

Commitment

by apisa_b

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Do you really think I would be posting here if they belonged to me? I'm just borrowing them for a little play outside.

"Charlie!"

As soon as he had opened the door and put his bag down, his mum had embraced him and was hugging him tightly. Tears of joy had sprung to her eyes, and she was repeating over and over, "My boy, oh, my boy," only interrupted by her kisses.

"How was your journey?" Mr. Weasley smiled and put his hands on his son's shoulders. "I'm so glad you could make it."

"I already started to get worried I couldn't possibly marry without my best man! It's about time you showed up!" Bill joined the circle of family members surrounding him. Charlie, who saw Bill for the first time since the attack on Hogwarts, tried to hide the shock Bill's injuries gave him. An angry red scar, seemingly a barely healed wound, marred the formerly handsome face. But his eyes seemed unchanged, still emitting the same love for life, which drew Charlie's gaze to them like a magnet.

"Not even a hundred dragons could have kept me away. I never thought I would live to see you being off the market for good. Now tell me, where's the woman that managed to snatch you up?" Charlie asked, smiling.

Fleur rose from her seat at the kitchen table, where they all had gathered moments before to eat their dinner, and approached them. Charlie managed to hold out his hand to her, despite Mrs. Weasley clinging to him, Mr. Weasley patting his shoulders, and Bill hugging him.

"Charlieeee! It ees such a pleasure to meet you, at last. Ze brother closest to Bill's heart, although 'e never would admit zat." Fleur took his hand and smiled up at him.

For a moment, Charlie felt utterly breathless, completely dazzled by the beauty of this woman. Of course he knew of her heritage, and he remembered seeing her briefly at the Triwizard Tournament, but back then he had paid more attention to Harry Potter than the other participants. He closed his eyes and shook his head slightly.

"Yeah, I know. She has that effect," Bill laughed. "You'll get used to it."

Charlie freed himself and bowed over Fleur's hand to kiss it. A melodious laugh was her reaction to his chivalrous gesture.

Slowly, Charlie's eyes were adjusting to the light in the Burrow's kitchen, and he noticed Ron and Ginny approaching him. Their welcome was a bit more guarded, but he couldn't really blame them, for they didn't really know each other. Since Ron had been four years old, he only had seen him during the holidays and the last time they had

spent some time together had been at the Quidditch World Cup. They had both grown so much. *Of course they have! Ron is an adult by now, taller than I am!* Charlie noticed. *And Ginny has grown into a very good-looking young woman; lucky is the man who is going to catch her eye.*

While he let himself be ushered to the table, he noticed two people rearranging the place settings to give space for an additional person; two people without the telltale flaming red hair that was so significant for his family. A young man about Ron's age with dark hair, who could have been nobody else but Harry Potter, and a young woman that he really could not see much of at first beyond a very unruly mass of brown hair. She also had grown up since he had last seen her at the World Cup. Grown up into a woman not quite as beautiful as Ginny he noticed with a considerable amount of brotherly pride as Hermione placed cutlery and a plate in front of him, but pretty in her own right. When she looked up, she smiled at him warmly, and suddenly her features changed from merely pretty to beautiful. "Thank you, Hermione! It's good to see you again," Charlie addressed her, smiling back.

"I'm glad you made it home safely. And, yes, it's good to see you again," she replied. Charlie's eyes were following her as she went to her place at the end of the table, next to Harry and opposite of Ron. But he noticed that his was not the only set of eyes following her way down the table. Ron's eyes seemed to be glued to her figure, as well.

"Where are the twins?" Charlie asked, addressing nobody in particular.

"They choose to stay in London half of the time. God knows they don't eat properly, and I swear they don't sleep regularly, what with all the experimenting and their shop running so well," Molly said, her pride barely concealed. "But they will be here tomorrow, and at the wedding, of course!"

Charlie revelled in the feeling of being at home. Questions were being fired at him from everywhere at once it seemed. How his journey had been, how much of the going-ons in England was known in Romania, why he had come alone and not brought a girlfriend, how long he was going to stay after the wedding. But with Molly putting a large iron pot filled with hot steaming stew on the table, the constant flow of questions subsided as everyone devoured his or her share of the excellent meal.

He had been dreading the question about a girlfriend. He knew that his mother would be asking about it, just as she had done in nearly every letter she had sent him in the last months. He always tried to laugh it away, to answer somewhat evasively and to not let shine through how sore a spot was touched there.

Jenna. A picture of her came unbidden to his mind: her short hair tousled from the wind after an adventurous broom-ride, her eyes sparkling, and her lips smiling that special smile that always made his knees go weak. But she wasn't his and probably never would be. She was a dragon tamer, just like him, and a better one he never had met. They were in constant competition: who would go nearer to a dragon, who could fire Stunning Spells in a more rapid succession, who was giving better care to the animals, who could fly faster ... She was strong and independent. Most men shied away from that type of woman, but not him. Her independence was drawing him near her like a moth to a flame; and somehow, he could have sworn that she liked him as well. He always thought that her eyes were following him, but of course, that could be just his imagination. Just as he imagined that her special smile always was directed at him. But lately, he had felt shunned by her. For some time now, she avoided touching him. She never sat next to him. Surely, she had somehow realized that he felt more than friendship and that was her way of showing him his place. And that hurt, oh, how much that hurt; but of course, he never would let her know that.

After the meal, Mrs. Weasley quickly started to tidy up her kitchen with Hermione helping her, eager to get a grasp on the household spells Molly was showing her in the process. Ginny had to help without her wand, as she still fell under the Decree for the Restriction of Underage Wizardry. Ron was setting up his chessboard together with Harry in front of the fire, and Arthur, Bill and Fleur ushered him into the living room as well, where they settled into a corner together. After a while, Ginny joined Ron and Harry at the fire and placed herself next to Harry. When Hermione strolled over to them some time later, she did not pull up a chair and settle herself next to Ron where an inviting gap was calling out to her; she sat down on the floor leaning her back on Harry's leg, on the side not inhabited by Ginny. Charlie thought this to be very odd.

He began to notice a pattern in her behaviour over the following days. Given a choice, Hermione would always choose a place not necessarily close to Ron, but where she could watch him, which she did almost expectantly; but what she might have been expecting Charlie had as much clue as Ron none, obviously. When her eyes met Ron's, she blushed, and her face lit up, glowing from within, which made her look really stunning.

When they were playing Quidditch it was a must that Charlie measure his skills as a Seeker against Harry's. Hermione graciously declined their invitation to join them.

"I'm so glad Charlie is there to play with you," Hermione said, and added in Charlie's direction, "You must know that I'm really afraid of flying and therefore can't play Quidditch. They always have gambled beforehand who lost had to take me in." As the others tried to disagree, Hermione put her hands on her hips and asked, "Do you really think I haven't noticed this?"

And she was right Charlie thought when she had to fill in because Bill had joined them and left the teams uneven. She was better placed on the ground where she cheered for Ron and himself, who had been forming a team. She always brought a book with her outside, but half of the time she forgot to read and was busy watching Ron.

It really was an enigma to Charlie, why the two of them weren't an item yet. Ron was obviously smitten with her, and Hermione seemed to be feeling the same for Ron, but her avoidance of Ron's physical proximity confused Charlie. He would expect a girl like Hermione to go and get herself what she wanted, especially when the probability of being rejected was zero. She simply *had* to have realized what Ron was feeling for her, doe-eyed as he became as soon as she was around.

It was the same as with Jenna and him, Charlie recalled. Sometimes he felt as if there was something between them, as if it wasn't only he who desired her, but as if the same were true for her as well. As the casual bystander, he was in the love dance between Hermione and Ron, he might be able to get some clues that could help him solve the mystery in his relationship with Jenna. Maybe she was expecting the same from him that Hermione was expecting from Ron?

The days flew by. Between catching up with Mum, Dad and his siblings; getting to know Fleur, Harry and Hermione better, playing Quidditch and helping to organise things for the wedding, the days blended into another and only the increase in Molly's and Fleur's nervousness and excitement showed that the big day had come at last. And still he hadn't been able to talk to Hermione privately; whenever they were alone, Ron turned up and shot him odd glances, ruining his chance to investigate.

The Burrow's backyard was barely recognizable anymore. It had been decorated with bows made by Ginny and white flowers mostly roses and lilies. A tent had been set up to give room for a dinner table big enough for the family, Order members, friends and trusted colleagues. Around the refreshment buffet and a square that had been prepared to allow dancing, which a few of Arthur's colleagues from the Ministry had offered to form a band, benches were grouped so tired dancers would be able to rest and refresh themselves.

But the metamorphosis of the backyard was not the most amazing one; the Burrow's inhabitants underwent drastic changes as well; everyone was groomed to their best. The twins had held true to the promise they had given Harry after the Triwizard Tournament once more and had provided Ron with another set of dress robes he could be proud of. Since the fiasco with his dress robes at the Yule Ball, Ron had had a slightly distorted relationship to festive clothing, but that was forgotten now. He looked good, and he knew it. Ginny was one of the bridesmaids, and therefore, she was wearing a robe in a very light shade of blue, matching Fleur's, which made her look almost ethereal. Hermione's ultramarine robe, combined with the effort she had made when twisting her hair into an intricate knot, made her look extraordinary. Charlie had known immediately when she entered the room, even though he was standing with his back to the staircase, because Ron's jaw literally had hit the floor.

But the most drastic change was to be noticed on Molly, whom nobody besides Arthur could recall ever having worn anything except plain clothes; everybody agreed that they never have seen her being more beautiful than today.

Charlie was busy calming Bill, who got more nervous with every minute that passed without notice from Fleur. Fleur had been spending the last night before her wedding at the Leaky Cauldron with her family. He only was appeased when Madame Delacour and Gabrielle arrived through means of Side-Along Apparition, accompanied by Mad-Eye Moody, and announced that Monsieur Delacour would follow in a few minutes with Fleur and Kingsley.

Now that Bill's mind was set at ease over the fact that his bride indeed intended to marry him today and was busy welcoming his future mother- and sister-in-law, Charlie again had leisure to mentally sit back and resume his position as the spectator of the scenes playing out around him. With quite a lot of amusement, he watched the contradicting reactions of the various female and male guests to the newly arrived members of the wedding party with Veela blood in their veins. Madame Delacour, of course, had her Veela charms under control, but was a sight to behold nonetheless: tall and slender, her silvery hair pinned up in a complicated way with just a few escaped tendrils caressing her face, she looked just like an older sister of Fleur. Gabrielle was an enchanting girl who had just hit adolescence and didn't seem able to

control her gift yet. She was dazzling, especially to the younger men and boys.

Ron seemed to be very receptive to those allurements, Charlie reflected. He hadn't even been able to build up resistance against Fleur; sometimes when Ron stood near Bill while Fleur flashed one of her smiles directed to Bill, Ron's eyes still glazed over. At least he had learned to restrain his urges to impress her in the meantime. And now, while Gabrielle was embracing Harry and Ron, who had "helped" rescue her out of the depth of the lake, he was exposed to her concentrated charms with the result that he was all but drooling. Hermione's and Ginny's reactions to the youngest Delacour was far less enthusiastic. Gabrielle could consider herself lucky that the girls' glances weren't able to harm her.

Mrs. Weasley's ego seemed to be a bit ruffled by the overwhelming air of elegance and beauty Fleur's mother exuded. She tried to hide that by busying herself. Molly started to usher people around so everyone would be at the right place when the bride arrived, until Arthur caught her in his arms when they were out of earshot and whispered something in her ear. Whatever it was, it caused Molly to blush and to smooth out imaginary wrinkles in her robe.

When Fleur arrived, accompanied by her father and Kingsley, everyone indeed was at his or her supposed place, and so the ceremony commenced. As Bill's best man, Charlie couldn't just enjoy the ceremony, as much as he regretted that fact; he was part of the show, and so he concentrated and fulfilled his duties. He mentally stored away the impressions he gathered and hoped he would be able to relish them before they faded away: Fleur's appearance in her light-blue robe and a tiara artfully included in her hair arrangement; the contrast between both bridesmaids like fire and ice; the love tangle between Bill and Fleur and many images more.

After the ceremony, he gave the speech he had prepared and, when the band started to play, Charlie felt obligated to make sure no woman had to spend the evening without a dance. Charlie knew that most women loved to dance and most men didn't. He personally felt it very rude to deny the ladies their wish for a dance, and so he was quite busy asking guest after guest for a dance.

Totally exhausted, he finally let himself slump down next to Hermione, and he saw her gaze longingly at the dancers and tapping her foot to the rhythm of the music.

"Don't tell me that Ron hasn't asked you to dance yet!" Charlie exclaimed. He shot a glare at his brother, who obliviously was involved in a conversation with Harry and Ginny. To judge by the gestures Ginny was making, the topic only could be Quidditch.

Hermione shrugged her shoulders. "Ron doesn't like to dance. I'm not even sure he knows how to do it."

"Dunderhead!" Charlie growled. "Would you give me the pleasure to dance with me in a few minutes?"

"I'd love to! But first, I'm going to fetch you some refreshments."

With a contented sigh, Charlie leaned back. He finally had a dance to look forward to with a partner he really wanted to dance with, and she was even going to fetch him something to drink. With a sideways glance at Ron, he thought, *Boy, you have no idea how lucky you could be, if only you could get on with it ...*

After a few minutes spent in silence, Charlie felt fit and refreshed again. Luckily the band played something slow, so they were able to chat while dancing. He really was anxious to get to know more about Hermione's behaviour when Ron was around.

"Uhm, Hermione ..." Charlie had to clear his throat before he was able to go on. "I noticed that you are avoiding Ron."

"Avoiding him? I don't think so. We are together most of the day; I was sitting near him just before you asked me for a dance--"

"No, I don't mean it that way," Charlie interrupted her. "I just noticed that you avoid sitting next to him. You never touch him, yet I see you touching Harry and everyone else, just not Ron. You always seem to wait where Ron is settling down so you can sit opposite and not next to him," Charlie explained.

Hermione's eyes grew big, a blush started to spread across her face.

"But I do have the feeling that you like him, that there could be more than friendship between the two of you ..." Charlie paused momentarily as he felt Hermione's posture become rigid, like a captured animal ready to flee. "And I wondered why a girl like you isn't going after what she wants. Look at Tonks, she went ahead and finally got her wizard. I don't want to meddle, but you are surely aware that Ron also likes you. All you would have to do is to encourage him," Charlie explained.

"By encouraging you mean being all girly, sitting next to him, accidentally brushing his hand with mine or my leg against his, looking his way when he is looking my way, which inevitably would lead to bumping our noses in the process, which surely would result in a kiss? Is this what you mean when you say I should encourage Ron?" At Charlie's nod, Hermione continued in a strained voice, "Well, that was exactly what his former girlfriend did. When batting her eyes and flattering him didn't get Ron going, she used the celebration of Ron's spectacular performance in a Quidditch match when everyone in Gryffindor Tower was hugging him. She just turned her head in the right direction when someone was calling Ron's name and ... bingo. They kissed."

"Well, if you say they were together after that, she obviously got what she wanted."

"But you might have noticed I said that she was his *former* girlfriend. Ron didn't fancy her. Those two being together was as a surprise to everyone, even to Harry, who is sure he would have noticed if Ron had felt more for Lavender prior to that incident. The truth is that Ron thought he was the last unknissed boy attending Hogwarts, and therefore, he jumped at the opportunity. That, and he wanted to get back at me for having went with Viktor Krum in my fourth year." Hermione had to stop talking for a moment, tears were welling up into her eyes, and it obviously took some effort on her part to not let them flow.

"So he used Lavender. Soon he was bored with kissing her, and he started to avoid her. He didn't have the guts to tell her that it was over. Ron carried on just like that until she suspected him of cheating on her and ended their relationship." Hermione had to pause again. She sighed and rested her head on Charlie's shoulder for a moment.

"I understand. You don't want to be treated the same way," Charlie conceded.

Hermione looked up again. "No, I don't want to coerce him into a relationship when he's not ready for one. I don't want to slip accidentally into a relationship; I want Ron to make a decision." Hermione's voice faltered. She closed her eyes and swallowed hard.

"I'm fully aware of the fact that he's not ready to make such a decision. He is far too immature for that; but, oh God, how I'd love him to finally grow up."

Charlie looked pensive; he thought he understood now. That explained the expectant looks Jenna expected him to act so he wouldn't feel as if he had been lured into a trap later on. Somehow, he suddenly knew without doubt that Jenna loved him, just as Hermione loved Ron. She was just waiting for him to act. A grin started to spread across his face, and he couldn't help himself from spinning Hermione around enthusiastically. Upon noticing the look of bewilderment on her face, he thought about how the situation must look for her. She was baring her soul to him, and he was grinning like a fool; so he started to tell Hermione his story in return. He told her about Jenna, his feelings for her and how he never acted upon them because he thought he could not deserve a woman like her and had feared rejection. He told her that he had become curious because he had noticed similar patterns in the behaviour of Hermione and Jenna, and he finally thanked her for enlightening him. Hermione listened without interrupting him, and when he finished, she hugged him tightly and wished him luck.

"I'm sure she loves you; otherwise, she wouldn't consider your feelings, but simply go and grab you, no matter what. And I sort of envy her, for she has set her eyes on a worthier man than I have."

"Worthier? No, I'm sure Ron will grow up and realise how lucky he could be--"

"I don't know how much time he is going to have for growing up. At the moment, my arms are open wide. But if he continues like this, I might come to the conclusion that I'm better off without him, regardless of my feelings for him." Hermione was staring darkly at a point behind Charlie's back. When he turned his head, he noticed Ron dancing with Gabrielle. No, not dancing, just rotating slowly on the spot, clutching the girl tightly.

Hermione looked desperate. Her cheeks lost all colour, and she started to shake violently. While Charlie gently took her in his arms and stroked her hair, he made himself promise never to hurt Jenna like that. She never should consider that being better off without him would be the better option. Never!

Hermione decided that she had had enough and retired, despite Charlie's attempts in convincing her to stay. He didn't think it a good idea for her to be alone; God knew what conclusions she might come to while mulling over the events of this evening.

Charlie found Ron at the refreshment bar and decided to intervene, despite Hermione hinting that she wouldn't appreciate that.

"I thought you fancied Hermione?" Charlie commented to Ron while he poured himself a drink.

"When were you thinking that? And why were you trying to pick her up then? A really nice brother you are trying to snatch my girl away from me!" Ron retorted angrily, eyes flashing.

"Steady, steady! Snatch your girl away? First, I haven't noticed you had taken action and asked her out yet, and secondly, just because I danced with her-"

"Danced? Ha! Do you really think I haven't noticed that you were constantly watching her since you have returned? Your eyes were practically glued to her all day long. You were probably only waiting for the right opportunity to get close to her." Ron's voice was getting louder and louder, matching his obvious agitation. Charlie's arm shot out and grabbed Ron at the collar of his robes, pulling him close.

"Now listen, Buddy," Charlie hissed. "I'm only telling you this once: I am not interested in your Hermione, at least not in this way. Admittedly, she is a pretty girl, nice to look at, but the reason I was watching her was that I was curious about her behaviour around you; the girl I fancy acts similarly, and I wanted to come to some conclusions regarding my relationship to Jenna." Charlie let Ron go. "If I were you, I'd seek Hermione out and apologise. You weren't considerate enough to ask her for a dance all evening. And then you all but grope Gabrielle on the dance floor in front of her eyes. A nice way of showing how much you like Hermione!"

Ron looked nonplussed and asked tentatively, "Hermione is hurt because ... but she knows that Gabrielle is a Veela and how I react to them!"

"Of course she is hurt!" Charlie all but rolled her eyes. "And her being a Veela is no excuse at all!" Charlie shook his head. "May I give you some brotherly advice? You went all jealous on me just a minute ago, but you are in no position to justify your claim. Think about what you really want. And when you've come to a conclusion, act accordingly. And in case you want to apologize ... Hermione wanted to go to bed."

Ron looked sheepish, nodded, and took a few steps towards the house; then he looked back and mouthed, "Thanks." before he continued his way.

The next morning at breakfast, Charlie observed that Hermione sat down next to Ron. He couldn't nail it down, but he just knew that something had changed for them, that they had come to an agreement. He was glad for them, but it increased the feeling of restlessness he was experiencing. Although he could stay a few days more, he decided to return to Romania the same day. Of course Molly pleaded with him to stay, but in the end, she relented, and Arthur managed to get him a Portkey back that evening.

Charlie didn't even take the time to unpack upon his arrival, but set out to the dragon enclosures where he suspected he would find Jenna. He found her near the corral of the Green Welsh they had hatched together the year before, slightly dishevelled after a seemingly long workday and with dirt on her cheek.

He just waited and drank in her appearance until she looked up and noticed him. Charlie made out several emotions flickering across her face: disbelief, then delight and, finally, caution. But it was all he needed to know. With a few strides, he was with her.

"Couldn't wait to see me again? Why else are you back before your holiday is over?" she quipped.

"Exactly," Charlie whispered, barely audible. He took a deep breath and brushed his lips gently against hers. "I was homesick."

"You have been at home, silly," Jenna retorted in the same barely audible voice.

"But home is where the heart is. And ... I know it sounds sappy, but my heart was here with you." Charlie barely dared to breathe. How would she react?

"Took you damned long to come to that conclusion!"

"No, I have known this for some time now, but it took me this long to finally dare admit it."

After a few seconds in which Jenna just looked at him, she turned to be able to watch the dragon, leaned her back against his chest, took his arms and wrapped them around her waist.

"It was about time. I had all but given up hope."

A/N: Kudos to Larilee and Phoenix for helping me to translate my story into proper English!