

# Again

by Savva

The third time's lucky or so they say. Written for HP Holiday Fest.

## One

Chapter 1 of 1

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**Prompter:** Username: lezonne\_fanfic

**Prompt:** 17. He was never one to give gifts. She was never one to want extravagant things, but that doesn't stop him from going out of his way to buy her something beautiful for the holidays.

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**Beta(s):** AmyLouise

**Author's/Artist's Notes:** Thanks so much to my wonderful beta, to mods for organising this and to lezonne\_fanfic for an excellent prompt.



### Again

#### Prologue

It was Christmas time in Diagon Alley. Again. United in their mission to find that illusory *perfect* gift, half-crazed magical folks enthusiastically besieged shops that were decked up to the nines, and of course, there was a surplus of light, sound and scent everywhere you went.

Two young wizards were slowly walking down the over-crowded street. One of them, black-haired and green-eyed, appeared somewhat troubled. Nervously raking his fingers through his unruly hair, he turned to his friend and said, "I dunno what has got into her this year. All these years, she's been telling me what exactly she wanted...easy and foolproof. Right? No. Apparently, *this* Christmas, I have to show how much I love her by coming up with something on my own." He frowned and exhaled heavily. The cold winter air metamorphosed his breath into a white cloud, which immediately fogged his glasses.

The other wizard shot him a sympathetic glance, shook his shaggy ginger locks and shrugged. "Witches, mate," he said, thoughtfully chewing a potato crisp.

"Gods. Where and how, for broomstick's sake, can I find her something extravagant?"

"Extravahat?" The redhead's blue eyes widened as he momentarily stopped eating.

"Extravagant," the black-haired wizard repeated with a tortured, hopeless sigh and pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

"You should ask Hermione," his friend suggested and threw another crisp into his mouth. "Though," he continued, crunching loudly, "she's never been into those *extra* things. She never asked for anything like that while we were married. Not once. Oh, maybe a puppy will do, eh Harry? Witches love that shite."

"I dunno, Ron. Somehow, I feel that she didn't mean a puppy." Harry suddenly stopped, and his eyes sparkled with hope. "Wait," he said looking at the window of one of the glitziest jewellery stores in the Alley. "I have an idea." With that, he marched toward the store and was already about to walk in when something stopped him in his tracks. He froze near the shop's window, peering inside with a dumbstruck expression.

Ron caught up with him a second later, almost colliding with the glass. "Bloody hell," he exclaimed, after following his gaze. "What the hell are they doing?"

"It's kind of obvious."

"Blimey. Do you think Hermione knows?"

Harry shrugged. "Haven't a clue. As far as I'm concerned, she doesn't. Come on, let's get out of here before they spot us." The two wizards rushed down the street and soon disappeared in the crowd.

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"Does my arse look big in this?" asked Pansy as she swivelled around in order to assess the back of the skin-tight scarlet-hued number she was currently wearing. They stood in the centre of the entirely-mirrored fitting room of Madam Malkin's shop, into which Pansy had dragged Hermione about twenty minutes ago. The Annual Yule party at the Manor was today, and she had suddenly decided that she needed to wear a red dress.

Hermione rolled her eyes and gave Pansy a quick once-over. "Your arse looks fabulous, and you know it. Stop fishing for compliments." She snorted and shook her head at her friend's antics. A minute later, however, she frowned. "Harry said that they stumbled upon Draco and Blaise in Diagon Alley," she said with a sigh, and, ignoring the possibility of wrinkling the lace dress she was trying on, sank onto a chair.

"And this fact comes with such a heavy sigh because ...?" Pansy prompted, arching an eyebrow.

Hermione momentarily wondered why they all...Draco, Blaise, Pansy, and even Lucius...arched their eyebrows almost identically. Was it a duty for every Slytherin to learn how to do it in that condescending manner? "Cause they saw Draco buying a ring! That's why," she said, feeling a bit annoyed.

"How do they know that it was *the* ring, not just a ring?"

"Harry said it was pretty obvious. They saw it, both of them. As Ron nicely put it, the thing was bloody sparkly." Hermione drew another heavy sigh. This situation wasn't something she wanted to deal with this Christmas. She knew exactly what Draco was trying to do and couldn't believe his nerve.

"Well, frankly, I doubt that much is needed to impress Ron," she heard Pansy telling her, "... And why are you so surprised? Draco loves you...it was obvious months ago. What's wrong with the fact that he wants to pop the question?" Pansy tried to sit down but the dress was way too tight for that. "Bugger," she muttered, unzipped it, and then, with a breath of relief, plopped onto a chair near Hermione.

"But we agreed. I told him from the very beginning that I didn't want any of that. I've had quite enough of that whole marriage circus. Twice I've tried to make it work, and twice I've failed spectacularly." Hermione shook her head. "I don't know, Pans. I'm not sure that I'm ready to try again."

"Of course you are," said Pansy with surprising confidence. "You'll be all right, hon. You lucky wench! Some people don't get to walk down the aisle even once, you know." She mockingly slapped Hermione's shoulder and fished a slim cigarette out of her purse.

"You can't smoke here," Hermione hissed. "I thought you'd quit."

"I have. Relax. I just need a few quick draws. No biggie." Pansy lit the cigarette and took a draw. "Your first marriage doesn't even count," she said, after puffing a cloud of smoke in the air. "Too bad I wasn't your friend back then...I would have told you. You never had a spark with Ron, and you know what they say: no spark, no flame. You both did yourselves a favour by ending that travesty. Honestly."

Hermione sniffled, suppressing a strong need to have a cigarette as well. "Yeah? What about Augustus? You were my friend already then, and there was enough of a spark to burn down all bloody London. It didn't work either, as you're well aware, and it took me ages to put myself together after that utter disaster."

Pansy shrugged her shoulders dismissively. "I'm not a Seer. No one could have predicted that it would all fizzle out that quickly. I'm sorry, hon. He looked like a nice guy...older, a Healer, and he did seem to be in love. I know it was super-hard on you." She exhaled another puff of smoke. "All this doesn't have anything to do with Draco, though," she added, and vanished the cigarette.

Hermione didn't reply, as thoughts and memories flooded her mind. *Fizzled* was the precise term for what had happened to her infamous attempts to build a nest. Her marriage with Ron had crumbled after a mere seven months. Pansy was right; it had been kind of stupid. They had been just so bloody happy to be alive; they'd jumped into it without a second thought. It was a miracle that they'd managed to salvage their friendship. Thank Merlin for that.

Her second time around had been the complete opposite. The way she'd met and fallen in love with Augustus...everything had been the epitome of a perfect romance that ought to have turned into a happily ever after. Alas, it hadn't. One morning, he'd just vanished without so much as a word (she'd learned later that he'd gone to Italy for good). She had found the divorce papers on their kitchen table, along with a tiny note with only one word written on it: *sorry*. It had been enough of a blow for her to decide right there, in her kitchen, that she wouldn't do it again. Ever. No more wedding bells for her, thank you very much.

That bastard ... He'd left her in shards. It took her years to piece herself together, but she had eventually succeeded. Two years ago, she had finally given in and allowed Pansy to set her up with Draco. They had been dating ever since.

"Do you love him?"

Pansy's voice broke her reverie, and she said, "What?"

"Are you in love with Draco?" said Pansy again, mockingly enunciating each word, as if Hermione were a four-year old. "Because if you do, then I think you'll have to try to walk this path one more time, hon."

Hermione frowned, thinking. Did she love him? The first thing that came to her mind was the scent of his cologne. Christ, she loved it so freaking much. Then there were his hands with those deft, long fingers; his smile, the one he reserved especially for her; his intelligence and dry, sarcastic humour; and, of course, his eyes, the colour of molten silver. "I don't know, Pans," she said eventually, "I don't think it's relevant, though. I'm done with those walks down the aisle."

"I don't think there's a way around it. Plus, third time's lucky," Pansy said matter-of-factly. Then, as if in afterthought, she narrowed her eyes at Hermione. "I hope you're not

going to reject him in front of everybody. He's obviously going to do it today during the party ... Hermione?" she said, her voice laced with wariness.

Hermione felt a wave of annoyance engulfing her. "That's exactly what pisses me off the most. He knows that I won't be able to reject him that publicly. Sly, manipulative bastard," she muttered.

"Comes with the territory, darling," Pansy chuckled. "Wait here, I want to try another dress," she added and disappeared behind the door. Hermione sighed, shrugged off the clingy lace and put on her robes. Pansy reappeared moments later with a cloud of white silk and lace in her hands.

"Pansy, what in God's name is *that*?" Hermione shrieked in horror.

Pansy grinned impishly. "I found you a wedding dress. Try it on."

"No!"

"Oh, come on, it's gorgeous!"

"I don't care. I am not going to try it on. I've had my fill of white dresses for a lifetime."

Pansy's face took on a gloomy expression. She grumbled, "Oh, whatever, you're so boring sometimes," and turned to leave the fitting room. After a few steps, however, she changed her mind and said, "You know what, I'll try it on. There's a good chance that I'll never wear one for real. So ..."

Hermione, surprised by this sudden change of mood, silently helped her put the dress on. When all the pearl buttons were fastened, she glanced in the mirror. "Oh, my goodness," she breathed, "you look absolutely breathtaking." Staring at herself in the mirror, Pansy only shrugged in reply. Suddenly feeling self-centred, and realising she had been oblivious to her friend's feeling, Hermione asked, "Pans, what's the matter?"

Pansy shot her a quick glare, said, "Nothing" and began irritably unfastening the buttons.

Hermione drew a sigh and decided to try a taboo topic. "How long have you and Blaise been together?" She knew that they had been together even before Pansy started to work at the Ministry.

"I dunno, on and off ...about six years, a bit longer perhaps." Pansy threw the dress on the chair and put on her robes.

"Merlin! Why hasn't he popped the question yet?" The question was rhetorical, of course. Blaise's unwillingness to commit was well-known in magical circles.

"Because he's a prick, that's why," said Pansy. "All right, let's go. I decided to wear my black dress."

"Why?"

"To signify my grief about losing another friend to that notoriously evil marriage institution."

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In the end, it was Hermione who decided to wear a red dress. Somehow it seemed more suitable to the occasion than the pale peach one she had been going to wear initially. She arrived at the Manor about an hour late, mostly due to a sudden, extreme case of nerves, and to the fact that it took her forever to tame her hair.

Predictably, the party was already in full swing when she stumbled out of the Manor fireplace into a dimly lit foyer. She inwardly cursed her cosmic-high heels and hurried toward the ballroom, guided by the sounds of voices and laughter. She didn't make it far before a strong arm snaked around her from behind, and she found herself pressed against a hard body. The familiar scent of cologne cocooned her, and she relaxed into Draco's embrace, instantly forgetting her doubts and concerns. "You're late," he murmured into her ear as his hand drew lazy circles on her stomach, caressing her through the red silk of the dress.

"Sorry," she muttered, resting her head on his chest and enjoying his closeness. He skimmed his lips over the column of her neck, and lowering his mouth to the soft place where her throat met her shoulder, planted a light kiss there.

"You look absolutely ravishing tonight," he whispered, and sucked the lobe of her ear into his mouth, swirling his tongue over her sensitive skin and making her shudder all the way to her toes. With a soft moan, she twined her arm around his neck and pulled him into a deep kiss, which he readily reciprocated. *Why on earth does he have to be so unbearably good at this?* she thought, before succumbing to a maelstrom of sensations.

Meanwhile, the band in the ballroom began to play, and the sound of a soft, mellow melody echoed in the foyer. "May I have this dance?" he said when their lips finally parted and, not waiting for a reply, spun her around in a tango-style pirouette and led her into the ballroom.

They swept by the tables with food and drinks and stopped only when they reached the centre of the hall. There were quite a few couples swaying around them, and dozens of candles, floating under the ceiling, flickered and glowed, giving the atmosphere that special, magical warmth she loved so much. *Electricity's definitely overrated*, she thought and smiled as her eyes fell upon Lucius and Narcissa performing a set of elaborate steps and twirls. The contentment that the older couple radiated made her heart tighten. Would she ever be able to experience something similar? With a sigh, she turned her gaze to Pansy and Blaise, who were fused together in an entirely inappropriate manner.

"Completely shameless, those two," she heard Draco chuckling. "Come on, let's show them how it's done." His arms tightened around her with unmistakable possessiveness, and he led them around the dance floor, twirling and swirling her with practised ease.

Alas, Hermione couldn't properly enjoy the moment. Pansy's black dress brought her back to reality, and an annoying agitation once again got hold of her. Unable to control herself, she pulled back slightly, gazing at Draco's face and trying to gauge his state of mind. Alas, if there were any nerves on his side, that bloody Slytherin was holding them tightly in check, because his face was absolutely unreadable. She thought she could feel something shimmering around the edges of his defences, but it might very well have been a projection of her own anxiety.

"Are you all right?" Draco said, abruptly stopping their twirling. "You seem a bit off ... a bit fidgety."

Hermione was so completely absorbed in her worries and musings that his question caught her completely off guard. "I'm fine," she said hurriedly. "Perhaps I need a little break; I'm thirsty, and these heels are killing me." The words spilled from her mouth in a rush and, even to her, they sounded unconvincing.

He narrowed his eyes and regarded her with a thoughtful, perhaps slightly suspicious, expression. "Sure," he said, after a pause, and was about to steer her toward the tables when the music was abruptly cut off, and the quantity of floating candles doubled, filling the hall with a brilliant light. He muttered something under his breath, and then, gazing into her eyes, said, "I'm sorry. I'll be right back," turned on his heel and left.

Hermione watched him wend his way through the crowd with her heart going absolutely berserk in her chest. "Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention, please," she heard Lucius' calm voice. Then she saw Pansy hastening to her. *God*, bolted through her head.

"It's happening, hon. Are you ready?" Pansy said, as soon as she was near her.

"No!" Hermione blurted, looking around and panicking. Somehow, only she and Pansy were left in the centre of the ballroom, with all the other guests spread along the perimeter. And then she saw Draco and Blaise moving briskly toward them.

"Merlin, they're sexy," Pansy muttered.

Hermione had to agree; Draco looked astonishingly handsome ... and those eyes. "Oh shite," she whispered and braced herself. She knew for sure that she wasn't going to reject his proposal. She was quite simply too far gone for that.

What happened next was a complete shock for both Pansy and her, and perhaps for some of the guests as well. As expected, on reaching them, one of the wizards dropped on one knee. But it wasn't Draco.

In a daze, Hermione watched as Blaise flashed a dazzling smile at his girlfriend and drawled, "This is it, sweetheart...I'm finally ready to be domesticated. Would you do me the honour?" He paused and extended his hand to Draco, who deftly fished a small velvet box from his pocket and placed it on his palm. Blaise popped the box open, and Hermione couldn't help thinking that Ron had been right. The thing was indeed bloody sparkly.

"I love you, babe. I've loved you for years." Blaise spoke again, his smile gone and his face suddenly very serious. "You're the best thing that have ever happened to me. Will you have me, darling?"

Pansy gasped, then sniffled. "Took you long enough to realise that, you bastard," she said after a pause, her voice slightly quivering.

"Well, will you?"

"Yes." The guests met Pansy's words with loud cheering and applause. Blaise put his ring on her finger and straightened up, and they once again fused in an absolutely indecent embrace, which this time was topped with a racy version of a French kiss.

The rest of the party passed in a haze. Hermione drank, danced and even laughed, though only half-heartedly. She herself couldn't make sense of why exactly she felt so blue all of a sudden. One part of her, perhaps the best part, was of course genuinely glad for Pansy. The rest of her, however, wasn't as content. Far from it, actually. Frankly, despite all her concerns and doubts about marriage, she felt disappointed, and stupid, and ... her shoes were killing her. Worst of all, she was certain that Draco had noticed her state. He didn't say anything, but he kept glancing at her askance, his grey eyes pensive.

Two hours later, while Draco saw the last of the guests off, Hermione, carrying her shoes in her hands, slowly tottered to the Floo. For a minute, she even considered sneaking away, but Draco caught her by the fireplace, banishing that opportunity. Wordlessly spinning her around, he pinned her to the marble mantel, cradled her face between his palms and crushed his lips into hers. When, chest heaving and lips swollen, she was finally able to pull back, she was met with a gaze of such intensity that her breath caught in her throat.

"I want to show you something," he said and guided them both into the Floo.

Seconds later, they stepped out of an unfamiliar fireplace, and Hermione, puzzled, looked quizzically at Draco. "Where are we?"

"In the house, the one that you kept eyeing from the window of your flat. The new one."

"Oh." It was true. She did actually eye that house from her window. She liked it for some reason. "And why are we here?" she said carefully.

And here it was, that nervousness he had been hiding from her so well. She could swear that his arm around her waist was trembling, and his eyes were frantically searching her face. Merlin, she'd never seen him looking so vulnerable.

"I bought it ... for us."

For a long minute, she could only blink and gasp for air. "You what?" she finally managed to breathe out.

"I was hoping that ... maybe ... you were ready to try again." Draco raised his hand, raked it through his hair in an abrupt gesture and leaned in closer to her, so their foreheads were touching. "I love you, Granger," he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. "I love your preposterous hair, your ridiculously small feet, and that frightening brainpower of yours. I love the way your nose turns slightly pink when you're cold, and the way you close your eyes when you drink hot chocolate. I love the fact that you cannot handle high heels for more than three hours. I ... I just love you." He ran out of breath and fell silent, his chest rising and falling rapidly, and his stormy-grey gaze fixed on her.

"I ..." Hermione sniffled. Her heart was so full of feelings, and all the words seemed so puny and inadequate that she just couldn't find the right ones.

He chuckled and pulled back a little bit. "Have I rendered you speechless, Granger? That's a first, I think. Anyhow, I reckon you've got the picture. I want you to live with me, and die with me, and do everything in between with me."

Overwhelmed, Hermione abandoned all attempts to find the right words, her eloquence failing her spectacularly. She just seized two fistfuls of his impossibly silky hair, dragged his head down to her lips and whispered into his ear, "Have we got a bedroom?"

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