

Happy New Year from Your Ministry of Magic

by beaweasley2

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Written as a gift for my beta, Southern_Witch_69, as a New Years surprise, and she decided to let me share it with all of you!

I hope 2008 brings hope, happiness and loads of good memories for us all.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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2008

Hermione circulated the room, watching the festivities as people in various masks walked around, laughing and chattering. The Ministry's New Year Celebration was a huge success if the sheer numbers were any indication. The huge room was full to capacity, as were the terrace gardens and balcony patios. Everywhere, people milled around in elegant robes, wearing a variety of masks, many magical and many not. Hermione noticed that carnival masks were the more popular form, although there were countless all Hallows Eve masks as well. Still the room was festive with thousands of fairy lights, garlands of greens and mistletoe, streamers and Weasleys' Ever-Falling Confetti everywhere. Thousands of iridescent Weasleys' No-Pop Bubbles floated in the air, bouncing among all the feathers, fur and flowers on the carnival masks, and thousands of balloons covered the floor, being kicked by celebrants and elves alike.

However, Hermione wasn't in the partying mood. *I wanted a quiet evening, curled up on the sofa, a roaring fire in the Floo, a good book with someone to lean against, idly playing with my hair while reading beside me... as we waited for the fireworks to go off announcing the New Year. But no such luck.*

There were only thirty more minutes before midnight and the final toast, and then she could leave. It wasn't the same this year. Harry and Ginny were standing together in a circle of Ministry personnel, both wearing matching Venetian cat masks. Neville and Anna were standing arm in arm in leafy masks. She was certain that Mrs. and Mr. Herten were standing next to the buffet table with Mr. Robards and Ms. Hopkirk. There were various Weasleys in the room, all sporting various masks from George's shop, but with their red hair it was easy to spot them. And avoid them. She knew Ron would be here somewhere among the crowd, and she fervently hoped to avoid him tonight.

It wasn't that she hadn't tried; he hadn't tried. A year and a half of dating, and she still couldn't find any common ground with him. *No, I'm not going to dwell on Ron and our lack of a relationship tonight. Tonight, I'm a mystery, just a mask in the crowd. I didn't spend thirteen galleons to have my hair done up and thirty-four on these robes to mope about.* She'd picked the Venetian style half mask made of paper maché because she liked the sheet music motif and hand painted artwork in gold and green that complimented her robes, but covered enough of her face to make her feel ambiguous. But the feathers that topped the mask made the mask tilt and sway as she danced, even though she couldn't tie the ribbons any tighter without making the mask uncomfortable. *Oh, well. Not much longer.*

House-elves wandered through the crowd, carrying trays of champagne in crystal flutes and a few hors d'oeuvres. Hermione nibbled on a light cracker and French cheese and sipped on her drink.

"And just who are you trying to fool?" a tall, dark-skinned wizard asked.

Hermione was taken aback as she stared at the wizard in yellow robes wearing a Snidget-like mask. "Everyone and no one, sir. How are you tonight, Dean?"

"Well, thank you. I thought the article you did on werewolf rights and werewolf misconceptions was really brave," he said as he scanned the room while he sipped his drink. "You were writing it about Professor Lupin, weren't you?"

All six of them, and no. She nodded and explained her reasons, he voiced his concerns regarding the new werewolf laws, and she tried to squelch his misconceptions. After a while, he excused himself and walked away. *Less than twenty more minutes to go, and my feet are killing me. Fact is those articles are going to all be reprinted again.* The articles had made Hermione rather unpopular for a while. Then as soon as that all died down, she became unpopular for a whole other reason: she stood up and voiced her opinions about Severus Talfryn Edgar Snape.

After the war was over, she and Harry had gone back to the Shrieking Shack to retrieve Snape's body only to find it was missing. Harry had gone mad, fuming about how unjust it was. The fact was Narcissa Malfoy had retrieved his body, and he hadn't been dead after all. He'd survived. He was really ill and near death, lying nearly comatose for a month, but still alive. Many people wanted to see him in Azkaban, but Harry would not hear of it and had asked the Malfoys to hide and protect Snape until he could clear his name. Hermione and Ginny had helped. Hermione had spent three months digging through Snape's office, his Potions lab, his private quarters and the files at Hogwarts to find evidence of Snape's involvement on the Order's behalf and proof any proof of his support of Dumbledore and Harry. Dumbledore's portrait had been most helpful as well, giving a full account of Snape's activities to three Wizengamot members. In the end, Hermione had come to truly respect the man, gobsmacked by all he had gone through and everything he had to conceal regarding his true role in the war.

Ron had become increasingly difficult and eventually furious as Hermione spent more and more time digging for the truth as Snape became better. *It isn't fair actually, dwelling on Ron like this. He'd certainly gotten over me quick enough.* She'd seen him with Annilene Applegurt in Diagon Alley, looking rather cozy.

She knew that as soon as Snape was well enough to do for himself, pressure to confirm or denounce him grew closer. By the time the Healers had declared him fit, she and Harry had cleared his name and even procured his right to receive his Order of Merlin. Hermione had gone to the ceremony, wanting to see him again, but Severus never showed up to receive the honor.

"Have another," a wizard in a large feather mask said, handing her another flute of champagne.

She was not surprised that George had found her. "Thank you, George."

"George? Do I know you?" he asked.

She decided to play along. "Oh, yes, intimately."

His feathers nearly brushed her face as he lowered his head to look at her from head to toe and back again. "Oh, no. I'd remember you." She thought she saw a glint of a mischievous grin, but it was gone when looked up at her.

"I assure you, George, we're on familiar terms," she said, "It's me, Hermione."

"No!"

"Yes."

"Damn, and my git of a brother is over there thinking that girl is you," he said, pointing. "Stupid git is flirting with the wrong witch."

Story of our relationship. Of course, now that George was pointing at Ron, he of course was now walking this way *Shite*.

"Hey, George, did ya...?" Ron started to say, before George elbowed him in the ribs. "Oh, yeah right." He turned to face Hermione. "Hi."

"Hi," she replied back. "How are you?"

"Fine. Here." He took two of the flutes George was holding and handed one to her.

"Have one, actually," she stated as Ron thrust the drink into her other hand.

George turned as an elf passed to commandeer another pair of flutes.

"A toast to I dunno the New Year," Ron suggested.

"Sure, the New Year," Hermione said, sipping the delicate drink.

"Mione, come back to me," he said, sounding sorrowful.

"No, Ron," she responded automatically.

"I miss you," he stated simply.

"I miss our friendship, but I don't love you. Not enough." She covered her mouth. *Oh my gods, why did I just say that?* "I mean, I like you and all, and we're good as friends, but seriously, Ron, I can't see us working out. I'm sorry." *No! Why am I confessing like this?*

George looked from her to Ron, and back again, the corner of his mouth pulled back in a slight grimace, obviously feeling sorry for his brother.

Ron looked down, his ears turned red, and he seemed to take in her words rather than want to argue about it. "It's okay, Hermione. I suppose you and I weren't really all that cut out for each other."

"Ron, please," she said, reaching out to touch his arm, but only bumped his sleeve because of the flute of champagne. "I'm so sorry, but all we do is fight, argue and make up only to fight again. I do like you, really, I'll always like you and I love your family, but but..."

"You are right," he said, as if finally accepting what she was saying. "George said I should ask you, talk to you, be sure myself." He leaned in and kissed her cheek. "But we can be friends, right?"

"Yes, absolutely," she said, relieved. *Oh thank gods!*

Ron nodded and walked away. George tilted his head, watching her as if he could see behind her mask. "You're going to be all right."

"Yes, I'm going to be fine. We'll wait a while, let things cool off; I'll owl him and try to I dunno, patch things up, maybe ask Harry to help... Or better yet, Ginny..." She took another sip of champagne. "Oh, George, what just happened? I just started spouting off and I've hurt his feelings!"

George shook his head. "I'll talk to him, Hermione, and yes, Ginny will help. But believe me, by morning everything will be all clear and things will work out. Trust me."

"Five minutes!" someone yelled out.

"'Trust you' and 'things will work out' are not two phrases I'd usually put in the same sentence," she said, smiling at him hopefully.

"Well, this time believe me. Your mind clarity is fine, and you were only speaking your true feelings," he said, smiling back. "It will work out. Tomorrow you won't even regret it. I better find Ron and see if he's all right."

She nodded, relieved that he at least wasn't holding her outburst against her. Hermione turned around, watching the revelers kick at the balloons.

"Well, herllo, beau-it-ful," slurred a wizard in a ridiculous lion mask.

"Good evening," she replied as politely as she could and not advertise her disinterest.

"You got son, er, one to kiss?" he stammered out nearly incoherently.

Hermione smiled, hoping it was a happy smile and not a smirk. "Why, Yes, right over there," she said pointing. She looked at where her finger indicated and saw a dark haired wizard in a black frock coat and trousers, a rich green robe and long-nosed, green and gold Venetian mask. She took a sip of her drink as she watched him. His pose and mannerisms held her eye for a while before she turned back to the drunken wizard. "Him."

"Awe, me losss, Misss," the wizard said.

But Hermione wasn't paying him any mind. She sipped more of her champagne and walked over to the dark-haired wizard. He was standing with his arms crossed, surveying the room and the revelers in their colorful robes and masks. There was something about him. He was thin, not as tall as Ron, but taller than her. His skin was pale, but his eyes were obscured from view by his mask. For some reason he seemed familiar, yet she couldn't tell really. He intrigued her. *Oh, just pluck up the nerve and ask him to toast with you. The worst that can happen is that he says no.*

She walked up to him and only faltered when he turned his attention her. Even through the mask there was a penetrating aura about him, a strength and confidence

surrounding him. She held up the flute Ron had given her. "Would you toast with me?"

He looked at the offered drink. "If you like," he said softly, accepting the flute.

Is he waiting on me to suggest the toast? "To a New Year and all the promise it can bring," she said. *There, that was safe enough.*

He nodded and raised the flute, drinking the sweet champagne. She'd hoped that when he tipped the flute that she'd see some of his face, but the mask must have been a magical one; it stayed in place, effectively obscuring him from view. "Thank you," he said as the countdown began.

"Ten... Nine..."

He regarded her from behind his mask. "I'd run away, unless you wish to be kissed by me," he said, his soft voice edged with a hint of a smoker's scratchiness to his smooth tones. He was standing so close she could smell his cologne. It was a heady mix of herbs and spices.

"Eight... Seven..."

"Somehow I don't think I'd mind," she said brazenly.

"Six... Five..."

His free hand touched her arm. "Are you sure?" he asked.

"Four... Three..."

His voice, that soft, silky drawl, so familiar, yet so unlikely... "Yes," she replied. His hand moved to her back, his fingers surprisingly strong as he pulled her to him with one arm.

"Two..."

His arm slid around her possessively, and she slid her arm around his waist, the flute in her other hand pressing against his side.

"ONE!"

His lips touched hers, sending a surge of sensations through her she'd never felt before, not with Ron, not with Viktor.

"HAPPY NEW YEAR!" people were yelling.

She didn't hear them; her mind was focused on one thing and one thing only: his kiss. She heard a glass break and felt his other arm on her back, crushing her against to him. Her flute slipped from her fingers as his kiss became more demanding, desirous. She swooned in his arms as he deepened their kiss.

People started bumping into them, jostling them as they tried to break them apart, even having the audacity of asking to kiss her. He growled, stopping only to pull her from the room and out onto a terrace, and kissed her again. "Will you come with me, Hermione?"

Her head was spinning, she felt light, and he was making her feel things she'd though only happened in romance novels. "Yes," she said, not realizing he'd used her name. It was as if she knew his voice, but couldn't place it.

He stopped, holding her tight in his arms, and suddenly she felt the squeezing sensation of Apparation, arriving in a dark room. He pulled her along with him, through a hidden door in the bookshelf and up a set of narrow stairs into a bedroom. There was a large wardrobe, a four-poster flanked by windows and bedside tables, and bookshelves, but that was all she could see before he pulled her to him and kissed her again. She kicked off her shoes as she pushed his robe off his shoulders while he unbuttoned his coat, carelessly tossing the garments aside. Her hands fought to open the buttons of his shirt as he pulled her closer to him, flicking each of the buttons of her robes easily.

"Stop," he said softly, barely a whisper. He turned her around, and leaned her back on his chest as his hands began to explore her body, his lips trailing kisses on her neck. Her robes fell at her feet, followed by her bra.

He turned her around as his trousers fell to his feet, standing before her in all his glory, his penis fully engorged. Her hands clasped his waist as he cupped her face between his hands and leaned in to place feather-light kisses on her lips.

Somehow, wearing only the masks heightened the excitement of the moment, and when he reached up to remove his, she stopped him. "No, leave it."

He kissed her again, heedless of the masks. He lifted her up in his arms and gently laid her on the soft down comforter, climbing up to stretch himself over her. His fingers traced her curves as he gazed down at her before leaning down to kiss her breast, sucking and nipping at her nipples. She stroked his skin, feeling the muscles of his lean body and enjoying his touch. He moved down her body, as if exploring every inch of her, caressing and kissing her as he went. She lifted her hips to help him as his fingers slowly removed her knickers, sliding them down her legs, his kisses trailing back up to meet hers as he positioned himself above her. His hand reached down to her juncture and began to fondle her, his deft fingers finding her clitoris, and Hermione arched into his touch.

She wanted him. His maddeningly slow pace, sensuous kisses and the soft strokes of his hands were making her feel reckless, pushing her endurance and trying her patience. "Are you sure you want this?"

Was he kidding? "Yes, I want this," she managed to say between gasps. To emphasize her point she opened her legs, and he moved between them with a smile, then kissed her, his mouth claiming hers hungrily as he eased himself at her opening. His first thrust had just the right force, his shaft filling her in one long, forward movement, and she closed her eyes from the feel of him. When he began to move, she tried to match him, and he laughed, a low, deep laugh that sent shivers down her spine.

Their movements began to match, her arching her back as he pushed into her, his strokes long and slow. She wanted more, she wanted faster, and she tried grinding herself on him. She could feel her climax build, slow pulsing waves beginning to roll through her as he picked up his pace. Her breathing quickened. "*Oh gods, yes!*" Her back arched. "Oh yes, harder, please, yes..." And she climaxed in mind-blowing waves as he pounded into her. "*Yes, oh, gods, yes... Severus, yes...!*" His body slammed into her, his breathing ragged as he followed her into post climatic bliss.

Oh, gods! Oh, no! She ripped off his mask and stared into the face of Severus Snape. "It is you! But, how why... you..."

"I thought you knew," he said as he lifted her mask off.

"I, um... no," she said. His penis shifted, jerked within her, still fairly stiff. "I mean, I oh, gods I'm..."

"Do not say you are sorry," he growled.

"I'm not, I'm surprised! I saw you, and you looked familiar, but your voice," she stammered.

"Still recovering from the snake bite, I'm afraid." He looked down at her, his dark eyes drinking her in. "I knew it was you, even with the new hairstyle and mask. I've been watching you, following your career, reading about what you've been doing in the papers."

"You have?" she asked, amazed. "Oh, gods your things! I'm sorry. I tried to be careful, to not hurt anything..."

"Yes, that," he said in a way that was so like the Snape she knew. "I was rather angry about that, but still, you and Potter were trying to clear my name. In the end I forgave you." He braced himself above her, looking at her face. "Why did you do it?"

"To clear your name," she replied, confused. "We tried to find your body, and Harry was contacted by Draco, asking him to please lay off. That's how we found out you were alive. Harry told Draco he intended to give you a memorial, tell everyone of your innocence. Draco offered the information only after asking Harry to let you stay at the Manor. Harry agreed, and Ginny and I helped him clear your name." She was babbling. She wanted him to understand. "Wait a minute, you knew it was me and yet you kissed me, and you we... You don't even like me! Why would you?"

He eased out of her and rolled to lie down at her side. "I have been impressed by you for years, Hermione. I have watched you grow up, mature, and yes, I said some things that were hurtful. I had to. You were Potter's friend; I was Head of Slytherin and the Dark Lord's follower. Dumbledore and I both knew the Dark Lord would return; we both knew what role I had to play. When he did return, I couldn't have feelings for anyone, so I pushed them away, buried myself to do what I had to do. You are a remarkable witch, talented, intelligent, and resourceful. I'd been watching over you and Potter for years. I don't like Potter; he reminds me too much of his father. I didn't like seeing you with Krum, and later, you were with Weasley. Gods, girl, I never thought in a million years I'd be here like this with you."

"Really?"

"Really."

"So all those years of insults and chastisement, you liked me?" she asked, stunned.

He smiled. "All those years watching a witch who was bright, eager to learn, inquisitive, who grew into a beautiful, singularly gifted, intelligent and kind woman. You have become the witch I knew you would be, and you were with Weasley. I was livid jealous." He was touching her, his finger tracing her breast as he spoke, sending shivers down her stomach to her groin.

"So, now, what do we do?" she asked, trying to take her mind off his fingers and the sensual path they made on her skin.

"You tell me." He looked up at her speculatively and, for the first time since she'd known him, uncertainly. "What do you want?"

"I want to get to know you. The real you," she said, hoping he wouldn't laugh at her. "What do you want?"

"I want to make love to you again," he said, his hand stopping to rest on her quivering stomach, "but without the masks."

"And after?" she asked, biting her lip.

"One day at a time," he said, leaning down to kiss her nose. "Dinners, walks, possibly even shopping," he said as his mouth just missed hers. "Until either you realize you've made a mistake," he said, kissing her eyelid, "or you beg me to stay."

"I don't beg," she said, just as his lips moved to cover hers.

He froze, his lips inches from hers. "I could make you beg, Hermione."

"Really? Okay, show me."

It was four days later when Hermione returned to her flat. Severus had taken up much of her time, proving that he could, in fact, make her beg. She collected her letters from the floor and walked to her loo, intending to collect a few things for a bath. There were notices from the Ministry, a letter from Ron, another from Harry, three from Ginny, and an envelope from George.

She opened the letter from George first.

Dear Hermione,

I hope that this owl finds you well and that you are not too angry with Ron and me.

You see I slipped you and Ron a potion, but before you get furious about it let me explain.

It's a new product I'm working on, a blend of a Mind-Clarity and True-Feelings Potions with a little touch of Brazen-Babe added in. You know, the one that makes women a little more receptive for romance.

Well, I digress. You see the potion does this: it opens your mind to the truth, makes you think more clearly and helps you express your true feelings in a way you'd like to, but are too polite to actually do. I meant it when I told you your mind clarity was fine and you were only speaking your true feelings to Ron. Since he was on the potion too, he was able to say things and listen to you with an open mind, and really hear what you had to say with perfect clarity. Brilliant eh? The potion only lasts a couple of hours, so it's not like you would've gotten into too much trouble.

I wanted you to know that things are okay with Ron. He'll be sulking for a few days, but he will be okay; everything is clear to him now, and things will work out. Trust me. He's my brother, but he's thick. You're my friend and practically part of the family, so I care about you too. I just knew things weren't working out between you.

Don't worry, you're an incredible witch. You'll find someone. Some lucky bloke will pull you in no time.

Anyway, please don't be mad at me, I was only trying to help.

Your friend (still, I hope)

George.

She carefully folded up his letter, feeling a bit put off that he'd slipped her a potion and happy that he had. Yes, George, we are still friends. And you are right; there is a perfect wizard out there for me. And he's expecting me to show up in fifteen minutes with my bath things.

~FIN~

Author's Notes:

I want to thank ladyinthecloak for offering to beta read this and for catching my many mistakes. I haven't the words to express my gratitude for literally checking this while I watched the ball drop for the new year. Thank you so very much. I appreciate it more than she could possibly know.