translation amulet, but also having the opportunity to learn Mandarin. She could speak German, French, Latin and Spanish fluently, but until then, she'd never thought to learn an Eastern Language before. She was sharing a flat with another lady from Crete in the town nearest, which was still three Apparation points away, which was near a local school that taught Chinese to foreigners.

At night, when most of the others would go to the town hall and have social drinks and get to know one another, Hermione had signed up for the night class at the school and intended to spend most nights learning. She smiled. It was so typical of her to want to spend her time hitting the books instead of getting to know her fellow researchers better.

A few times already since she had been there, some of the male researchers and Archaeologists had tried to flirt with her. They had been dashing and full of charm and flattering compliments, but she had been too distracted by thoughts of home to pay them any mind. Her parting kiss with Bill was still fresh and at the forefront of her mind whenever she was not distracted with her work. She knew that at some point over the last few months, she must have fallen in love with him.

Sighing heavily, she walked down the path towards the marquee that had been set up for the researchers. Her desk was set up the closest to the dig, and because she had used it so little in the week that she'd been there, it was covered in a thin layer of dust. She had left her books and papers under the tent and gone down to the dig, getting quite filthy every day, sifting through sand and dirt and dust.

'Good morning, Master Granger!' a young man greeted from further along the path.

'Good morning, Mr. Gardener,' she responded in kind.

'Are you going to be coming down to the dig again today, or will you be up at the tent with the other researchers?' he asked.

Hermione smiled. Adam Gardener was a very young, enthusiastic man from London who was studying Ancient Runes at the Wizarding College. She too had studied an accelerated Arithmancy and Ancient Runes double degree there for two years and afterwards had been an Apprentice with Professor Vector for a year. While a lot of the other researchers preferred to stay up the hill under the marquee, studying the finds, Hermione preferred a more hands-on approach. She wanted to be there when they discovered the Ancient texts that she had heard about and been waiting to be found for as long as she could remember.

'I'll see you down there then!' Adam called out as he rushed off ahead.

Hermione nodded and waved him on, heading over to the tent to drop off her things at her desk before putting on a wide-brimmed hat and continuing down the path. She arrived at a nice spot near a window that they were slowly brushing hardened red clay out of. Picking up a small chisel and hammer, she picked up where she'd left from the day before, delicately chipping away at the red dirt, using a brush to get it out of the way whenever it built up too much.

She wore enough of the red clay away that she was soon able to see ancient granite along the sill, carved beautifully with snakes and vines. She didn't bother breaking for lunch in the middle of the day with the others as she was too focused on getting the window totally un-sealed by the end of the day. By the time that the sun was setting at around five o'clock, she had made her way through, and looking through the small opening, could just barely make out some large shapes in the pitch black room.

'Master Granger, it's time for us to leave for the day,' one of the other Archaeologists called from the top of the hill.

She looked around to see that she was the only one remaining at the dig. Packing up her tools, she walked back up to the marquee, collected her briefcase and began the

trek back up to the top of the hill. The mystery of what lay in the room beyond the window would have to wait until daybreak.

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To be continued.

Part Four: Memories

Chapter 4 of 6

Confident... Handsome... Charming. Three words that Hermione Granger would use to describe her boss, Bill Weasley. But just how does the smartest witch of her age intend to resist his charms when her boss decides to go on the prowl? Written for the Mayhem in May Challenge '10, Prompt Two: 'Your desk is hardly the place for that, sir!'.

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Hermione stared numbly at the package in front of her.

If it had been from any other person she knew, the brown paper would have been torn from the box it was wrapped around already, and the letter attached would have been opened. It was a surprise. She had not expected to hear from Bill at all, and just when she least expected it, he sent not only a letter, but an accompanying gift as well. Scared at what it might be, she grabbed a pair of small scissors and cut the yarn that bound the letter to the brown-wrapped parcel.

She unfolded the letter and looked down at the familiar script. A pang of loneliness went through her. She missed him. It had been a month already, and while she had received bi-weekly updates from Ginny about the status of everyone in their friendship circle, she had not received a stitch of news from the one person she yearned to hear from. And yet, with the precious parcel sitting before her, Hermione was reluctant to disturb the paper and see just what he had thought of when deciding to send her a gift.

Sighing, she returned her eyes to the parchment in front of her and began to read.

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Hermione,

I suppose I should have written to you sooner, but every time I tried to begin a letter, my quill would pause over the parchment, and I would be unable to write what I wanted to say to you. For that, I apologise. I have longed to write and tell you just how much I miss you and wish that you could come back to London to Gringotts. Were it up to me, I would keep you here or I would have followed you on your expedition. As it is, the goblins find that I am more useful to them watching over the others in the department.

Knowing you are over there and enjoying your time there and your work makes me long to be back out in the field. Maybe someday I will. Perhaps when that day comes, I might convince you to be there with me. The office has been a lonely place indeed without you here with me. Marietta Edgecombe, with whom you are not friendly, seems persistent in making some sort of trouble for you with the goblins, despite your departure. Needless to say, you won't be having any trouble with them. Miss Edgecombe might even find herself jobless in a few weeks' time.

Well, for now that is all that I have to report. I will write to you again one day soon. If perhaps you find that you have the time to spare, any response that you pen will be read and treasured. I hope that my gift will be useful to you while you are busy with your research there.

With Affection,

Bill

--

For a few moments, she simply sat and stared at the parchment. It was written on his finest stationary and in the royal purple ink that she knew he favoured. His words on the page before her seemed sad. Like somehow as he had been writing the letter, his emotions themselves had fastened to the words he wrote and, as she read them, had transferred to her. She felt sad. Her fingers itched to open the package containing his gift. He mentioned it perhaps being helpful to her and her work.

Finally, after a moment of hesitation, she began to slowly unfasten the little bits of tape that were holding the brown paper closed. Pulling the cover off totally, she opened the box and was surprised to discover a leather pouch. It felt heavier than leather should, and she gave it a light shake. It made some clinking noises inside, so she began to open it to discover what it was. Just as she moved to do this, she discovered that her name and some roses had been embossed into the leather. It was dark cow hide, and it felt smooth beneath her fingers as she traced the letters. The pouch itself was an amazing gift.

When she finally unfastened the clasp, she tipped it upside down on her desk and watched as shiny, new tools slid onto the wood. They were the finest quality dig tools, of much higher quality than the old ones she had kept since her days as an apprentice. Each tool had her initials engraved into it in the same font used on the pouch. The inside of the pouch, while not lined with tools, appeared to be lined with soft fur. Smiling at his thoughtful gift, she placed the tools back in their places inside the pouch carefully.

She mused that it might have been one of the nicest presents she had received.

Just as she was discarding the brown paper and box into the rubbish bin beside the desk in her room, she heard her flat mate knocking on her door to let her know she was leaving. Picking up her wand, Hermione summoned all of her things to her and attached her new tool pouch to her belt before leaving the flat also. She met a few of

the other researchers down the road just a little, on the way to the first Apparation point. A few Apparations later and she was at the top of the hill once more, looking down on the dig site.

Compared to when she had first arrived, they had made a lot of progress. The first chamber was totally exhumed, and many artifacts and a couple of books had been found. When Hermione had seen the books, she'd known that they were not the ones that she was looking for and had let them pass to one of the younger translators. She was looking for the real deal the older and much frailer original documents that explained the customs and burial rites of the time. The documents she was after were ones that she intended to dig up herself before she left China for the Christmas break.

Heading down to the marquee, she dropped off her case before going straight to the dig, intent on giving her new, precious gift a trial run.

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It was a mere four weeks away from the Christmas holiday, and a breakthrough had finally been made.

An ancient site plan had been found in a secret antechamber off the original chamber that had been exhumed. It had detailed the layout of where all of the small buildings and chambers that made up the tomb were, and the purpose of each. The main chamber where the Emperor supposedly rested was right in the centre, but was so much further down that it would take another month to finish. Hermione knew her documents would be in there. The entire history and culture of the time were all resting right beneath their very feet.

After they had discovered this, people trod far more cautiously, most just afraid that if they broke the roof, they would tumble through the ground and into the tomb. Hermione, while cautious herself, had snorted at the idea. People would believe anything, and she was sure that some of them feared that they would end up trapped inside a tomb for life. But she was a resourceful and smart witch even if the place was booby-trapped, she was certain that she could come up with some sort of escape plan should the problem arise.

The day before when she had been digging, she had come across a short papyrus scroll that wasn't quite like the ones she was searching for. But she felt good about them and thought that perhaps they might hold the key to discovering where to look for the actual ancient scrolls. So instead of working in the dirt and sun all day, she had stayed up in the shade of the marquee and settled down to do some translations.

Pulling her gloves on, she pulled out a pair of tweezers and a magnifying glass.

By midday she was over halfway through translating when her young protégé, Adam Gardener, came up from the dig site. 'Hello, Adam,' she greeted with a smile, rolling the top half of the scroll carefully back into place with the tweezers. 'How is it moving along down there today?'

'Slowly, without your help,' he said with a grin.

Hermione chuckled at that. 'Flattery will get you nowhere, Mr. Gardener,' she quipped, pulling off her gloves.

'Did you find anything on that little scroll from yesterday so far?' he asked.

'Actually, I was just getting to the important part. But I think I'll need to have something to eat so that I can concentrate a little better afterwards,' Hermione answered, getting up from her desk.

'Let me escort you up the hill,' Adam said, offering her his arm.

'Why, thank you, Adam,' she said, accepting the offer.

They set off up the hill to the next clearing, where another marquee had been set up as an outdoor dining area. There were always sandwiches, coffee, tea and various types of juice set out for the hungry workers. Until now, Hermione had never been tempted up the hill to eat, but this time it was more important than ever that she get her translations perfect. It was crucial to her research that she did. As Hermione sat down with a small plate of sandwiches and a coffee, Adam joined her at the table.

'Madam Granger, I don't mean to pry, but why is it that you are never at the town hall with everyone else at night?' he asked as he munched on a sandwich.

'You can call me Hermione, Adam, really,' she insisted with a half smile. 'And to answer your question, it's because I've been studying Mandarin at the little school most nights.'

'Really? That sounds fascinating,' he said.

As they talked over lunch, Hermione observed her young protégé. He asked a lot of questions, was very attentive and did not spend the whole time talking about himself. It was nice, but towards the end there was a look in his eyes that gave her the distinct impression that he was attracted to her. That was something she could not afford especially with someone a few years younger than she was herself. Adam couldn't have been older than twenty, and there she was, twenty-seven years old and the only one in the Gryffindor trio who had not settled down. Not to mention the fact that she was in love with Bill.

After lunch, she waved Adam on ahead and returned to her desk to complete her translations. As she slipped on her gloves again, she thought it was rather ironic that the one person that she thought she could count on not to make a pass at her had inadvertently done so with just a glance. Sighing, she pulled out her magnifying glass and pulled out a fresh sheet of parchment and a quill, beginning to note down her findings.

After a couple more hours of reading, Hermione finally hit upon the thing that she had been searching for. It was nearly right at the very bottom of the page in the tiniest writing, but it basically stated that the ancient scrolls and texts she was searching for were kept in a hidden chamber that was right below the chamber that the Emperor's casket was supposedly placed. She breathed a sigh of relief. Her day at the desk had not been wasted after all.

Tomorrow, when they returned to the dig site, she would head straight down with her tools and begin where she thought the door would most likely be. She was determined, if nothing else, to complete the task that she had been sent there to do. If she could get everything she needed before Christmas, she could go back to her friends and family sooner and could spend her time with her books and scrolls, translating them at home and at Gringotts. She would even have her chance to show Bill that she wanted him just as much as he wanted her.

--

The sun was beating down on the site regardless of the fact that it was nearly winter.

Hermione brushed away a bead of sweat that was slowly making its way down the side of her face. The roof of the main chamber had been uncovered already, and they were all well on the way to removing the dirt from the walls and unblocking the windows and doors. A lot more ladders and gear had to be moved in to help support the slightly crumbling structure and help get them in and out of the dig itself safely. The country was famous for the suddenness of its landslides, and Hermione desperately hoped that they would not be so unlucky.

In actual fact, the entire reason for the dig itself was because the burial site had been the unfortunate victim of a landslide in the past. It wouldn't have occurred as far back as when the buildings had been newly created, but at least one hundred years would have gone by for the red clay and dirt to have dried out the way it had. A lot of moisture had been sucked out of the earth by bone-chilling winters and a lack of precipitation in the province.

The area of the building that Hermione had been working away at by herself was near the side entry door that was mostly out of the way and towards the untouched area of the site. It was an ideal location for it kept her out of the way of other people's work and kept them away from her important work also. It also meant that she saw less and less of Adam as he assisted the old wizard that he had been apprenticed to more often now that things were getting a lot more delicate.

By the end of the day when the sun was setting, Hermione had managed to clear out more of the doorway and collected some samples of beads and colourful stones that she assumed had once been a part of some rather elaborate jewelry. She bagged them and packed them into her briefcase when she finally got to the marquee, which seemed to be even further away from the site than it had before due to how much further down they had been forced to excavate.

When she finally got back to her flat, she went straight to her bathroom, peeling off the layers of dusty, soiled clothing and tossing them into the wicker hamper. She would have to visit a laundry the next day and do some washing. She, unlike many of the other magical folk, preferred to have her clothes cleaned the Muggle way. Cleaning charms only worked well for a little while before even they could not remove stains or smells. Besides, she had always liked the smell of clothes fresh from the washing machine.

After having a soak in the bath for half an hour, she washed and got out, drying herself and getting straight into her pajamas. She had worked really hard all day and really didn't feel much like going anywhere. She settled on her bed with a book and cracked it open, beginning to read the first chapter. She was only a few paragraphs in when a tapping noise at the window alerted her to the arrival of some mail. She saw her eagle owl, Delia, perched on the sill outside, waiting patiently for her to open up and let her in. She unlocked the window and untied the letter from Delia's leg before taking the owl to the desk and setting her down beside a bowl of food that she had set out.

Cracking the red seal, she realized it was from Ginny.

--

Hermione,

How are things in the east, my dear? I hope you are doing well, if not better than your last letter detailed. Everything over here is just as you would expect. Mum and Dad are planning to go to Romania this Christmas because Charlie can't get away, so naturally everyone will just be having small, intimate celebrations instead of the huge festivities that we've all gotten so used to.

If you don't have any other plans for the holiday, Harry and I would love it if you would spend the season with us at Godric's Hollow. Bill will probably come to have Christmas with us too if that is any incentive. The holiday is only two weeks away now, as you know, and I am looking forward to your return eagerly. I hope that you get everything you need to before you come home so that you don't have to leave us again so soon.

By the way, do you remember the conversation you and I were having on the day you left for China? Well of course you do, you're Hermione after all. Well, it turns out that the Weasley tendency to have very high fertility levels has lent a hand to the contraceptives wearing off sooner rather than later. I'm already two weeks along and happened to discover so soon purely by chance. I'll explain it to you when you're home as it is a rather interesting and complicated tale.

We are all missing you loads and hope that you are doing well.

All of our love,

Ginny and Harry

--

As she placed the letter down on the growing pile she had received from her friends since she had been away, Hermione allowed herself a moment to smile. It was really good for Harry and Ginny to be having success on the family front. She was really very happy for them. It was not something she felt that she would want for another few years, if she ever did decide she wanted to have children. She had liked her life as an only child; she felt she could consider having one. As she climbed back into her bed and picked up her book, she tried to imagine what it might be like to have a family of her own, and whether such a thing would be possible for her and Bill.

She snorted. She and Bill weren't even in a relationship with one another and she was already contemplating a family between them. It was typical of her to over-think something like that. She opened the book and looked down to where she had left off before looking back over to her owl.

'What do you think, Delia?' she asked quietly.

The owl hooted softly, blinking at her a few times before lifting off from the desk and gently floating down to stand on the nightstand that was not covered in books. Hermione reached out a hand and stroked the soft, downy feathers of her head.

'Things are so complicated,' she told her familiar. For some reason, talking to her owl, despite the fact that the animal had no idea what she was talking about, was comforting. 'I sometimes wonder what it might be like to be a familiar. What do you sweet little animals think of us humans? You're such a beautiful creature, but you probably think that we are awkward and ugly.'

Hermione received another soft hoot, and she wondered for a moment if perhaps familiars knew more than they were ever given credit for. Running a finger over the pretty dark brown feathers of one of her wings, Hermione marveled at the texture. It was soft and silky, firm and flexible and strikingly beautiful, all at the same time.

'You're such a pretty thing,' she murmured.

Setting aside her book and giving up all false pretenses of reading that night, she lay back on her bed and succumbed to sleep.

--

The next morning, Hermione walked into the chamber and immediately made her way around the very edges of the room, checking carefully for any kinds of magical- and non-magical booby-traps. It had taken her nearly three long months to get into the main chamber, and she was looking forward to discovering if all the back-breaking work was worth all of the time and energy she had expended. When she was certain there was nothing, she turned back to the entryway and motioned for the other archaeologists to enter also.

She felt her way around the room with her sturdy gloves on, following the directions that had been laid out to her at the very end of the first smaller scroll that she had found. If she found just the right stone, the chamber that she was seeking would be hidden right below the big elaborate stone coffin that was the central feature of the room. She found a rough stone that stood out slightly from the others and gave a light push.

Something gave, and she felt the stones close to her feet beginning to shift and change as a set of stairs leading down to the hidden chamber appeared before her. Smiling at her success so far, she grabbed a torch and switched it on, wand in hand as she slowly but sure made her way down the stairs and into the secret pit below. What she found at the bottom of the stairs was nothing short of amazing.

There, perfectly preserved and in unbelievably good condition considering their age, were the scrolls and texts Hermione had been searching for, in the form of a great big archive.

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To be continued.

Part Five: Progression

Chapter 5 of 6

Confident... Handsome... Charming. Three words that Hermione Granger would use to describe her boss, Bill Weasley. But just how does the smartest witch of her age intend to resist his charms when her boss decides to go on the prowl? Written for the Mayhem in May Challenge '10, Prompt Two: 'Your desk is hardly the place for that, sir!'.

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A/N This story is non-HBP or DH compliant and can therefore be considered AU. For the purpose of this story, Bill is neither engaged to Fleur nor is he part werewolf. He might have been dating the blonde for a short time, but she won't be getting a mention.

Many thanks and hugs to WriterMerrin for all of her help as my beta.

--

The Portkey that Hermione was scheduled to take was leaving for London at exactly six o'clock in the evening.

At half past five, she collected together the last of her remaining possessions from her room in the flat and placed them in the pockets of her travelling robes. As with her departure to China from London three months beforehand, her belongings had gone ahead of her by a separate Portkey earlier in the day. After handing in her key to the landlord and bidding farewell to a couple of her colleagues from over the past months, she made her way over to the Portkey point. As she was approaching, she saw that Adam Gardener was standing around in that area, also wearing his travel robes.

'Master Hermione!' he greeted cheerfully.

Hermione almost laughed. He had taken to calling her that ever since she had offered that he start using her given name instead of her formal title. 'Good evening, Mr. Gardener. I assume you are heading home to London for the holidays?' she inquired politely.

'Yes, for two weeks and then I'll be back here with the Master until the entire site has been exhumed,' he replied enthusiastically. 'I heard some of the other researchers talking the other day, and they said that you would not be returning after the holidays like the rest of us.'

She nodded with an awkward smile. 'What you overheard is correct. I won't be returning here for quite a while it seems. After finding the ancient archive beneath the central burial chamber, I have quite a lot of work in translation to do and a team back in London that is going to help me get it done,' she replied. 'All of the scrolls and texts in the archive were removed to the archives at Gringotts for safe-keeping just yesterday.'

'It sounds like you've got quite a job ahead of you,' he said.

'Certainly, I won't lie and say that it will all be brilliant and glamorous work, but nothing good ever came from a lazy mind,' she replied. 'I will be swamped under a load of paperwork and various other things in the meantime, so I imagine translating will come as a welcomed job after all of that.'

'Well, it's nearly six. We'd better get a hold of that Portkey before it leaves without us,' he said, picking up the bright yellow Wellington boot from the ground and holding it out for her to grasp onto also.

Grabbing onto the other side with one hand, Hermione ensured that her wand was firmly clasped in her other hand. Soon enough she felt a familiar tug around her navel as she was dragged through time and space until finally she ordered for them to let go. She arrived at the Ministry department that she had left from and thanked the receptionist on the way out. After bidding her protégé goodbye for the last time, she made her way to the nearest Apparation point and appeared at home moments later.

Her trunks and other belongings were sitting on the floor in her sitting room. The house was a little musty from being locked and warded without an inhabitant for so long, and there was a thin layer of dust on most surfaces. Waving her wand, she turned on the lights and moved around the rooms downstairs, Scourgifying the dust away and purifying the air. After that, she floated her trunks up the stairs and left them at the foot of her bed to deal with later.

She went to her study to deposit her tools and briefcase, and after grabbing a piece of parchment, she penned a quick note to Harry and Ginny.

--

Harry and Ginny,

I'm home safe from my trip, and I'll be staying at home for the night to do a bit of cleaning and making it reasonable to live in again. I will probably be finished around midday tomorrow, and I'll pop over right after lunch to see you. I know you probably want me to be there sooner, but I won't actually be coming to stay at Godric's Hollow until Christmas Eve. Sorry, but there is a lot I have to catch up on here. I'll see you tomorrow.

Love,

Hermione

--

Dusting powder over the ink to dry it, she folded the note up and went to the window to open it. No sooner than she had opened it, she heard the beating of wings as Delia landed there in front of her. Smiling, she stroked along her feathers before attaching the note to her leg.

'Take this to Ginny,' Hermione told the owl, allowing Delia to nip affectionately at her fingers.

With a soft hoot, she took off from the windowsill and flew off into the darkness. Hermione closed the window, but cast a charm on it to open when her familiar returned for the night. With that out of the way, she went straight to her bathroom and turned on the bath taps. She was tired and sore and felt a little bit grimy from the cleaning she had done in the house, which was nothing compared to the cleaning that had yet to come. She still had her kitchen to deal with and her tool shed-come-potions lab.

Sighing heavily, she slid into her bath once it was full and allowed the hot water to soothe her weary bones. She dozed off in the water, and it was only when the water started to become a little chilled that she woke and finished her bath. When she was dry, she slid naked between the sheets after casting a warming charm on them and fell asleep almost as soon as her head hit the pillow.

--

The days seemed to fly past, and all too soon, Christmas Eve was upon her.

Had she a little more time to accustom herself to the idea that she would be spending the entirety of her Christmas with Bill, Hermione might have been anticipating the holiday. As it was, she was nervous about how it would be to see him again after all those months away. She had never replied to any of the letters that he sent her, and for that she was regretful. What if he had decided to move on? Had she discouraged his affection by trying to keep a distance while she had been away?

She was worried that the admiration and love that she felt for him might not be returned when she was finally ready to admit that to him.

Sighing, she summoned her coat to her and shrunk down the bag of her clothes and toiletries to take to the Potters' house before locking up the house once more. It wasn't going to calm her fears at all if she didn't go and see for herself if there was still a chance for something between them. Pocketing the shrunken bag, she tucked her wand up her sleeve before Apparating.

Reappearing behind a bush in the park, Hermione walked across it and over the road to where the Potters' house was, with the white picket fence and snow covering everything except for the front path. *That* looked as though it had been shovelled recently, and for that she was grateful. Her feet were quite cold enough without her having to trudge through snow a foot deep. Knocking on the front door, she waited a moment before she heard footsteps and it opened up to her, and her breath hitched in her throat.

'Hello, Hermione,' Bill greeted, flashing her one of his deliberately lazy smiles.

'Hello, Bill,' she murmured quietly in return, stepping inside when he moved aside to allow her to pass.

She felt her spirits begin to sink a little as she took her bag out of her coat pocket before shrugging off her coat. Her slight moment of self pity turned to surprise, however, when she felt her coat being taken from her by Bill, who had then turned and gone to hang it up in the closet near the front door. She turned away from him, unable to look at him, her heart hammering hard in her chest.

'Where are Ginny and Harry this morning?' she asked casually, enlarging her bag.

'They went out to the shops to buy some groceries for the next few days,' Bill answered, coming to stand a couple of feet behind her. 'Harry mentioned something about the shops being shut all of tomorrow.'

'Oh yes, that's right,' Hermione said. 'Not many shops are open on Christmas day.'

Hermione closed her eyes, willing Bill to give her some sort of sign that he still wanted something with her. Letting out a breath, she began to walk up the stairs to the spare room that Ginny had told her she would be staying in and deposited her bag on the bed. Just as she was turning around to go back down the stairs, however, two arms came around her waist and pulled her back against Bill's very firm chest. His hands didn't stray, but his embrace was tight.

'Hermione...' he breathed, burying his nose into her hair and inhaling the scent of her shampoo.

'Bill, I...' she stammered. 'I'm sorry I never replied to your letters.'

One of his hands moved to stroke her stomach, tracing small patterns over her shirt. 'It doesn't matter,' he replied. 'I understand why you didn't. I could not help but to write to you, even though I knew it wouldn't be welcomed.'

'I appreciated each letter and gift that you sent,' she murmured, turning around in his arms to correct him. 'I was just... unable to respond in kind while I was there. I it hurt too much to miss you and be unable to tell you that.'

'I missed you a ridiculous amount,' he said with a small smile. 'There was not one day while you were gone that I did not think of you.'

Hermione felt a smile come over her features at that. He could not have said a more sweet or perfect thing in that moment. Her heart was practically singing. Reaching up a hand to cup his cheek, she ran the pad of her thumb along his cheek bone and then jaw. When he moved her hand out of the way and leaned down to kiss her, she didn't stop him. She had been putting him off for far too long, and now she was going to just let things unfold. Not everything had to be totally under her control.

When they heard the door open and close downstairs along with footsteps, they broke their gentle kiss and parted from one another. Feeling a little warm and flushed, Hermione motioned for Bill to go on ahead of her and retreated quickly to the bathroom to wash her face and calm her breathing a little more. How was it that he still remained so composed while she was reduced to a blushing, panting mess? After she was sure that nothing looked out of place, she finally went back down the stairs to face two of her best friends.

No matter how composed she was, however, somehow Ginny had managed to see through her calm façade and immediately drew her into the kitchen under the guise of the two of them preparing lunch. Casting a muffling charm on the door, the younger woman crossed her arms over her chest and gave Hermione a questioning look.

'So talk,' she demanded.

Hermione could stop the blush from creeping back up her neck to her cheeks. 'I told him that I missed him.' She clasped her hands together in front of her. 'I want to make a go of it with him, and I want to do it right.'

Ginny grinned. 'Hey, I won't stop you. Whatever makes you happy, Hermione,' she said, reaching over to her and embracing her tightly. 'And if my brother happens to be the man who will make you happy, then all the better for me! I've always wanted you to be my real sister, and now, it seems, that might just happen.'

'I'm so glad I have your support,' Hermione said. 'It really means a lot to me.'

The two smiled at one another and left the kitchen in search of the two men. They found them in the sitting room, and Ginny dragged Harry off to help her in the kitchen with 'a few things that needed his contribution,' leaving Hermione alone with Bill. Her boss. The man she was falling very in love with.

He went to her and took her hand, leading her over to the window. He wrapped his arms around her to embrace her from behind, and they simply stood there, content just to be near each other.

--

Christmas at the Potters' passed in a bit of a blur.

Harry and Ginny turned out to be the only ones that Hermione felt she could trust to keep her and Bill's blossoming relationship from anyone else. On Boxing Day, Ron, Lavender, Luna and Draco Malfoy had joined them at Godric's Hollow for the entire day, exchanging the gifts that had not been sent to sit under the tree for the day before. The entire day she felt a happiness that she had not experienced for quite a number of years as though she had finally come home to what she had been missing.

All of the thoughts made her feel that perhaps she was finally doing exactly what she was meant to be.

Two days after Christmas, Hermione had returned to her own house. It was too cold to crack open any of the windows, and she had spent the better part of the first morning home shovelling the snow from the brick path that led up to her front porch. Bill had been with her the day before, spending a little time just sitting and reading over her notes from her China expedition before they made dinner together in her kitchen. He had given her the most mind-blowing kiss of her life before he left for the night a kiss that made her extremely weak at the knees just thinking about it.

It was almost comforting to her with Bill reverting back to his take-charge self a little bit. He didn't hesitate to touch her affectionately, nor did he bother to ask her permission to kiss her or grab her and lift her up in a tight embrace. She was going out with him to dinner that night, simply because he had demanded that she finally go on a date with him as he had practically begged her to do previously.

Hermione continued to go through her notes for the entire afternoon, but every now and then her mind would stray elsewhere. She was feeling a little excited about her first official date with Bill, and it occasionally made it difficult to focus. She was writing a book about the expedition, and she had a fairly good idea that if it were good enough, she would be able to achieve her first published work ever. In a few months' time, she planned to go back to the site and spend a month on observations on what she had hoped would be a fully exhumed burial.

When the clock on the wall chimed five o'clock, she carefully put away her books and notes. It would not do to lose anything over careless filing. She went and took a shower, careful to use her nicest smelling shampoo, conditioner, and soap. After drying off her body and hair, she moisturized and put on her undergarments and nude stockings before picking out a pretty, but modest, black cocktail dress and putting it on. Bill had told her to dress in something she would feel comfortable dancing in, so she chose a dress that fell to her knees and floated gently around her legs.

Applying just enough make-up to accent her eyes and cheekbones, she left her hair to fall in silky curls down her back to her waist. At seven, the doorbell rang and Hermione grabbed her wand and her nicest black coat and went to answer it. She opened the door to let Bill in, wordlessly accepting the kiss he immediately leaned in to place on her cheek.

'You look beautiful,' he told her sincerely.

'You're not too bad yourself,' she replied, eyeing him in his dark green shirt, clean black slacks and dinner coat.

He had another longer coat over the top to ward off the cold, and he presented her with a pretty Midnight Rose and a deep purple silk scarf. 'It's too cold to be wandering around without a scarf on,' he said, wrapping it about her neck as she pulled on her coat.

She smiled at his thoughtfulness. 'Thank you, they're both very beautiful,' she murmured as she lifted the rose to her nose to smell.

'Shall we? I have a reservation for a quarter past, and if we leave now, I have a feeling that we'll make it on time,' he said with a teasing smile.

'Yes, I'm ready.'

He wrapped her in his arms and Apparated the two of them from her house, appearing near an old, abandoned warehouse that had a dark lane running down one side of it. Taking her hand in his, he led the way down a quiet street onto a slightly busier one to a rather pretty restaurant that had fairy lights that twinkled amongst the hedges out the front. They went inside, and after he gave them his name, they were seated at a table near the window that overlooked a small courtyard garden out the back. It dawned upon her then that they were actually in a Muggle restaurant rather than a Wizarding one.

When the menus came around, Bill offered her one immediately, but she just smiled and shook her head. 'Surprise me,' she said.

'As you wish.' His grin was borderline feral then as he perused the menu quickly and placed his order quietly with the waiter.

They sat and chatted lightly about what each of them had been doing that day, and when Hermione brought up her idea about writing and trying to get a book published, Bill smiled encouragingly as she spouted all of the details. When their entrée arrived, Hermione was pleasantly surprised at what he had ordered. It was roasted capsicum with brie, asparagus and garlic. She would never have imagined that he would be able to pick out something so perfect.

He had gone with salmon soufflé, and when he saw her eyeing it from across the table, he held out some to her on the end of his fork, encouraging her to have a taste. She accepted his offer and found it to be interesting and tastier than she had expected. She then offered him the same, and he murmured an appreciation. Dinner for the two of them was roasted quail with dill Hollandaise sauce served with sautéed vegetables. By the time they were both finished, Hermione begged off dessert and Bill simply settled on a rich chocolate mousse.

After he had teased her with eating the dessert, even feeding her some off his spoon, he stood up and offered her an arm before escorting her to a small dance floor that was set up. A few other couples were already dancing. Bill eased them into a nice slow dance, swaying them gently in the steps of the waltz to the music. If any of the other Weasley boys had mastered the art of dance, she wouldn't know, but Bill, it seemed, was a divine dancer and very light on his feet. It didn't surprise her, though he was, after all, a smooth, charming and confident man.

'Thank you,' she told him as the song came to an end.

'You're very welcome,' he told her, leading them back to the table.

He paid the check very shortly after and offered her his arm to escort her from the restaurant. The entire night he had been the consummate gentleman, and she appreciated all of the effort he had gone to just for her. After a short walk, he Apparated them back to her house and saw her to her doorstep. Once she had unlocked and opened the door, she pulled him inside out of the cold and lifted her face up to him, showing him that she wanted to be kissed.

He obliged willingly and met her pouting lips with his, deepening the kiss quickly and exploring her mouth thoroughly with lips and tongue, gently nipping at her bottom lip with his teeth. His hands went into her coat as they continued, hands grasping first her waist and then trailing up to cup a breast over her dress, his thumb rubbing over her peaking nipple through the layers of fabric. All too soon, however, he withdrew and placed a final kiss on her forehead, stroking her cheekbone with his thumb.

'Thank you,' he told her a little breathlessly. 'I am grateful that you have given me a chance.'

'I am glad,' she told him.

He Disapparated shortly after, and Hermione drifted up the stairs in a daze.

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To be continued.

Part Six: Equilibrium

Chapter 6 of 6

Confident... Handsome... Charming. Three words that Hermione Granger would use to describe her boss, Bill Weasley.

But just how does the smartest witch of her age intend to resist his charms when her boss decides to go on the prowl?
Written for the Mayhem in May Challenge '10, Prompt Two: 'Your desk is hardly the place for that, sir!'.

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I would like to say a huge thanks to WriterMerrin for all of her help as my beta.

--

The New Year had passed in the blink of an eye, and though Hermione had attended the Ministry of Magic's annual celebration with Bill, they'd had barely enough time to spend together except for on weekends. Bill had been swamped under a mountain of work at Gringotts and spent a lot of time during the week travelling around Europe to the other branches of the bank, speaking to the other department heads and trying to gauge how close the branches were connected to one another.

Hermione had by far surpassed the expectations of the goblins with her find at the dig. The scrolls, texts and transcripts were worth a lot of money, and that she had managed to secure them had gained her an unbelievable amount of clout. She was filling in as Bill's acting department head while he was away, which simply made the rest of her coworkers even more jealous than they had been when she had returned from China so successful. She had known for a long time that everyone had been rooting for her failure and successive fall from grace.

Always one to disappoint the resentful, she did even better than she had expected, falling into her stride as their boss gracefully.

While she had not spent a lot of time with Bill, their relationship was blossoming at a perfect pace, with neither one feeling crowded nor neglected, although their forays into physical intimacy were moving at a maddening pace. He had not touched her any more intimately than rubbing his hand over her breast with their clothes on while kissing. Hermione had felt on more than one occasion his hard desire for her against her thigh, and more than anything, wished he would do more and take what he wanted.

The weekend before, she had planned to try and coax him to spend the night with her, but things had not gone as planned, and Bill had been called away to go to the Switzerland branch on emergency. This weekend, they had dinner plans on Saturday and were to have dinner at the Burrow on Sunday as they usually did. That reminded her immediately of how beside herself with joy Molly had been on hearing of their relationship. She'd had barely a moment of peace since.

As work came to an end for the day, Hermione packed up her things from Bill's office that she was temporarily using as her own and waited until the last of the other staff had left before locking up for the night. She Apparated from Diagon Alley, straight to the park near the Potters' house and walked up the hill and down their front path. The snow had already melted enough that they barely had to shovel it anymore, for which Hermione was extremely grateful. It was her least favourite part about winter. Knocking on the door, she was soon greeted by Ginny.

'You're looking well,' Hermione told her friend, looking pointedly at the slight swell of her stomach.

Ginny rubbed her tummy and the barely-there bump that was her unborn baby. 'He's only a little shrimp, but I already love him,' Ginny said, letting her friend inside. 'You know you could stop Apparating to that park and just go straight into our backyard. You're practically my family, and I'm sick of letting you in the house as if you're a guest.'

Hermione shrugged. 'My parents brought me up to always knock,' she said simply. 'Where is Harry?'

The younger woman sighed. 'Kingsley asked him to go to Romania for him on an errand just this afternoon, so he's not around. So it'll be just you, me and Luna tonight.'

'Oh, is Luna here?'

Ginny nodded as Hermione took off her coat and scarf and hung them in the cupboard. 'She's in the kitchen at the moment. Harry asked if she could come and stay with me for a couple of days while he's away. Draco was reluctant to part with her, but apparently he had to go with Harry as well in the end,' she answered with a chuckle. 'He worries far too much about me, and it's just gotten worse with this little man on the way.' She indicated her stomach.

'I understand where he's coming from though, Gin,' Hermione said as they entered the kitchen. 'He's been through a lot and lost too many people he's cared about, so the last thing he would need is for something bad to happen to you and your baby.'

'Hermione!' Luna exclaimed, rushing across the room to hug her tightly.

Laughing, Hermione returned the embrace. 'It's good to see you too, Luna,' she said as they parted.

'It's been too long since the last time I saw you.'

'Then I guess we'll have to find some time to catch up again sooner,' Hermione replied.

'It's not your fault that you've been so busy, love,' Ginny said, ushering the other two women into chairs at the kitchen table. 'You've had a lot of work to do, and with Bill being out of the country and you having to run that department with all of those other rotten employees, you've got enough to put up with.'

Hermione laughed. 'You're right, they are rather rotten,' she agreed.

'How is Bill, by the way?' Ginny asked. 'I don't doubt that he's been Floo-calling you every night to check in on you.'

'He's fine. He'll be getting back in the afternoon on Friday, and hopefully after that he won't have to travel quite so much and can go back to being the one in charge of the department,' she answered.

'Do the others still try and taunt you about him being your boss and your significant other?' Luna inquired.

'Oh, there will always be people trying to get a rise out of me over Bill, but I've really stopped caring about what they think,' Hermione said, waving it off as though it were nothing. 'People just hate it when someone appears to be happy with their lot in life.'

Ginny smiled. 'So, who's hungry?'

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Friday approached entirely too slowly for Hermione's liking.

She worked tirelessly all morning on her book of observations to keep her mind focused rather than drifting towards Bill. At midday, she took a break to go and visit with Harry and Draco at the Ministry after they had arrived back from Romania. She had lunch with them for an hour, but her mind was somewhere else.

'Hermione, you look as though you have something on your mind,' Draco commented with a sly grin.

Harry, still a little slower on the uptake as he had been as long as she had known him, had no idea what Draco meant when he had noticed her lack of focus. 'She looks

the same as she always does when she's thinking,' he said.

Hermione chuckled softly at Harry's natural reaction to defend her. 'It's alright, Harry, really,' she said. 'I am a little distracted today.'

'Does it have anything to do with the fact that Mr. Weasley will be returning from his trip?' the blond asked, trying to look innocent, which was disturbingly easy for him, considering who he was.

'Playing coy doesn't suit you, Draco,' she told him.

'Oh, is that what you're thinking about?' Harry said with a chuckle. 'You two must be doing really well then if you're concentrating on him rather than your salad.'

Hermione reached over and gave both men a flick between the eyes. 'Mind your own business,' she scolded lightly.

Giving up on eating her food, she managed to distract her two friends by asking them about their trip to Romania. Harry regaled her with the main details while Draco made snide little comments about the pointlessness of the whole thing. She laughed unlike she had in a long while, listening to the two men, who were once bitter nemeses in their teenage years, talk and joke and bounce comments back and forth between one another. Now the two were both Aurors and partnered one another most regularly on missions.

After the lunch hour was up, she bid her friends goodbye and weaved her way back through the busy crowds gathered in Diagon Alley that day and back to Gringotts. She was just entering the main office when she realized that the place was unusually quiet before realizing that nobody else was there. All of the desks had been packed up for the weekend, and the door to Bill's office, her temporary one, was open. Her heart leaped into her throat in excitement as she quickly made her way through the desks.

She walked through the door, expecting Bill to be at his desk, but the chair was empty. Before she had a moment more to wonder, she was grabbed around the middle, and the door was kicked closed behind her before the man in question pressed her against the wood and immediately kissed her. Knowing that it was inappropriate, but secretly thrilled, Hermione kissed him back with equalled passion, letting her frustrations from the week pour into their increasingly heated embrace.

'I missed you,' he breathed, kissing a trail down her neck and sucking gently on her pulse just above the edge of her robes.

'Oh!' she exclaimed as one of his hands left her waist and began to unfasten the clasp at the top of the robes. 'I missed you too.'

Flushed and breathing heavily, Bill pushed her robes from her shoulders, allowing them to pool on the ground behind her. He kissed her again, pressing his tongue into her mouth and fighting with hers for dominance. Without waiting to ask for permission, he tugged her blouse out of her skirt and pushed it up to allow his hand to slip beneath the fabric. Hermione couldn't stop the soft moan from emitting when his hand slid up the soft skin of her stomach and further to her breast.

His hand pushed the cup of her bra up and greedily began fondling her bare breast, playing with one aching nipple.

'Please,' she moaned, too aroused to think of what she meant by it.

'Please what, Hermione?' he murmured, flicking a thumb over her hardened nipple slowly, pinching it between his fingers gently.

'Please more,' she breathed.

'With pleasure,' he said, removing his hand and using both hands to unbutton her blouse.

Once those were undone, he released the clasp of her bra between her breasts, freeing them to his view, both nipples standing proudly and flushed a dark pink in her aroused state. He reverently cupped both breasts, weighing them in his palms, and began to rub and knead them gently. She moaned again, and he quickly bent her over his arm slightly and moved his head down to lap at a nipple with the tip of his tongue. Her shriek echoed through his office, and he smiled before sucking it into his mouth, switching between both breasts to lavish them with attention.

'You have such beautiful breasts, Hermione,' he murmured, kissing the cleft between them before lifting her up by her bum and walking them over to his desk. 'They are such a perfect size and so sensitive too.'

Depositing her to sit on his desk, he sat down in his chair in front of her and reached out to stroke from her neck, down between her breasts, and to the top edge of her skirt. He placed his hands on her knees, urging her to open her legs for him and bunching her skirt towards her hips as she did as requested without question. She was so aroused by this point that she was ready to do anything to ease the ache between her thighs.

'You're very wet,' he commented when he saw her midnight blue, lacy knickers.

'You're taking an awful long time to get to the point,' she said huskily, her eyes glazed over with lust.

'And what do you think that might be?' he asked, tracing a finger along the seam of her thigh where it met a lace edge.

'Dammit, Bill,' she exclaimed as his fingers almost touched her where she most wanted them to be. 'Stop teasing me...'

Pulling her forward so that her bottom was near the edge of the desk, he leaned forwards to exhale a warm breath over her wet knickers, making her squirm. She was going to burst from the anticipation. She closed her eyes, waiting for him to do more, and she as she was about to open them again, his lips touched her underpants and placed a gentle kiss over the spot where her clit was beneath them. Her moan was loud, and without wasting any more time, he yanked her knickers down and deposited them in a drawer in his desk before leaning back to admire what he had exposed.

Her curls were neatly trimmed into a triangle of hair just above her clit. Her labia were glistening and dark pink in colour from her arousal, and her core pulsed at the hungry look in his eyes. She shrieked when his tongue touched her clit gently before he sucked it between his lips and allowed his tongue and teeth to gently dance over it. She wanted to beg him to stop and keep going at the same time. He wet two of his fingers with the moisture seeping from her and slid them into her channel, finding her tight and warm. It wasn't too much longer before she was writhing uncontrollably under his mouth and she peaked, moaning as she pulsed around his fingers.

He removed them and lapped at her as she came down from her high before wiping his mouth on the back of his hand and looking up into her hooded eyes. 'Satisfied?' he asked, cocking an eyebrow at her sexily.

Hermione reached out and ran her hands through his long hair that had come unbound at some point during the last few minutes. 'Almost,' she replied with a smirk.

She slid off the desk and onto his lap, straddling him and rubbing her groin against his hard length that was still trapped beneath his clothing. He groaned loudly, his eyes closing as he enjoyed the friction of her moving on his lap. Hermione leaned in and kissed him, tasting her essence on his tongue. She had never much enjoyed kissing a man after he had pleased her with his mouth, but in Bill's mouth, she found that she did not mind so much. She let her hand trail down to his shirt and unbuttoned it, pulling it out of his trousers and pushing it apart to gaze at his toned chest, lightly dusted with just the right amount of chest hair.

She shifted back on his lap slightly, and his hands cupped her bottom, squeezing the cheeks playfully. She grinned and let her hands slide over his pectorals, down his hard stomach, to the button of his fly. Releasing it, she continued with unzipping his pants and slid her hands within to encounter his hard length encased by his briefs that were stretched tight over his erection. Shifting up so that she could tug his pants down a little, she pulled his underwear along with them, releasing his aching cock from the restraints.

Immediately, she wrapped her hand around his girth and stroked upwards, causing him to moan loudly. 'Oh gods, Hermione,' he muttered, his eyes closing and head rolling back just a little.

Pleased by his response, she slid out of the chair and onto the ground before him, leaning in and sucking the tip of his cock into her mouth. With some more practice, she was sure that she would be able to complete her task better, but contented herself with sucking on his length and teasing the slit at the tip with her tongue while fondling his balls with one hand as her other gripped the base. After a few minutes, Bill pushed her off him and pulled her to stand up, encouraging her to sit back on the desk.

'I want you,' he told her, his voice a little hoarse with desire.

She smiled coyly and opened her legs, her core already wet with want again and her fingers over her clit and between her labia to tease him. 'But sir, your desk is hardly the place for that!' she exclaimed.

'Then, I shall take us to a more appropriate location,' he growled, summoning all of their discarded clothing to him and locking the office for the night.

Wrapping his arms around her, he Apparated the two of them straight to his bedroom. He spelled all of their clothes from their persons and placed Hermione on her back in the middle of his large bed. Joining her, he kneeled between her legs, immediately pressing his hardness to her warm wetness and teased her clit with the tip. Hermione frowned and reached out to pull him into her, and he obliged, sliding his length into her tight canal with one stroke.

'You're so warm, love,' he ground out through his clenched teeth as he stilled inside her for a moment.

'I've been waiting too long for this,' she said softly, gazing up at him fondly. 'Please, keep going, Bill.'

He withdrew slightly and pressed back into her before establishing a regular rhythm, thrusting both hard and fast into her warm, welcoming heat. It wasn't long before she was moaning and writhing beneath him, her climax approaching fast. When her muscles clenched around him, he lost all semblance of control and picked up his pace yet again, coming with a shout and a jerk. He allowed his length to be milked by her still quivering and clenching vaginal muscles before slumping down and rolling to the side of her as they disjoined.

Kissing her forehead, Bill pulled the covers over them, and they both succumbed to slumber.

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A month later, Hermione was sitting at her desk in her new office, completing the last of her notes for her book.

Everything was all coming together rather quickly, and she was very excited about it. The goblins had decided, as she had displayed the signs that she was perfectly capable of running her own department, that they would give her an office and team of her own and promote her to the Head of Archaeological and Runic Studies, a new division created especially for her. No longer working under Bill made all of her worries fade, and their relationship was better than ever before.

It also helped that they were regularly spending the night in either one of their beds, and Hermione had found that she rather liked the feeling of falling asleep in his arms. In fact, on the few nights that she hadn't slept with him when he had gone away for the day, she had some trouble getting to sleep. And although there had yet to be any open declarations of love between them, she didn't mind so much. She already could tell by the way that he treated her that she meant more to him than any other.

Her translations of the Chinese texts were steady, and she split her time between that and the work on her book. That afternoon, she was preparing to leave a little early and let her employees have some time off early. She and Bill had planned a little weekend escape over the last few weeks, and that afternoon they had to leave to secure their booking at the villa they would be staying at just on the coast of Italy.

At four o'clock exactly, she collected her things together and tidied her office before sticking her head into the other office and telling everyone to get packed up for the day. By the time she was ready to leave, the only one left in the office was Adam Gardner, her young friend from the China expedition. He had been recruited by Gringotts after he had completed his apprenticeship and assigned to her team.

'Hurry along, Adam,' she told him as she locked and warded her office. 'I've got somewhere to be in ten minutes, and I won't have you dawdling.'

'Sorry, Hermione,' he said apologetically as he shoved a book into his backpack. 'Got a hot date, I take it?'

Hermione laughed softly. 'Something like that,' she answered.

Adam smiled and waved as he left the office, and she finished locking up for the day before walking into the hall. No sooner than she had stepped onto Diagon Alley, that she felt a pair of familiar arms wrap around her.

'Hello, beautiful,' Bill murmured into her ear. 'Are you ready to leave?'

Hermione spun in his arms and kissed him in greeting. 'Very,' she answered. 'The question is, are you ready?'

He chuckled at her cheeky response and pulled her to him tightly. 'Always ready for you, my love,' he answered huskily.

Hermione smirked when she felt his hard length pressing against her thigh. The man was insatiable. The two of them walked to the Apparation point together and left for the southern coast of Italy. On arrival, they checked in at their villa and immediately fell into bed with one another, their moans reverberating off of the walls.

In the aftermath they curled into one another and slept.

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On Sunday afternoon when their weekend away was drawing to a close, Bill and Hermione packed up their belongings and went for one last walk along the beach.

Bill had already told her that they would have to go back for another holiday again soon. Holding hands, they walked from the villa and back up to the hill where the Apparation point was located. They Apparated together and were soon standing inside the front hall of Hermione's house. After giving her a kiss goodbye and telling her he would see her the next day at lunch, Bill left for the evening, most likely to join his parents and brothers for dinner at the Burrow. Hermione had decided not to go that week and had every intention of spending the night at home alone.

However, the moment she went upstairs and into her study to check on her mail, she saw that a letter from Ginny was resting on the top of the pile. She cracked the seal and flicked it open, reading through it quickly. Harry and she wouldn't be at the Burrow and had invited her to have dinner with them. She had no doubt that the redhead simply wanted to know all about her weekend away with her brother. Smiling, she quickly jotted down an affirmative reply and sent it off with Delia. After depositing her bag in her bedroom, she went to take a quick shower and dressed in jeans and a sweater. Checking around the house with a spell to ensure that it was still locked and warded securely, Hermione went downstairs to the front entry by the door.

She Apparated into the Potters' back yard.

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The end.