Still Strong

by DietCokeofEvil

Summary

Ron left a month before the wedding. How does Hermione put the pieces of her life back together?

Notes

I read this great fic- I Am Strong about a year ago and left a comment about a possible prequel. I've not gotten a response here or on Tumblr, and given the dates, I don't believe this particular author is active in the fandom anymore. I've read a lot of stories, and this was the first one that compelled me to continue on- a fanfic of a fanfic, as it were. Of course, if the original author takes offense at this, I will take it down- it's not my intention to steal anything- I was just really inspired by the story. I don't think you need to read the original story first or anything- it's not like the outcome is a surprise based on the tags- they can be read in any order.

Originally, the start of this story was the actual note that Ron left, but after a while, I realized that it was better left to the imagination. I just couldn't get it to come out right. I've adjusted the timeline to match up with the various children in the original story- and since I have yet to read The Cursed Child, I can safely say this isn't canon. I've also completed this work, and will post chapters often. Hope you enjoy it!

- Inspired by I Am Strong by floatsodelicately
A Month Before the Wedding

George stared at the closed door before knocking one more time. There was no answer at Ron and Hermione’s flat again— it had been two days, and he had to get the inventory done. He couldn’t do that without Ron’s help. “Ron?” called George as he knocked. “Hermione?” He looked at Ginny, who had come to the shop that morning to say hi— George had convinced her to come along to look for his wayward brother.

Ginny frowned— she had a bad feeling but wasn’t sure why. She pulled out her wand and pointed it at the door. “Homenum Revelio,” she muttered and watched as the spell worked itself inside the closed door. “Someone is in there. Do you think there’s trouble?” There were still dark wizards that had gone into hiding after the war— could there have been some retribution?

“Only one way to find out, I reckon,” said George, pointing his wand at the door. They entered cautiously, wands raised and they looked around the small flat. “Stuffs missing,” commented George. “Didn’t there used to be more furniture?”

“Yes,” said Ginny. “I went shopping with Hermione and helped her pick it out.” She headed into other rooms before calling out to George. “She’s in here, George.” Hermione was lying on the bed, Crookshanks lying next to her, meowing piteously. “Hermione?” whispered Ginny. She sat on the bed and put her hand on Hermione’s arm. “Are you all right? Some of your things are missing— where’s Ron? Did someone take him?”

“Gone,” Hermione said. “Ron left.”

Ginny and George looked at each other. “He left? Where did he go? I don’t understand,” said Ginny.

“He left me,” said Hermione, fresh tears falling down her cheeks. “I came home from work, and his things were gone. He left a note saying he was leaving.”

“Where’s the note?” asked George. “Maybe he has cold feet? The wedding is only a month away. We could find him— talk to him.” Hermione didn’t say anything. “Come on, Hermione, you know Ron. He acts first and thinks later. Let’s find him and talk this out.”

“No,” said Hermione. “He’s gone and not coming back. He…” she stopped, not wanting to admit he left her for another woman. The humiliating note had broken her. “It’s over. Forget about the wedding and forget about me.”

Ginny pulled Hermione up and gathered her in her arms. “No, Hermione. I can’t forget about you. None of us will— you are my sister. I’m so sorry— I know my brother can be a prat. I’m sure he’ll come back— give him some time.” That made Hermione cry harder. Ginny looked at George, who was standing there looking helpless. “George, I know you need to open the shop, but can you get in touch with Mum and Harry and have them come here?”

“I don’t want anyone here,” said Hermione. “Just leave me. It’s obvious I’m not worth it anymore.” Ginny stared at Hermione in disbelief and saw a piece of paper crumpled in her hand.

“Is that Ron’s note?” asked Ginny, gently trying to take it from Hermione’s hand.

“I don’t want you to read it,” said Hermione, grasping it tighter. “It’s…” Ginny felt tears spring to her own eyes thinking of what the note must contain. Hermione, always level-
headed was inconsolable- whatever Ron wrote in that note must be cutting and terrible. “Please, leave me alone.”

“I can’t leave you like this, Hermione,” said Ginny. “I won’t ask you what’s in the note, but I can tell that it’s hurt you very badly. Please- let us get Mum. Please? You shouldn’t be alone right now- it’s for the best, yes?”

Hermione didn’t say anything. She knew Ginny was right, but any confidence she had built up in herself since starting school was gone. No one wanted to be around her- Ron was right about that. Hermione wanted her Mum, but they hadn’t been able to find her parents yet. She finally nodded, hearing Ginny breathe a sigh of relief.

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“Mum!” Molly turned around to see George running into the kitchen, looking frantic. Her heart still skipped a beat every time she saw him, still expecting Fred to be by his side after all this time.

“George? What’s wrong,” Molly asked anxiously. “What’s happened?”

“You need to come to Ron and Hermione’s,” he said. “Ron’s gone- he packed up and left. Hermione is lying in bed and won’t get up. He left her Mum.”

“Are you sure?” Molly asked. “He’s left before- he hasn’t come here. Maybe he went to Harry’s?” Molly tried to remain calm and tried to see reason- but the look on George’s face made her realize the situation was more serious.

“Mum- he took all his things and moved out while Hermione was at work. He left a note,” said George. “Hermione refuses to show us the note, but whatever is in it must be pretty bad. The way Hermione is acting isn’t right- she’s almost catatonic. Mum- please? Ron left at least two days ago and Hermione has been alone that entire time.” Molly grabbed her sweater, and she and George headed to the apparition point by the Burrow. “Head to their flat,” said George. “Gin asked me to get Harry too- I’ll head to get him now.”

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Molly walked into the flat and immediately noticed that things were indeed missing.

“Ginny? Hermione?”

Ginny came out of the bedroom, tears still on her cheeks. “Mum...” Molly came to hug her daughter. “I don’t know what happened, but Hermione won’t get out of bed- she won’t even look at me. She keeps repeating the same thing- she wants to be alone, and she wants us to forget about her.”

“What?” Molly stepped back, shocked. “She wants us to forget...why? I don’t understand.”

“I don’t know, Mum,” said Ginny. “She said she wasn’t worth it.”

“Oh, that poor, dear girl,” cried Molly, heading into the bedroom. She saw Hermione lying on the bed as her eyes adjusted to the dimness and went to sit down next to her. Hermione didn’t turn to look at her and didn’t do anything to acknowledge Molly’s presence at all. Molly tried talking to her, petting her hair but got no response. She looked around the room, noting that all Ron’s things were missing, including Pigwidgeon and she frowned, regretting not checking her clock before she left the house. He had to be somewhere- but where? She looked up as she heard
more voices in the other room—Harry had arrived, and Ginny was telling him what she knew. Molly went out to join them. Harry and George were standing in the living room, and they looked up when Molly came out. She shook her head as Ginny and George looked at her hopefully. “Harry, dear,” she said. “Why don’t you try to talk to her. We need to get her at least up and about.”


“‘Mione?” Harry hesitated at the doorway to her bedroom, unsure of what to do. He remembered how heartbroken she had been when Ron left them during the Horcrux year, but he could tell already that this was different. He came and sat down next to her and took her hand. “Is that Ron’s note?” he asked her. “Would you let me read it?” Hermione jerked her hand away; the note still clutched firmly in it. Harry had a feeling it would be harder to get that note away from her than it was when they pulled the book page out of her hand when she was petrified. “It’s all right,” said Harry, trying to soothe her. “You don’t have to show it to me. But please talk to me.” No response. “Come on, Hermione, he said. “You know Ron is a prat and he’ll be back. He always comes back. Remember when he stopped talking to me at the Tri-Wizard tournament? He came around then, and he will this time too.”

To his surprise, Hermione sat up. “No, he’s not,” she thundered. “He’s not coming back this time.” She held up the piece of paper clenched in her fist. “This makes it pretty clear.”

“Are you sure he wrote it?” asked Harry. He knew what dark wizards were capable of, being an Auror, and he began to panic—maybe someone had taken Ron and left the note to make it look like he left of his own accord.

“I know Ron’s handwriting and his style,” said Hermione bitterly. “He wrote it, and he’s gone. And he doesn’t want to be found.”

“Hermione, did something happen?” Harry asked gently. “Did you argue?”

“He got mad at me a few nights ago because I was studying instead of paying attention to him. I have my Healers Certification exam coming up- you know how I am.” Hermione wiped her eyes. “This is the rest of my life- my work. It needed my full attention. He didn’t like that. I got home the next day, and his things were gone.”

Harry didn’t say anything. Arguing over priorities was not new to Ron and Hermione—they had been doing that since the first day at Hogwarts. But Harry had been after Ron as well—Hermione was right—this was their future at stake, and Ron hadn’t taken it very seriously, assuming he would skate through on his war hero status. He held out a hand to Hermione. “Come on,” he said. “You need to leave this room at least. Molly, George and Gin are all waiting for you.” Hermione didn’t move from the bed. “Look, I know you want to stay here and cry, and I don’t blame you. But we’re all worried, and you know Molly won’t leave until she sees you taking care of yourself, right?”

Hermione thought about it for a moment and then nodded. She let Harry pull her up, and he led her by the hand to the living room.


“You shouldn’t stay here by yourself,” said Molly. “Why don’t you come stay at the Burrow for a while until you decide what you want to do?” Hermione hesitated. She didn’t want to be a burden, and she was afraid there were too many memories there for her to settle in.
“Isn’t Bill still with you?” asked George.

“No,” said Molly. “He’s gone back to Shell Cottage, but I suspect he’ll be going back to Egypt soon. I’ve tried to talk to him about it.” A few weeks earlier, Bill had shown up at the Burrow to stay for a while because Fleur had left him and sent him divorce papers. It hadn’t been a very good year for the Weasley family, it seemed.

“You could come stay with us, Hermione,” said Ginny. “We have plenty of room.”

“No,” said Hermione. “You two don’t need me hanging around all the time. You just got married and are having a baby- you need time to yourselves. I…I think I should stay here. Maybe I’m better off on my own.”

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“Harry, she shouldn’t be alone,” said Ginny that night as they ate dinner. “I don’t understand why she wants to stay by herself.”

“That’s how she is,” said Harry. “I don’t like it either, but she needs to process everything. To do that, she needs time- and she doesn’t need us breathing down her neck. I’ll look in on her as often as I can, and you know Molly will do the same.”

“I wish Ron hadn’t pushed her into that huge wedding,” sighed Ginny. “The press is going to be ridiculous about this.” Harry groaned. He had forgotten about that. The Ministry, anxious to have some happy news and good press again, had offered to throw the weddings for Harry and Ginny and Ron and Hermione, as long as the press would have direct access. Harry and Ginny had opted for a private wedding- sooner than they had planned, but the baby had moved their plans along faster than anticipated. Ginny was due in about three months, and they were both thrilled. Ron, on the other hand, wanted the big wedding and all the attention and had pushed Hermione relentlessly to get married. Hermione wanted to wait until after they settled in their chosen careers, but Ron made her feel guilty, and she finally agreed to set the date.

“We’re going to have to tell Kingsley,” said Harry. “As soon as possible. We’ll try to use every connection we have to keep this quiet. If reporters hound her day after day, it will kill her.” He sighed. “I can’t believe this is happening. I thought I knew Ron.”

“We all did,” said Ginny. “Do you think he’ll come back?”

“He always has,” said Harry. “Even if he does, I reckon it will be over for the two of them for good. I don’t see Hermione taking him back after this.” Harry put his fork down. “I’ve lost my appetite. I’m going to go out and look for him for a while.” He came over to kiss Ginny. “I know you want to look too, but stay here and get some rest. I want to check a few places I can think of- I’ll be back soon.”

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Bill looked up from his book as he heard a knock at the door. He opened it to find Molly and Arthur at his doorstep, Molly wringing her hands in worry. “Mum? What’s wrong?” he asked as he stepped aside to let them in.

“Is Ron here?” asked Arthur.

“No,” said Bill. “I haven’t seen him in a while. Why?”
“He’s gone,” cried Molly. “He packed his things and left while Hermione was at work. The clock says he is “lost.” We have no idea where he is or if he is coming back.” Molly started crying, and Arthur put a bracing arm around her shoulders. “Hermione is devastated. It took Ginny, Harry and I to convince her to get out of bed today.”

“He left her?” asked Bill. “Did he say why?”

“He left Hermione a note,” said Arthur. “She won’t let us read it. Harry says that given how Hermione is reacting, that the note was rather harsh. Molly tried to talk Hermione into staying with us at the Burrow or with Harry and Ginny, but she refuses- she wants to be by herself.”

“Well, I can understand that,” said Bill. “Not that there’s anything wrong with your offer- but she needs to work things out.” Bill could get behind Hermione’s wanting to be by herself from experience. He stayed at the Burrow for a little while after Fleur left, but he found that he needed time to come to terms with his situation by himself. Molly tended to hover, bless her. “She knows that she’ll have our support when she is ready. In the meantime, I’ll check at Gringotts to see if he accessed their vault at all.”

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“He cleaned it out?” asked Hermione. “I hadn’t even thought to look.” Arthur, who had brought the news to her shifted uncomfortably, ashamed that Ron was his son, but still worried about him at the same time.

“If you need money,” said Arthur, “we’ll help you.”

“No,” said Hermione. “That account was money we accumulated since we moved in together. I still have my vault. He may have taken all our savings, but my Order of Merlin award money was still in my vault. I was going to set it up as a trust for charitable contributions. I can use some of that for now.”

“Bill asked around- everyone is looking for him,” said Arthur. “I’m so sorry, Hermione.”
The Wedding Day

Chapter Summary

Thanks to Floatsodelicately for responding and giving me permission- I'm glad you found this!

Kingsley managed not only to handle the canceled wedding quietly, but he also kept the press off Hermione’s back. Not that it was hard- Hermione was very rarely seen in public, opting to floo wherever she needed to go and arranging delivery of anything she needed from the shops. Harry and the Weasleys continued to worry about her and check on her as often as they could, but Hermione kept herself busy, throwing herself into her work as much as she could. She had passed her certification test with flying colors and was now a junior healer at St. Mungo’s, often working the shifts no one else wanted. She found it kept her mind busy from thinking about Ron and all that he had said in his final note, the contents of which she repeated to herself every single day.

When she wasn’t working herself so hard as to sleep when she wasn’t busy, she found herself reviewing her life from Ron’s eyes. Had she treated him like a child? Was she bossy? She knew she had been in her younger days at Hogwarts. Finding out she was a witch when she was ten was terrifying and exhilarating all at once, and she jumped into her new role, eager to please and craving to learn as much as she could as quickly as possible. It had taken her a long time to learn the difference between being bossy and gently guiding, but Ron, a creature of habit always took her advice as though she was lecturing him. Aside from Harry, Ron, and Ginny, Hermione never had many close friends, but she had never taken notice of it because she had her books, and she had enough friends to keep her happy. She never realized that maybe she didn’t have many friends because of how she acted- giving advice instead of commiserating- it was how she showed she cared. Anyone could sympathize. Trying to help was better, wasn’t it?

Sighing, she looked at the calendar. It was her wedding day. She had to remember to write Kingsley a note thanking him for his help with canceling the wedding- she was lucky that she hadn’t had to put any deposits down on a hall or dinner. It could have cost her a fortune- the only money she was out was her wedding dress, and Ron’s wedding ring- and those were both resellable. In fact, she had already arranged the return of the wedding rings and her engagement ring to the jeweler- she felt no qualms about keeping the money from that given that Ron had cleaned out their joint savings account. The dress was gone. Ginny had taken it to a resale shop for her. She wouldn’t get what she paid for it, but she didn’t mind. She picked up her healer's cloak and headed for the fireplace, ready for a long nights work.

“Did you see Hermione today?” Ginny asked Harry when he got home from work. “You realize what day it is don’t you?”

“I stopped by St. Mungo’s during my lunch break,” said Harry. “She’s working a double shift today- she seems to be ok.”

“Another double shift?” asked Ginny. “That’s her fourth one this week. She never sees anyone anymore- she never goes out. I’m worried about her.”
“I know,” said Harry, hugging her. “I’m worried too, but this is how she is. She’s always thrown herself into her work when she needs a distraction. We need to give her some time.”

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“Hey Mum,” Bill called out when he reached the Burrow.

“Bill,” called Molly as she came in from the kitchen to hug her oldest son. “I was making some lunch for us- come along- I’ll fix you a plate.” They sat at the table for a while before Arthur spoke up.

“So, no news then?”

“No,” said Bill. “The vault is still empty. Hermione switched back to using her vault in case he tried to take money out again. Wherever he’s gone, he’s using a different bank, or he’s not working. Not sure which.” He fidgeted with his cup for a moment. “I have some news…” Molly and Arthur looked up, worried. “It’s nothing bad. I’m taking leave from Gringotts for a while.”


“Not with me,” said Bill. “It’s George. He’s been struggling to make a go of the joke shop. Losing their place at Diagon Alley during the war was a huge blow financially, and he needs help. Ron was supposed to be helping him since he quit Auror training- and well, that obviously didn’t work out. Ron left George in a bad way. I need a change of pace- so I’m going to help Georgie out for a while.”

“I thought Lee was going to help him,” said Molly. “Not that I don’t want you to, dear. I’m thrilled you’re helping your brother.”

“Yeah, well, it’s going to take both Lee and me to replace Fred,” said Bill. “The war ended over a year ago, and George is still struggling with Fred’s loss. He needs family right now- he feels like he’s letting Fred down by struggling to keep the place open.”

“Is the business that bad?” asked Arthur.

“No- not at all,” said Bill. “He can barely keep up with the orders. He and Lee are the brains of the operation. I’m going to use my banking knowledge to help out on the financial end, and do the day to day work- hiring, firing, etc. It’s not curse-breaking, but it’s a change of pace.”

Molly took Bill’s hand in hers. “That’s wonderful. I know you wanted to go back to Egypt, but I’m glad you’re staying. I’ve already lost one son.” She wiped away a tear. “Well, two sons. I didn’t want you to go away.”

“He’ll be back, Mum,” reassured Bill. “Speaking of, today would have been the big day. Has anyone talked to Hermione?”

“We’ve tried,” said Arthur. “She’s never home when we stop over. Harry says she’s at work, all the time. Practically lives there.”

Bill frowned. “I know the feeling, but I found out pretty quickly that you get more burned out if you try to forget by constantly working.”

“Harry says to give her time,” said Molly. “It’s only been a month. We trust Harry- he knows her better than anyone.”
Bill nodded. He had always liked Hermione. She was sensible, smart and amazingly talented, and she had stayed after Ron, helping him get through Hogwarts, and after. Bill was certain that they could have lost the battle against Voldemort if it hadn’t been for her, especially after hearing the stories of their time on the run. When he first came back to the Burrow after Fleur left, she came and sat next to him as he stared dejectedly into his teacup. She didn’t say much but just sat with him, refilling his cup when he needed it, and slipping a little firewhiskey in for good measure. Later on, she found some information for him and recommended a barrister that helped prevent Fleur from taking him to the cleaners and keeping Shell Cottage. And here, he hadn’t done anything for her yet except give her bad news about their joint account. He was going to have to change that.

“Miss Granger, you have a delivery,” said Healer Wyndham. Hermione looked up in surprise as the older woman smiled gently at her. “It’s at the desk. Why don’t you go take a look, I’ll finish up here.” Healer Wyndham had become a mentor to Hermione during her training and had become her supervisor afterward. She often reminded Hermione of Madame Pomfrey, who had encouraged Hermione to go into healing during the rebuilding of Hogwarts.

Hermione stopped when she saw the large bouquet of flowers at the desk and approached it apprehensively before taking the card and opening it. “I don’t forget. Take some time for yourself, and call if you need a friend.” B.W. “You know something of the language of flowers?” her mentor asked. Hermione knew a little, and she looked at the bouquet. Healer Wyndham pointed at various flowers. “Lavender- calm and grace, scarlet geraniums- comfort and esteem, lilac primrose- confidence, dahlia- dignity, snowdrop- hope, and lily of the valley- return to happiness. My dear, someone put a great deal of thought into this.” Hermione looked at the additional bundle that was attached to the vase, opened it and smiled. A tin of tea and a small bottle of firewhiskey.
A Year after the Wedding

Chapter Notes

Such original titles right? Jumping forward a bit...

“Come on, Hermione,” pleaded Ginny. “Just come out for a little while. We haven’t been out together for ever so long, and Mum is watching the baby. Come to dinner with Harry and me.” Ginny hadn’t seen much of Hermione in the last year, and she missed her friend. “If you don’t, I’ll get pregnant again so that I have an excuse to see you when I go to St. Mungo’s.”

Hermione laughed. “Fine, I’ll go out. I suppose it’s been a while.” Ginny clapped in delight and told her where to meet them.

When Ginny arrived at the Burrow with James, she found Bill sitting at the table. “Hey Gin, twisting Grandma’s arm to babysit?”

Ginny snorted. “Like I have to. She keeps popping over to take the baby and tells us to go on a date. I think Harry and I have been out more in the last eight months than we ever had before. I know Mum misses having kids around the house- so she keeps stealing mine.”

Bill laughed. “Well, at least it keeps her from nagging me about finding a girlfriend. She’s been after me for a while to start dating again.”

“Well,” said Ginny. “You haven’t been out for a long while. Maybe Mum’s right.”

“I go out,” said Bill defensively. “I’m just…busy. The shop keeps George and I going all the time. I did see Hermione the other day.” Ginny’s eyebrows shot up with interest. “Not like that, Gin.” She humphed at him. “We meet up every once in a while to talk. Or, well, just get out I guess. Hermione doesn’t talk much anymore.”

“I noticed,” said Ginny. “I talked her into coming out to dinner tonight. We haven’t seen her much- she won’t come to Sunday dinner here. It’s like she’s avoiding us.”

“It’s not that,” said Bill. “I asked her about it- and told her Mum and Dad were hurt that she wasn’t coming around. She didn’t explain though. Maybe it’s because of her parents?” Hermione had finally tracked down her parents in Australia. The suggestion she had planted about moving to Australia had backfired and given them wanderlust, and they had died in a plane crash on their way to New York. Getting this news only a few months after Ron’s abandonment had almost finished her.

“She’s not the same anymore,” said Ginny. “I guess that’s too much to expect given everything that’s happened, but I miss her. Bill, why don’t you come along tonight? You don’t get out much either. Maybe the three of us can get Hermione to open up a little. Or maybe Harry, Hermione and I can get you to open up.”

Hermione arrived at the restaurant to see Harry and Ginny seated with Bill and stopped in surprise. When Ginny saw her, she jumped up and came over to Hermione, catching her in a quick
hug before ushering her to the table. “I hope you don’t mind that Bill came along. He was at the Burrow when I dropped James off. He never gets out either, so I invited him along.” Bill smiled at Hermione and stood up, helping push her chair in as she sat down.

They spent dinner catching up- Harry and Ginny were full of news about baby James and how they thought he was a genius. Bill, Harry, and Ginny all noticed that Hermione didn’t speak much or give any advice like she used to- she seemed very guarded. That wasn’t new to Bill. He and Hermione met up every few weeks for tea- their shared disappointments and heartbreak seemed to bond them in some way, and since neither was ready to be in a relationship, the lack of tension between them was refreshing. Still, Bill noticed that Hermione would be in sympathy with him when he talked about any problem he was having, but never took it any further than that. It was like someone had removed part of Hermione’s personality and left a partially empty shell behind. She wasn’t their Hermione anymore, and they didn’t know how to get her back.

Ginny looked at the time and realized they still had a few hours before they needed to be back. “Let’s go to a pub for a little while, have a drink,” she said to the group. “Come on; it’ll be fun. I know a good one- the music isn’t too loud, so you can hear yourself think.”

Hermione looked down. “I don’t know Ginny; I’m not dressed for clubbing. I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“You look beautiful,” said Bill. He blushed a little as he said it, missing the look that passed between Ginny and Harry. “I suppose it couldn’t hurt to go out for a few. You work hard, Hermione, it’s time to relax a little.”

Hermione blew out her breath. “Fine,” she said.

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Bill couldn’t help but notice the admiring looks that Hermione was receiving from many of the wizards in attendance at the pub that evening, and he couldn’t blame them. Hermione had finally perfected a hair smoothing charm, tired of trying to pull it back when she was working, and the style was very becoming on her. She was a little pale, but somehow, it worked on her. The four of them sat around a table with their drinks, and Hermione finally relaxed a little. She noticed the looks Bill was getting as well. He was strikingly handsome, and the scars on his face gave him a dangerous edge that the other witches in the pub were taking enthusiastic note of and she smiled a little.

“What are you smiling about?” asked Harry.

“Bill seems to be getting a lot of appreciative looks,” said Hermione. “Maybe one of them will come and ask you to dance.” Bill looked around a little, noticing many women quickly looking away, and groaned inwardly.

“Not interested,” said Bill. “Besides, I could say the same about you. I’ve seen a lot of blokes take more than a few glances your way.”

“No,” said Hermione, disbelievingly. “They’re probably looking at Ginny. She looks gorgeous tonight.”

“Hermione, they are looking at you,” said Ginny. “Everyone here knows I’m married and desperately in love with my husband. You’ve never thought much of yourself looks-wise- and that’s not being fair to yourself. You really are a looker.” Hermione blushed. She never thought about herself that way. Ron certainly never said anything positive to her about her looks, and no
one aside from Viktor Krum seemed to notice her at school. Even if it were true, anyone who came to talk to her would most likely turn and run when they found out how boring she was. “’Mione, why don’t you go and get the next round of drinks?” Ginny asked. She noticed one man, in particular, sitting at the bar with his eyes on Hermione, and she wanted to see what would happen.

While Hermione was waiting for the drinks, he made his move. “I haven’t seen you here before,” he started, turning towards her. “I’m Sam. What’s your name, Love?”

“Hermione.” She blushed a little, not used to attention from other men.

“Like Granger?” he asked. She blushed again. “Wow…I never thought I would meet you. Have a dance?”

“No thank you,” she said faintly. “I’m with my friends, and we’re waiting for our drinks.”

“They won’t mind,” said Sam. He took her arm. “Come on, live a little.”

Hermione shook her head, and then jumped when she felt an arm go around her shoulder. She looked up to find Bill standing there. “She’s taken,” said Bill, giving Sam a look.

Sam let go of her arm and raised his hands up. “No harm in trying mate.” He looked at Hermione appreciatively again and sighed. “Good on you, you lucky bastard.” Bill nodded and helped Hermione grab the drinks, both of them heading back to the table.

“Thank you,” said Hermione.

“It’s all right, Hermione,” said Bill. “You’ll do the same for me if needed?” Hermione smiled and nodded.

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“Do you think Bill fancies her?” Ginny asked as she and Harry lay in bed that night. “He was awfully quick to go to her rescue when that bloke asked her to dance.”

“I don’t know,” said Harry. “I would have done the same thing if people didn’t know who I was. She’s not ready, Love. I think Bill was being Bill.”

“Yeah, but he told her she was beautiful, and I saw him looking at her a few times through the night.” Ginny replayed the evening in her head. “They’d be perfect together.”

“Bill’s what- ten years older than her?” asked Harry. “He probably just sees her like a little sister and his youngest brother’s ex-fiance.”

“What’s ten years?” asked Ginny. “They’re both of age. And he doesn’t have to see her that way. It’s not like Ron has a claim on her anymore.”

“Well- let them figure it out,” said Harry. “If he’s interested, I’m sure he’ll do something about it.” They lay quietly for a little while. “I wonder where Ron is? I’m surprised he hasn’t tried to contact anyone- I thought he would by now.”

“I know,” said Ginny. “Mum and Dad are really hurt. I’m so mad at him for doing this to them, I could scream. Reckon he’ll ever come back?”
“I hope so, for your parent’s sake,” said Harry. “I don’t know if I can forgive him this time. He’s hurt too many people.”

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Hermione opened her door a few days later to find Bill waiting for her. “Bill,” she said in surprise. “Come in.”

“I just came to invite you to dinner at the Burrow this Sunday,” said Bill as he entered. “Mum and Dad found out we went out to dinner with you and now they won’t take no for an answer.” Hermione didn’t say anything. “They miss you,” Bill continued.

Hermione sat down. She hadn’t seen Arthur and Molly in almost a year- she had barely seen anybody except Bill and Harry and Ginny occasionally. Not because she didn’t want to, or because she didn’t love them anymore. She had chosen to stay busy with work- partly to avoid the dinners. She didn’t want to see the pitying looks or hear news of Ron- even after all this time. “I don’t know, Bill,” she finally said.

Bill sat down in a chair across from her. “Look,” he said. “I know how you feel. I wanted to avoid family together time after my divorce. Seeing happy couples, pretending everything is all right- the thought of it just wore me out. But they want to see you. Charlie will be there- I think Percy and Audrey are going to make a big announcement. You’re still family, you know.”

“So, my first dinner back would be during an engagement announcement?” asked Hermione.

Bill paled. “Oh. Hermione, I’m sorry I didn’t mean… wow… I’m really sorry.”

“Don’t be,” said Hermione. “Maybe that’s what I need.” Bill started to protest, but Hermione stopped him. “Bill- I can handle an engagement. Life doesn’t stop for everyone just because of what happened to me. I’ll go.”

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“Mum, let her get some air,” George said, smiling as Molly held Hermione to her. Everyone was happy to see her, and Molly couldn’t stop crying and hugging her. George slung an arm around Hermione’s shoulders. “Come on,” he said. “You can sit next to me.”

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Dinner had gone well. Percy and Audrey announced their engagement and they wanted to get married in six months, and Hermione smiled and congratulated them along with everyone else. After dinner, she went outside to get some air and watch the garden gnomes when she heard someone approach. “I hope that didn’t upset you,” said Arthur.

“No,” said Hermione. “I knew it was going to happen- Bill told me.” She looked at the garden, not saying anything.

“I’m glad you showed up tonight,” said Arthur. “We knew you needed space, but we’ve all missed you. I hope you’ll keep coming to dinner on Sundays, at least.”

“I think I’d like to,” said Hermione.

………
Bill finished putting the last of the plates away as Charlie wiped a cup. “Hermione looks good, yeah?” asked Charlie. “She all right?”

“She’s getting there,” said Bill. “I think…Gin and Harry say she’s not the same. She doesn’t seem the same to me either.”

“Well- you’ve changed too, you know,” said Charlie. “Since SHE left. Harry told me about the other night. Since when does the charmingly handsome Bill Weasley turn away a lady who asks him to dance?”

Bill shrugged. “Since I stopped being charmingly handsome, I guess.” He heard the cup Charlie was wiping thunk down on the counter.

“What are you on about, Bill?” asked Charlie. “You can’t be serious.”

“It’s why Fleur left,” said Bill. “At least, that’s what she told me. She tried to get used to my scarred up face, but she wasn’t attracted to me anymore. I guess when she told my Mum that my scars didn’t matter, she was trying to show her up and embarrass her. She said she felt obligated to stay with me because of the war and everything that happened.”

“That’s not what you told Mum,” said Charlie.

“Would you?” asked Bill.

Charlie shrugged. “Guess not. It’s not true though- you know that right? Gin told me that the ladies were practically drooling. The only one you paid attention to was Hermione.”

“Some bloke was hitting on her, and I ran interference,” said Bill. “Nothing more.”

“Do you fancy her?” asked Charlie.

“Why? Do you?” asked Bill.

“She’s bloody gorgeous,” said Charlie. “But no. If I lived closer, I don’t think I could say the same though. But Romania is far- it wouldn’t be fair. I’ve got my job- don’t really need anything else out there. So, you never answered my question.”

Bill didn’t say anything for a while.

“I’ll take your silence as a yes,” said Charlie.

“It’s not like that,” said Bill. “Hermione…well…we’re just…”


“I’m too old for her,” said Bill.

“Bollocks.”

“It’s too soon- for both of us,” Bill said.

“It’s been over a year,” said Charlie. “I’ve known other divorcees who only wait half as long or less.”

“She’s Ron’s ex-fiance.”
Charlie looked around. “Well, I don’t see Ron anywhere in the picture trying to get back with her- and if he did, do you think she’d go for it? She’s fair game, mate.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea,” said Bill. “She’s Hermione Granger- war hero and golden girl. I’m just a busted up divorced storekeeper- I have nothing good to offer her.”

“Damn it, Bill!” Charlie slammed his hand on the counter. “There is nothing wrong with you. You fought in the same war. You spent years as a curse breaker- one of the best. And despite the scars that you seem so hung up on, you’re still ten times better looking than the rest of us put together. George tells me half the people that come into the store to shop are there to get a peek at you. Did you know that?” Bill didn’t say anything. “I’m not telling you to run off and marry her. But if you fancy her, you’d better do something about it before someone else asks her out. She’s a good one- and we’re not the only ones who know it.”
Eighteen Months after the Wedding

“Dance with me ‘Mione?” Hermione looked up and saw Bill holding his hand out to her. She smiled and took his hand, following him to the dance floor. “Having a good time?” he asked her.

“I guess so,” said Hermione. “The wedding was lovely- Audrey has good taste.” Bill nodded in agreement. “Are you having a good time?” she asked him.

“It’s a wedding,” he said with a shrug. “I’m glad you came.” He wasn’t sure that she would. She had been coming to family dinners, and they continued to have tea together on occasion, but a wedding was different.

“I’m glad you did too,” said Hermione. “This can’t be easy on you either.”

“It doesn’t bother me,” said Bill. “I’m glad to see people being happy. I think George and Angelina might be next- but I don’t see George doing something like this.”

“That depends on what Angelina and your mum has to say about it,” said Hermione. “I think George will do whatever Angelina says.” Bill laughed and spun her around. They didn’t say much else and parted ways after the song was over with Ginny hauling Hermione off for a chat.

“So…dancing with Bill?” asked Ginny. Hermione shrugged. “Come on Hermione- what did you talk about?”

“Not much,” said Hermione. Seeing Ginny’s exasperated look, she said, “What? He was being nice. We talked about weddings a little.”

“Hermione,” said Ginny. “Bill likes you. He hasn’t asked anyone else to dance tonight, except Mum. It’s been what- almost two years since Ron left? You’ve not been out on a date, and you rarely leave your flat except to work or come to the Burrow for dinner. Isn’t it time you got back out there?” Hermione didn’t say anything. “I want you to be happy,” said Ginny. “Do you like Bill?”

“It’s not like that,” said Hermione. “He deserves to be happy. I don’t think I could be that person.”

“Why not?” pried Ginny. “I can tell that you feel something for him. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“I know,” said Hermione. “I have my reasons.” She looked around at the crowd. “I’m going to get some air- it’s getting a little stuffy in here.”

Ginny watched Hermione walk away, and she felt sad for her friend. “You ok?” she heard from behind her. She turned to see Harry coming towards her with drinks in his hands.

“I wish I knew what to say to Hermione to make her want to live life again,” she said sadly. “It’s been almost two years, and she’s still as closed off from us as she was the day Ron left. I think she likes Bill, but she refuses to act on it.”

Harry kissed Ginny on the temple. “She’s getting better. She at least comes to family dinners, and comes out to the pub every once in a while. I think I’m going to go talk to her.”
Harry found Hermione sitting by the pond. “Hey,” he said quietly. “Can we talk?” Hermione nodded, and Harry sat down next to her. “It’s been a while since it’s been just the two of us. I’ve missed you.” He pulled up some grass and started tearing it apart as he thought of what to say next. “Hermione…I can’t help but notice that you’re different. I mean…not in a bad way, but since everything happened, you’re so quiet. You haven’t given me any advice in so long- even when I ask for it. You won’t open up to anyone. You don’t even go running for your textbooks anymore like you used to.” Hermione didn’t say anything. Harry took her hand. “You can talk to me, you know. We’ve been through everything together. You supported me when no one else did. Will you at least tell me what’s changed?”

Hermione hesitated. Harry was right in many ways- if there were anyone she could open up to, it would be him. Every time she thought to talk to him about things, however, she stopped herself. Even after all this time, the contents of Ron’s final note humiliated her, and she was afraid that if she told Harry, that he would agree with Ron. She remembered him rolling his eyes at her when she would lecture him about his studies, or about his occlumency, just as many others did. “I can’t,” said Hermione, finally. “Things are just…different now.”

“Are you happy?” asked Harry. “At least tell me that much.”

“I’m fine,” said Hermione. She got up to leave, but Harry stopped her.

“Hermione, we didn’t fight a war and go through everything we went through so you could be “fine.” You fought as hard as everyone else- harder even. I would never have made it through without you pushing me to do the right thing. I don’t want you just to be “fine.” I want you to be happy.”

“I know,” said Hermione softly. “I don’t think it’s in the cards for me. I’m going to call it a night, Harry.” They stood up, and she hugged him before apparating away. Harry looked at the spot where she had stood, wondering what the hell had been in that note that destroyed her so terribly.

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“Did you talk to her?” Ginny asked later that night.

“I tried,” said Harry. He had been quiet since Hermione left, and Ginny could tell something was on his mind. “Gin- I don’t know what Ron said in that note to her- but she hasn’t been the same since.” He gave her an abbreviated version of their conversation. “I just want her back the way she was,” said Harry. “I thought maybe she would get better with time, but I don’t see it happening.”

“I know,” said Ginny. “I swear, I’m going to kill Ron if he ever shows his face back here.”

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Bill hesitated before knocking on Hermione’s door, and almost turned and apparated when she opened the door. “Bill!” she exclaimed, opening the door wider.

“I was hoping we could talk for a minute,” said Bill as he came in. They went into Hermione’s kitchen and sat at the table with some tea while Bill tried to find the words he wanted to say. “You left the wedding without saying goodbye,” he started. “Did I do something to offend
“You want to take me out on a date?” asked Hermione in confusion. “Why?”

“Because I like you,” Bill said simply.

“But…why?” asked Hermione. “I’m nothing special.”

“To me, you are,” said Bill. “You are to a lot of people. You just won’t let yourself see it.”

“Is this some kind of joke?” asked Hermione. “Did George put you up to this?” She felt tears come to her eyes but refused to let them fall.

“Why would you think this is a joke?” asked Bill. “I would never do that.”

“You could have anyone you wanted,” said Hermione. “I see the way other women look at you— they’d sell their eyeteeth to have a chance at you. You’re probably the most beautiful man I have ever seen in my life, and you’re strong and smart. Why would someone like you be interested in someone like me?”

“What do you mean ‘someone like you’?” asked Bill. “Hermione, you’re bloody gorgeous. You’re smart, funny and you make me happy. You’ve never seen the blokes admiring you?” Hermione shook her head. “They do, you know. I hear them in the shop asking George about you. Wondering how you are or if you are seeing anyone. George never said anything?”

“He mentioned it,” said Hermione. “I just didn’t believe him.”

“George may be a joker, but he would never lie about something like that,” said Bill. “Especially to you.” He hesitated. “You like how I look? You don’t mind the scars?”

“Of course, I like how you look,” said Hermione incredulously. “You are probably the most handsome man I’ve ever seen. I don’t think I’ve ever heard anyone ever say otherwise.”

“Fleur did,” said Bill quietly.

“What?” asked Hermione, not sure she heard correctly.

Bill sighed. “I’ve only ever told Charlie. Fleur left because she wasn’t attracted to me anymore. She told me she thought she could learn to live with the scars, and with some of the other complications that come with a werewolf attack, but in the end, she left.”

Hermione took Bill’s hand. “I’m sorry. Fleur is a fool.” She sat for a moment. “What other complications?”

“Nothing much. I prefer my steaks rare. Strong sense of smell. My temper and my… well, my libido tend to increase at the full moon. I’ve never hurt anyone, and I don’t turn into a wolf— it’s just harder to maintain control. Everything together was too much for her.”

“Well, that’s stupid,” said Hermione.
Bill laughed. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard anyone put it quite that way,” he said.

“Besides, I have scars too,” Hermione said. She hesitated before pushing her sleeve up and showing Bill her arm. He could see the word “Mudblood” as plain as day. Bill drew his breath when he saw it.

“I’m sorry,” he said, as she rolled her sleeve back down. “But there’s more to it than just your scar.” He took her hand. “Hermione, why on earth would you think I wouldn’t like you? That nobody would like you? You keep saying that you’re no one special- why it’s so obvious to everyone that you are amazing. When you and Ron and Harry showed up at Shell Cottage that day, even though you had obviously been tortured, you were still so self-assured and in control. You’ve faced way worse than Ron leaving you. What changed?”

Hermione fidgeted with her cup while she thought of how to answer his question. He had opened up to her about Fleur- he trusted her with his secret. Maybe she should trust him. She got up and went into her bedroom, opening a drawer and pulled out a tattered piece of paper and handed it to him. “I’ve never let anyone else read this,” she said. “Not even Harry.” She waited at the kitchen sink, staring out the window while Bill read the letter.

She heard his sharp intake of breath. “Oh, Hermione…no…” she heard him say quietly. He put the paper down and came to stand in front of her, his hands on her shoulders. She looked away, humiliated, but he wouldn’t let her stay that way. He made her look at him, and she was startled to see tears in his eyes. “Hermione, you can’t believe what he wrote,” he said. “Those,” he pointed to the letter, “are the pathetic words of a man trying to justify his actions to himself. Trying to make himself believe he is doing the right thing. I shouldn’t even call him a man. This is a boy acting out, trying to make himself bigger than he is.” Hermione looked down, tears falling. Bill wiped them away with his thumb, cupping her face in his hand. “I wish I could convince you of exactly how wrong you are about yourself. I wish I could just take this paper away and make you forget about it.” He took her by the hand. “Come on,” he said. He led her to the living room and sat down with her.

“He obviously meant it,” said Hermione. “Or he wouldn’t have written it.”

“Trust me,” said Bill. “He didn’t mean it. That doesn’t mean that he isn’t a complete git, because he is, but he wrote those things thinking with the wrong head if you know what I mean.” Hermione blushed. “In fact, I’ll bet he regrets leaving. If this Lavender is anything like what Mum and Ginny say, then I know he does. What would you do if he came back? Would you go back to him?”

“No,” said Hermione. “The things he said- I can’t ever forget them. Even if you say he didn’t mean them- there has to be something behind it. He wouldn’t have written them if he didn’t think it was true- at least in some part.”

“I don’t know,” said Bill. “What I do know is that he is full of it. You are going to make some lucky bloke very happy someday because you are beautiful, intelligent, kind and brave. And that’s why I asked you to dinner.” Hermione inhaled- not sure of how to answer. Bill squeezed her hand. “I’ll tell you what- you think about it. You don’t have to answer me now. My offer still stands- and I’ll be waiting.”

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Molly walked into her kitchen to find Bill and Arthur sitting at the table, a glass of firewhiskey in front of each of them. “What’s wrong?” she asked. “Is it Ron?”
Bill took a sip from his glass and put it down. “I was just telling Dad to stop looking for
him- and why. I can’t tell you all of it- I promised Hermione I wouldn’t.” Bill sighed. “He’s your
son, and I know you love him and are worried about him, Mum. But Ron is dead to me.”
Two years after the Wedding

Molly jumped, seeing Hermione’s face in the fireplace. “Molly, you need to come to St. Mungo’s right away. Andromeda just came in.”

“Oh…oh dear,” said Molly. “Should I get Arthur?”

“Probably would be a good idea,” said Hermione.

Molly and Arthur hurried into the hospital and found Hermione, who was carrying Teddy. Andromeda didn’t have any close family anymore. She and her surviving sister, Narcissa were on speaking terms since the war but were not close, and Ted Tonks had no surviving family members. “Andromeda has spattergroit,” said Hermione. “I’ve checked out Teddy, and he seems to be okay thank goodness. I don’t know how she kept him from getting it, but Andromeda has had it for a while and is seriously ill. I don’t think she’s going to make it.”

Tears sprang to Molly’s eyes. They had remained close with Andromeda over the years, especially after the war, helping her with Teddy when she needed it- they had been fixtures at family functions over the years. “What can we do?”

“Can you take Teddy?” Hermione asked. “Just for now- until we can decide what to do?”

Molly held out her arms to Teddy, who readily went into them, giggling. His hair changed from black to blue while they were talking. “Of course,” said Molly. “We’ll keep him as long as needed. Arthur, why don’t you kip over to Andy’s and pick up some supplies- clothes, diapers. I’m sure you remember what’s needed. I’ll take Teddy to our place.”

Everyone sat somberly around the table at the Burrow, Andromeda’s passing still sinking in. It made the loss of Ted, Dora, and Remus even more profound, losing the last member of their family. “We’ll take care of the funeral of course- have her buried next to her family,” said Arthur. “But more importantly, what will we do with Teddy?”

“We’ll keep him,” said Molly.

“You shouldn’t have to do that. You’ve raised your children- it’s time for you and Dad to have time to yourselves and spoil your grandchildren. Not start over.” She looked at Harry. “We’d take him, but we’re already trying to juggle James as it is. I’m starting on the Harpies now, and Harry’s schedule is odd hours. There’s only one opening at the childcare center at the Ministry right now. We can figure something out though if no one else can take him.”

“I’ll take him,” said Bill quietly. Everyone turned to look at him. Bill had been thinking about it since Andromeda had gone into the hospital. He wanted a family, and since he didn’t see a wife in his future, he figured this would be the only chance he got.

“Bill, are you sure?” asked Arthur. “This is a pretty big step.”

“I know,” said Bill. He got up and picked Teddy up, gazing at him. “I’ve wanted kids- I
don’t see having any of my own, so I may as well take this chance. Plus- he’s the son of a werewolf. None of us knows what this means- I may be the best equipped to handle anything that comes up.”

“If that’s what you want, Son,” said Arthur. “I think Teddy will be in good hands.”

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Hermione went home that evening deep in thought. It had moved her when Bill volunteered to adopt Teddy. She had never taken Bill up on his offer- every time she thought about it, she would let her doubts get the better of her, and she would end up chickening out. She could feel his eyes on her at family dinners, and they spoke, but he never pushed her. She spent a lot of time thinking about what he said to her that day, not only his opinions on her, but what he felt about himself, and finally realized that maybe she should take a chance.

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The next few days were a whirlwind of activity. After Andromeda’s funeral, the Weasleys went to her home to clean it out and get it ready for sale. They were surprised to see Narcissa Malfoy turn up with Draco and even more surprised when they pitched in to help out. Draco and his wife had a young son, Scorpius, who was a little younger than James. Harry and Draco had struck a cordial relationship over the last few years since they spent so much time at the ministry together- they would never be best friends, but they had eventually gotten to the point where they could joke around and even reminisce about their days at school.

“Hey,” Hermione heard from behind her. She turned to see Draco carrying a box towards her. “I understand that Bill Weasley is going to take Teddy. I found some things he may need- where should I put them?”

“Just put them here for now,” said Hermione. Draco set the box down and turned back to her.

“I haven’t seen you in a long time,” said Draco. “How are you?” He stopped awkwardly. “I’m sorry about the engagement and all…Ron’s a prat. I think you dodged a bullet.”

“Thanks,” said Hermione. “I’ve been ok- I stay busy at St. Mungos. You?”

“Good,” said Draco. “Scorp is a bit of a handful. Astoria is ridiculous- arranged marriages are a joke.” He looked at her. “This may be a strange question, but have you heard from Cormac McLaggan at all?”

“No, why?” asked Hermione.

“I’ve just been hearing some talk- he said he’s going to try chatting you up and taking you out,” said Draco. “He’s an ass.”

Hermione snorted. “That’s putting it mildly.”

“Well, I just wanted to warn you,” said Draco. “He’s not the type to take no for an answer. He’s also been threatening anyone he thinks might ask you out.”

“Great, I remember how persistent he can be,” said Hermione. “Thanks for the warning though. Have you found any family heirlooms?”

“Mum found a few. She’s decided to leave them for Teddy though.” Draco ran a hand
through his hair. “She feels bad that she ignored Andromeda all those years. I’m glad they got to reconnect- Mum wouldn’t have forgiven herself if they hadn’t. Well, I’d better get back to it.”

Draco nodded and left to go back to work.

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Bill looked around the house that had been cleaned out. The furniture had been left behind since no one needed it, but all of Andromeda’s things had been cleared out and taken care of. After thinking a little while he went to find Molly. “Mum- are there plans for the house?”

“We were going to put it up for sale. Why?” asked Molly.

“I think I want to buy it,” he said. “Shell Cottage is great, but it’s not a good place to bring Teddy up- too near the water. This place is close to everyone. Honestly, I can’t think of a better place to bring up a little boy. Plus, he’s lost so much already. He shouldn’t lose his home too. Shell Cottage can go back to being a retreat for everyone.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea,” said Molly.

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Hermione came outside to sit down next to Bill on the porch. “I overheard your conversation with Molly, about buying the house,” she said. “I think it’s wonderful.”

Bill smiled. “I was sitting here wondering if I made the right decision. If you like it, I guess that clinches it.” He stood up. “I suppose I should go tell Mum and Dad and Mrs. Malfoy so they can make the arrangements.”

Hermione stood up. “Bill, wait.” She stood awkwardly, trying to figure out what to say. She took his hand in hers. “I know you have Teddy now, and that there’s going to be some adjustment. I…well, I want to take you up on your offer. For dinner. If you still want to, that is.” She stood there lamely, unsure the offer was still on the table.

Bill squeezed her hand. “I do still want to. Would you mind terribly if a toddler accompanied us?” He drew her in for a hug. “I told you I’d be waiting,” he whispered.

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“Harry!” He turned at Ginny’s frantic whisper and saw her waving him over to the window. “Quick!” He came over and looked to where Ginny was pointing to see Bill and Hermione hugging. “Do you think…”

Harry cut her off. “Don’t get overexcited, Gin,” he said. “You’ll freak them out. Give them a chance to figure things out yeah?”

“Spoilsport,” said Ginny. She sighed. “I hope they get together.”
Two years, one month after the wedding

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the chapter names- it's how I kept track of the timeline.

Hermione found herself spending more and more time with Bill and Teddy. Between helping Bill move and get settled in his new home and with Teddy, and still working, it was almost a month later that they finally got to go out for dinner- just the two of them. She was nervous- she hadn’t been on a real dinner date in over two years, and though she knew Bill, she couldn’t shake her jitters. Ginny had come over to help her get ready, and to pick up Teddy when Bill arrived. “Hermione, it’s going to be fine. You two have been dancing around each other for months. You know you like him, and he likes you.”

“This is different,” said Hermione. “What happens if this doesn’t work out? Maybe this was a mistake.”

“You know it isn’t,” said Ginny. “You two have known each other forever; you have a ton in common. He obviously knows things about you that no one else does, and vice versa. Take things one day at a time, ok?” They both looked up when there was a knock at the door, and Ginny went to open the door. Teddy toddled in grinning, holding a bouquet of flowers in his hands and he ran up to give them to Hermione.

“Are those from you, little man?” cooed Hermione. “Thank you so much!” Teddy giggled and clung to Hermione’s leg. She looked at the flowers and noticed that Bill had put a great deal of thought into the blooms again- she had purchased a book on flower meanings after his last bouquet and made a mental note to look at it later.

“Hey now,” said Bill. “No taking credit, Teddy. She’s my date.” He scooped Teddy up and planted a kiss on the top of his head before handing him off to Ginny. “Mum floo’d me before I left- George wants everyone to come around tomorrow- he’s setting up a portkey. Won’t say why.”

“Alright then,” said Ginny. “I’ll let Harry know.” She settled Teddy on her hip and grabbed his bag. “We can keep him overnight,” she said, eyebrows waggling. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” she sang as she sailed out the door.

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After dinner, they took a walk in one of the local parks. Bill took her hand as they walked. “I hope you’re having a good time,” he said. “I have to admit that I was nervous.”

“I was too,” Hermione admitted. “I am having a good time. I…I should have said yes months ago.”

“I agree,” smiled Bill. They walked along for a while. “So, what do you reckon is up with George? He’s been so secretive lately.”

“I bet it’s a surprise wedding,” said Hermione.
“You think?” asked Bill. “That would be kind of sudden. I think they are going to announce their engagement.”

“Nope,” said Hermione. “Don’t you know your brother at all? If they announce their engagement, Molly will be all over him to have a proper wedding- dress robes, ceremony- the works. That’s not George, and I think Angelina feels the same way.”

“Care to make a wager?” asked Bill. “Loser buys dinner?”

“You’re on.”


Hermione invited Bill in for some coffee when they returned to her flat since he didn’t have to pick up Teddy until the morning. He watched her as she puttered around the kitchen, getting coffee ready and cutting up a pie she had made earlier in the day. It had been a fantastic night, and Bill was thrilled that things were finally starting to get sorted out for them. He hadn’t told his Mum and Dad that he was taking Hermione out- he didn’t want Mum to get her hopes up, but the more time he spent with Hermione, the more he could see them having a future together. He hoped that she saw the same thing. He wanted to kiss her but was hesitant- afraid it would be too soon. “Thank you for the flowers, Bill. They mean something, don’t they?”

“They do.” Bill smiled. “Mum taught us how to pick them- something about wooing the ladies and giving her grandchildren. A lot can be said with flowers that may not be easily spoken out loud. I find I enjoy taking the time to select just the right message- especially for those that mean something to me.” He winked at her. “I’ll let you figure those out on your own.”

As their evening drew to a close, Hermione got up to see Bill out. He stopped at the door and pulled her into his arms. “I hope we can do this again,” he said. “I enjoyed this.”

“I’d like that,” said Hermione. She looked up at him, conscious of how handsome he was and felt herself tremble a little. “I’ll see you tomorrow, for when I win the bet?”

Bill chuckled. “A little over-confident, Granger?” he asked. “I already know where you’re going to take me.” He reached up and cupped her face in his hand. “You look wonderful tonight. I can’t wait to see you tomorrow.” Unable to resist, he leaned down and brushed his lips across hers, a sweet kiss that left her with the promise of more in the future.

After he left, she went to study her flowers and smiled. Yellow rose- affection, purple rose- enchantment, honeysuckle- devoted affection, ranunculus- you are radiant, and purple pansies- you occupy my thoughts. She was a lucky girl.


The portkey brought them all to a beach, where they found George and Angelina waiting for them, smiling. “Welcome to our wedding!” called George.

“Your wedding?” asked Molly, confused. “Georgie, what...oh, you’re getting married!” She grabbed George and hugged him, following up with hugging Angelina, while Ginny squealed in delight. Hermione grinned as she caught Bill’s eye.


After the wedding, they went to a local restaurant to have dinner, all taken care of by the Bride and Groom. After a few toasts, George and Angelina stood up. “I have another
announcement,” called George. He looked at Angelina for a moment. “We’re having a baby,” he said. There were cheers and cries all around for the happy couple.

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“So, I guess I owe you dinner?” asked Bill. Hermione laughed. They had kept their distance from each other for the day, not wanting to take attention away from George and Angelina, and because they weren’t quite at a point to make anything known yet. “It’s good to hear you laugh like that,” he said to her. “It’s been a long time. Ginny just asked- they’re taking James to the Zoo tomorrow and wanted me to bring Teddy. Do you want to come along?”

“I’d love it,” said Hermione.

“…

“Hey, Granger.” Hermione turned and looked to see Cormac McLaggen swaggering up to her. She had come to Diagon Alley to run some errands and stop in to see Bill at their shop- they had re-opened there about a year before. She was hoping maybe he would be free for lunch. She groaned inwardly, thinking of what Draco had said.

“McLaggen,” she said flatly. “Do you need something?”

“How are ya?” he asked. “It’s been a long time. You’ve filled out nicely.”

“Um…thanks,” she said. “If you’ll excuse me, I have some running to do.”

“I could join you,” said Cormac. “I’ve meant to get in touch with you anyway. Want to go out sometime?” He tried to take her arm so he could escort her along.

“No thank you,” said Hermione. “I’m seeing someone.”

“No, you aren’t,” said Cormac. “Everyone knows you haven’t been out with anyone since Weasley ran off. Come on, Granger. I’ll show you a good time.”

“I said no, Cormac,” said Hermione. She pulled arm away from him and tried to walk away. “I’m not interested.”

Cormac grabbed her arm again, a little more harshly, his fingers digging in. “No one says no to me, Granger. You know who my father is and who I’m friends with,” he hissed.

“Let go of me,” said Hermione. Her fingers tightened around her wand.

“Yeah, let go of her.” She and Cormac turned around to find Bill and George standing there; wands pointed at McLaggen’s head. “Don’t even think of naming names McLaggen. Most of your dad’s mates aren’t in the Ministry anymore. She’s not interested. So get while the gettings good.”

Cormac dropped Hermione’s arm. “I should have known better than to ask you out anyway. You’re nothing but a frigid bitch- just like Weasley said. No wonder he was running around on you with anyone he could stick his dick in. I just thought maybe you needed a real man to show you a good time.” He sauntered off, leaving Hermione standing in the street.

She felt a hand on her arm and jumped. “It’s just me,” said Bill. He put his arm around her shoulder. “Come on inside. We can floo over to my house from there.” She felt George’s eyes on her as they walked into the shop.
“Bill, is Hermione here?” Harry had come to Bill’s house after George had contacted him.

“She’s here- she’s been asleep for a few hours. Why?” asked Bill.

“Is she ok?” asked Harry. “George told me what happened. I…sort of took it upon myself to track McLaggen down. Well…George, Draco and I did.”

“What did you do?” asked Bill. “Do I want to know?”

Harry hesitated. “Draco used legilimency on him- wanting to know if what he said was true. If Ron said and did those things.” Bill remained quiet. “It was true,” Harry said. “I had hoped that it wasn’t. How much does Hermione know?”

“She knows enough,” said Bill. “She’ll talk about it when she’s ready.”

“But she’s told you?” asked Harry. Bill nodded. Harry studied Bill for a moment. “You’re going to be good to her?”

“You know I will,” said Bill. Harry nodded and turned to leave. “Harry, do I want to know what the three of you did to him?”

“Probably not.”

Hermione came to the kitchen to find Bill cooking breakfast and Teddy sitting in a booster seat with a juice and snack in front of him. “Hey,” he said when he saw her standing there. “Feeling better?”

“Yes,” she said uncertainly. “Did I sleep through the night?”

“You needed it,” said Bill. “I made arrangements for you at work- they know you aren’t coming in. I took the day myself. I thought the three of us could spend it together. We don’t need to go anywhere unless you want to.”

“You didn’t have to do that,” said Hermione.

“I know,” said Bill. “I wanted to. But if you want to be alone, or if you’d rather go to work, I’ll understand. I know I took some liberties.”

“No, I think I’d like to spend the day with you and Teddy,” said Hermione. She sat down at the table and cut up some more banana for Teddy. Bill watched her interact with the little boy for a few minutes before turning back to his cooking.

They spent a quiet day together, taking Teddy to the park and having a picnic lunch. Bill could tell that Hermione hadn’t forgotten what happened with Cormac, but he didn’t want to push her on it until she was ready. After he laid Teddy down for a nap, he went to find Hermione, who was sitting on the sofa in the sitting room and he sat down next to her.

“You’re still upset?” he asked her.

Hermione didn’t say anything for a while. “Do you think what he said was true- that Ron said those things about me?”
Bill looked down for a moment. “It’s true,” he said. “Harry stopped by last night. I guess Draco Malfoy used legilimency on him and confirmed. I’m so sorry. I wasn’t sure you would want to know.”

“I think that what he said to other people hurts more than the fact that he cheated on me,” said Hermione. “I wonder who else he told.”

“Well, obviously not anyone who matters- none of your friends knew,” said Bill. “You know they would have said something.” He put his arm around her and drew her close. “We’ve never talked much about it,” said Bill. “Did Ron pressure you?”

“All the time,” said Hermione. “You all thought he pressured me into the wedding because he wanted to money and attention. That was only part of it. I…well, I wanted to wait until my wedding night,” she said, looking away in embarrassment.

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about, Hermione,” said Bill. “I take it you…”

“Still a virgin,” said Hermione. “He’d get so mad sometimes- and he’d leave. Stupid me, I thought he was going out to the pub. Here he was cheating on me the whole time.” They sat together on the couch for a while, neither saying anything. “Does it bother you?” she asked timidly.

“Not at all,” said Bill. “Hermione, there’s nothing wrong with wanting to wait.” Bill found it refreshing. He, of course, being a curse breaker, and devastatingly handsome had never lacked for female attention, and Fleur had been no stranger to sex when they married, but he would never stoop to pressuring someone who felt differently. “I think it shows how strong you are, and makes me respect you more than I already did.”

They sat together; both lost in their thoughts when Bill spoke up again. “Is that note why you’ve been so quiet all this time? Everyone has said something at some point- how you’re not the same person you were. You don’t speak up anymore, you don’t offer your opinions, even when asked. Is it because of what he wrote?” Hermione shrugged. “It’s not true, you know. People miss you, Hermione. Your old school mates come into the shop and ask after you all the time.”

“I think he was right,” said Hermione. “I’m too bossy and opinionated. I wonder how many times someone came to me to sound off just to get some sympathy and ended up getting a lecture instead.”

“You were young,” said Bill. “Everyone does mental stuff when they’re young. You can’t be defined by how you were as a teenager- if they were the case, we’d all be doomed. As you grew and matured, you learned how to do both- be sympathetic and give good advice. And you always have the person’s best interests at heart, and admit when you’re wrong. I wasn’t there the last night you saw Ron, but I’ll bet that he said what he said because he was jealous that you were moving ahead in your chosen profession when he had given up on his and taken a job with his brother. You always worked for your goal and made it, and it probably drove him crazy that he fell short.”

“People ask about me?” Hermione asked quietly. “Even after all this time?”

“You need to get out more,” said Bill. “Everyone from the DA has stopped into the shop at some point and asked about you. They all want to see you.” He squeezed Hermione to him. “I wish you’d have said something long ago- we could all have told you how much you are loved.” He wiped Hermione’s tears as he talked. “I’m glad you’re finally opening up about it.”
“You make it easy,” said Hermione, snuggling into Bill’s side.

………

“SURPRISE!!!!!!” Hermione jumped when she entered the door to the pub and looked up to see all her friends and family standing in a festively decorated room. “Happy Late Birthday!!!!” Bill and Ginny had managed to organize several people to attend- all the original DA members, the Weasleys, fellow healers from St. Mungo’s, and even Draco Malfoy were in attendance. Hermione spent the next hour being hugged and talked to be people she had not seen in over two years and she felt amazed by what she saw. Later in the evening, she felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to find Bill smiling at her. “Told you.”

………

Bill escorted Hermione home from her party and they lingered a few moments in the doorway before she invited him in. “Thank you,” she said. “The party was amazing.”

“You deserve it,” said Bill. “You had plenty of dance partners tonight, I see.”

“Well, so did you,” said Hermione. “All those younger women making eyes at the dashing Bill Weasley…”

“I only saw you,” said Bill. He put his arms around her waist and drew her close as her arms wrapped around his neck. “I only ever see you,” he said as he brought his lips to hers.

………

“Hi Ginny,” Hermione came into the house on Grimmauld place to find Ginny in the kitchen with James in his high chair.

“Hermione!” said Ginny. “This is a nice surprise!”

“I came to thank you for the party,” said Hermione. “It was nice to see everyone again.”

“It was Bill’s idea you know,” said Ginny. “I just helped him get in touch with everyone. Sooo? Anything you want to tell me about you and Bill?” Hermione’s cheeks turned red, and she looked away. “Are you together?”

“We haven’t labeled anything,” said Hermione. “I think I’d like to, though…”

“What’s stopping you?” asked Ginny as she wiped James’ face and handed him a cookie. “I think you two would be grand together.”

“You don’t think it’s weird?” asked Hermione. “He’s the brother of my ex-fiance- don’t you think people will think it odd?”

“I think most people will think you traded up,” said Ginny. “Hermione, it doesn’t matter to those who love you. A lot of us have been watching the two of you for a while, even Mum and Dad. Charlie yelled at Bill to get a move on and ask you out before someone else did. The two of you are better together- you’ve both started acting like your old selves since you started spending more time together.”

“But…”

“Hermione,” said Ginny. “No one is expecting you to get married straightaway or
anything. Spend time together, have a good time and see where it goes. If it doesn’t work out, which personally, I don’t see happening, we can talk about it then.”

“Thanks, Ginny.” Hermione sat down at the table, not sure what to say next- she had a lot to think about. “Gin, why do you have a muggle paper?”

“Harry brought it home,” said Ginny. “Check out page 3…”

A young man was found wandering naked by the side of the road on Wimpole Street, Westminster early Tuesday morning. Having no identification, he was taken to Nightengale Hospital as he was brandishing a tree branch and claiming he was a wizard. He is of large build with blond hair and green eyes and is approximately twenty-four years old. Anyone searching for a person of this description should call the hospital as soon as possible.

Hermione shook her head. “They didn’t…”

Ginny laughed. “Don’t worry; Harry plans on anonymously contacting Cormac’s dad today to let him know. He was only confunded- he’ll be fine eventually.”
“Bill, I have some news,” said Molly. She had stopped by his house to drop off some clothes for Teddy and some casseroles for the two of them. She hesitated as he looked at her. “Fleur contacted us looking for you.”

“Fleur? Why?” asked Bill. They hadn’t spoken in almost two years after Bill had made sure that she wouldn’t walk away from the marriage with anything more than she had brought in, which wasn’t much.

“She didn’t say,” sniffed Molly, “And we didn’t ask. Have you talked to her?”

“Not since the divorce,” said Bill. “I don’t feel the need to either. We have no business to discuss.”

“Well, we didn’t tell her where you were,” said Molly. “She left her information and asked that you contact her. She said it was urgent.”

Bill sighed. He didn’t want to contact her, and he didn’t think he would. If it was that important, she could find him. “Thanks for letting me know, Mum.”

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Bill heard more about it the next day when he went into the joke shop. “Oi- Bill,” said George. “Your ex was in here looking for you.”

“Here too?” asked Bill. “She contacted Mum and Dad too. Did she say what she wanted? She wouldn’t tell them.”

“Nah,” said George. “She just said it was important. What do you reckon she wants?”

“No idea,” said Bill. “Everything was settled a long time ago- I can’t imagine what she needs.”

“You don’t think she maybe had a kid and it’s yours?” asked George. “That happened to a friend of mine- ex-girlfriend showed up after three years with his kid. It was a huge mess.”

“I don’t think so,” said Bill. “We hadn’t been together for months- I think I would have noticed- timing wise. I told Mum I didn’t want to see her. There’s no reason for it.”

“It’s only a matter of time before she tracks you down, mate,” said George. “I’d be ready if I were you.”

………

“You’re quiet tonight,” said Hermione. They were eating dinner at Bill’s house and laughing at Teddy, who was growing his ears to different sizes. “Is there something wrong?”

“Mum and George have both told me that Fleur is looking to get in contact- she tried the Burrow and the joke shop,” said Bill. He had debated telling Hermione about it and decided that honesty was the best policy. “I don’t know why, but I don’t plan on talking to her.”

“You may not have a choice,” said Hermione. “If she knows you’re working at George’s shop, it’s only a matter of time that she finds out where you live.”
Bill sighed. “George said the same thing. I wonder if I should contact her and be done with it. Maybe a public place- so she can’t make a scene.”

“You know her better than I do,” said Hermione. She hesitated. “What if she wants you back?” she asked quietly.

“She can stuff it,” said Bill. He looked at Hermione who was looking dejectedly at her plate. “Hey,” he said taking her hand. “You have nothing to worry about.”

“She’s part Veela,” said Hermione. “She has her ways.”

“And I know about them,” said Bill. “She has no sway over me anymore- now that I see her for what she really is.” He got up and pulled Teddy out of his high chair, wiping his face before starting to carry him into the living room while Hermione put the dishes in the sink and followed him. After putting Teddy down by his toys, he took Hermione by the hand and pulled her into his embrace. “You’re not the only one who traded up, you know,” he said caressing her cheek. “If you don’t want me to see her, I won’t. I only thought about it so I could put this behind me- not because I want to see her.”

“I know,” said Hermione. “I understand- I just… I don’t want to lose you.”

“You won’t,” said Bill.

“I think you’re right,” said Hermione. “Maybe you should see her and get it out of the way.”

“If I do,” said Bill, “maybe after that, it would be time to tell people about us? I think most suspect anyway, but it would be nice to be out in the open- if you’re ok with it.”

“I think I would like that,” said Hermione.

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Bill watched as Fleur approached him at the restaurant. She was as lovely as ever, lithe and willowy, her silvery blond hair cascading down, and she still emanated a faint glow- a gift of her Veela heritage. She stopped at the table where he stood, ever the gentleman, and studied him. He still wore his long hair in a ponytail with a few wisps framing his handsome face, and he still filled out his leather jacket like no one’s business. His fang earring glinted in the firelight, but that light did not reach his bright blue eyes at all. He was not glad to see her. “Fleur,” he said in a flat voice, waiting for her to take her seat before sitting down again. “I understand you have urgent business?”

“In good time, Bill,” cooed Fleur. “Why don’t we have dinner first and then we can talk- maybe a walk outside? It’s a lovely night.”

“Yes, it is, but I have plans for later,” said Bill. “I’d prefer to get this over with if it’s all the same to you.”

Fleur looked taken aback. “Why don’t we order, and then we can talk while we wait,” she said. They gave their order to the waiter- salad for Fleur, rare steak for Bill and then sat quietly.

“Well?” asked Bill.

“How are you?” asked Fleur.
“I’m fine,” said Bill. He wasn’t going to make this easy, and he had no desire for basic niceties at this point.

Fleur played with her water goblet for a few minutes before speaking again. “I’ve missed you,” she finally said. Bill stared at her in disbelief. Fleur swallowed and continued. “I…I wanted to explain.”

“What’s to explain?” asked Bill. “You were no longer attracted to me, and you left. And not only that, you wanted to try to take the cottage that was in our family for generations, and whatever money you could get your hands on, even though you didn’t work. I don’t think there’s any more to it.”

“It wasn’t my idea,” said Fleur frantically.

“Wasn’t your id…wait…there was someone else, wasn’t there?” asked Bill sharply.

“He bewitched me,” cried Fleur. “He had me under a love potion. I’ve only just gotten away from him. You must believe me!” Bill looked at her skeptically. “It’s true, Bill. You were the only one for me…it wasn’t my fault.”

Bill didn’t say anything but continued to watch Fleur as she pleaded with him. Fleur nervously drank her water, while she waited for Bill to speak. Taking another sip, she shivered slightly. When Bill saw her shiver, he smiled slightly and steepled his fingers under his chin. “Now then…” he said. “Do tell me again about why you left me.”

“I was cheating on you,” said Fleur. “With an old friend from Beauxbatons. He was very wealthy.” Fleur clapped her hands over her mouth, shocked at what had come out. “You spiked my water?”

“Veritaserum,” said Bill. “I had a feeling about this. So…why are you back? You may as well stay and answer my questions, Fleur.”

Fleur lowered her hands slowly. “We didn’t work out. He wanted the cottage and whatever money I could get, and now he has nothing. All his money is gone. I was hoping…”

“You were hoping that I hadn’t moved on,” said Bill. “That I’d still be sitting in Shell Cottage by myself waiting for you?” Fleur blushed and looked down. “Why on earth did you think I would take you back?”

“You once said I was the best you ever had,” said Fleur. “And you were the best I ever had. We had fire together Bill- I thought you would want to rekindle that.”

“You were wrong,” said Bill. “You hurt me too badly- I could never trust you again.” He looked up as the waiter put his steak in front of him. “So, there was no love potion?”

“No,” said Fleur. She looked down at her food. “You’ve moved on?” she asked.

“That’s none of your business,” said Bill. He waved the waiter over and asked for a box. When his food was packed up, he put some money on the table. “I think I’m done here,” he said in disgust. “There are a million things I could say, but I find that I want to get away from here and away from you.”

Bill arrived at his house and stopped to watch Hermione and Teddy through the
window. He smiled to watch her lift Teddy over her head and bringing him down to blow raspberries on his belly, and let himself in the house, making Hermione jump. “You’re back so soon?” she asked. He put his things down to scoop up Teddy who ran to him and jumped into his arms. He could see the faint bit of worry in Hermione’s eyes as he settled Teddy in his arms.

“I’ll tell you about it in a minute,” he said. “It’s time for this one’s jammies and a snack first.”

After Teddy had been put to bed for the night, he sat down with Hermione on the sofa. “Hey,” he said gently. “I told you that you had nothing to worry about.” He pulled her into his arms and told her about what happened, leaving nothing out. “I can’t believe she tried to blame everything on a love potion,” he said.

Hermione stayed quiet while she processed everything he had said and then leaned over and kissed him. “I’m glad you told me everything.”

“Are you ok with it?” asked Bill.

Hermione hesitated. “I am,” she finally said. “I guess- sometimes, I forget that you were married and that you’ve probably had loads of other girlfriends.”

“I’ve dated my fair share I suppose,” said Bill. “Does it matter?”

“No,” said Hermione. “I just… I’ve only ever been in a relationship with Ron. Viktor was great- but I think we both knew that there was no future there. I worry that maybe…I don’t know…I know you like adventure- you were a curse breaker- your girlfriends were probably all just as gorgeous as Fleur was. I don’t think I can compare…and that I want to wait until marriage? You must think I’m a child.”

“Hermione,” said Bill. “of course, I don’t think that. It’s not like you had it easy during the majority of your early dating years. Hunting Horcruxes…being in the middle of a war… Then after that the war ended, you counted on a life with the person you had fallen in love with, and it didn’t work out, and it left you afraid to try again. You knew what you wanted, and you stuck to it in spite of being pressured. I happen to think that you’re amazing, and I love the time we spend together. I also happen to find you incredibly sexy, and I don’t mind waiting for you.”

Hermione blushed. No one had ever referred to her as sexy, or even beautiful, not even Ron when he had been trying to get into her pants. Bill held her as she broke down. “No one’s ever said that to me before,” she whispered.

“Well get used to it,” said Bill. “I’ll say it to you every day as long as you’ll have me. You’re a catch, ‘Mione.”. He drew his lips to hers, parting hers as he deepened the kiss, tightening his arms around her. She responded eagerly, leaning into him and sighing as she felt his tongue enter her mouth. Bill was an amazing kisser, and it wasn’t long before she wanted more. Reluctantly, she pulled away from him and smiled as he cupped her face in his hands. “That was nice,” he said. He kissed her again, savoring her lips against his. He had forgotten how exciting taking a big step in a relationship could be- and this one meant more to him than anyone ever had before, including his ex-wife. He wasn’t sure if it was because of how long he and Hermione had known each other, or because of how their connection had deepened over the last several months- he just knew that he wanted to make the most of this new relationship and make her happy.

………

Molly greeted her eldest son with a hug and a kiss when he arrived for Family Dinner on Sunday before picking Teddy up, delighting in holding a young one again. “Mum, can you keep an eye on Teddy for a moment,” asked Bill. “I wanted to have a quick word with Dad.” Molly
looked at him, concerned, before putting Teddy in a chair at the table and giving him some pieces of banana. “Nothing to worry about,” reassured Bill. “Just a quick chat.”

“Something on your mind, Son?” asked Arthur. Bill had found him and pulled him into his workshop before the others saw. “Is everything all right?”

“I just… I was going to make an announcement at dinner today, but I…I’m not sure how people will take it.” Bill fidgeted with a box of batteries Arthur had set on the workbench as he spoke. “I thought maybe I would run it past you first. I’d run it past Mum, but she gets pretty emotional and…”

“Bill, I understand,” said Arthur. “Why don’t you come out with it and we can talk about it. Is this about Fleur? Are you getting back together?”

“No,” said Bill. “Not that she didn’t want to.” He quickly told Arthur about his meeting with Fleur. “I wouldn’t go back with her anyway, not after everything. I’m seeing someone—well… it’s new, but, well, we were going to say something at dinner.”

“Hermione?” Arthur asked. Bill blushed a little. “What’s bothering you about it?” asked Arthur. “We all know you’ve been spending time with her.”

“She’s Ron’s ex-fiancé,” said Bill. “And I’m ten years older than her…”

“Is that stopping you from caring about her?” asked Arthur.

“I’m just worried what you all will think,” said Bill.

“You brought Hermione back to us,” said Arthur. “She’s coming back to be the girl we all loved, and that’s thanks to you. Not to mention the changes we’ve seen in you since you started spending more time together.” Arthur put his hand on his son’s shoulder. “I don’t think there is a person here today that will say a thing about it.”

Bill made a point to sit next to Hermione at dinner and noticed that no one seemed to be giving them any sideways glances. The conversation went on normally while they ate until George spoke up. “So, Bill… did you see her?” Everyone stopped eating and turned to look at Bill. News of Fleur’s visit had gotten around, but no one knew the details.

“George,” scolded Molly. “That’s Bill’s business.”

“It’s all right, Mum,” said Bill. “I don’t mind.” He told everyone what Fleur had said and that he had turned her down. “I don’t know what she was thinking.” He glanced at Hermione. “Besides, I’m seeing someone now… someone loads better than her.” He took Hermione’s hand in his and entwined their fingers, glancing at Molly to see what she would say.

Molly looked at their hands and at the two of them and smiled. She knew they were growing closer—she had seen it when she saw how upset Bill was about Ron. “Well, if you’re happy, we’re happy,” she said. “I don’t think there is a person here who would disagree.”
Love is in the air

“He’s adorable George,” cooed Hermione as she held baby Fred in her arms. She felt Bill’s arm go around her waist as she talked with Angelina while bouncing the baby a little and leaned into him. Bill called Teddy over to take a peek at his new cousin and smiled as the blue haired boy patted the baby on the head. Hermione carefully placed the baby back in Angelina’s arms and sat down to chat for a while Bill set Teddy down to toddle around the room again.

……..

“Things are going well?” asked Charlie. He and Bill were out at the pub for a few after baby Fred’s first Family Dinner.

“Things are good,” said Bill. “The shops are successful; Teddy is growing like a weed, the family is all good…”

“You know what I meant, mate,” said Charlie. “How are things with Hermione?”

Bill smiled. “Really good,” he said. “It’s nice to be with someone who is her own person- she works hard and loves her job. After Fleur- who was happy to sit around and collect my paychecks- it’s quite a difference. And she’s so good with Teddy.”

“Sounds serious,” said Charlie. “Said the big L word yet?”

Bill hesitated. “I’ve been afraid to,” he admitted. “I don’t want to scare her away. It might be too soon.”

“How long has it been?” asked Charlie.

“About six months,” said Bill. “I do love her. She’s everything I could imagine in a partner. I just don’t know how to tell her.”

“Wow,” said Charlie. “Fleur did a number on you. What happened to the overconfident, egotistical brother I once knew?” Bill didn’t say anything. “You already know that Hermione is a huge improvement over Fleur and that every person in our family approves of the two of you. Tell her.”

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“Teddy!” Hermione chased after the chubby three-year-old who was zooming around the house on a toy broom, an ill-advised gift from his Godfather. She caught a vase he had clipped as he passed, saving it from an untimely breaking and put it back on the table, just in time to see him collide with an ottoman and go flying off his broom. She caught up with him as he started wailing and picked him up, checking him over for injuries.

“What was that?” Bill came running into the room and saw Hermione holding Teddy, who had blood on his face. “What happened?” He rushed over, taking Teddy in his arms.

“He hit the ottoman and fell off his broom,” said Hermione. “I couldn’t keep up with him. Bring him to the bathroom so I can check him over.” She hurried to the bathroom, bringing out the first aid kit and started pulling things out as Bill followed her, Teddy still screaming in his arms. Bill shushed Teddy as Hermione treated his injuries- a small cut on his face and a bump on his forehead. “Here, Teddy,” she soothed, “This will sting for just a second and then it won’t hurt
“I want Daddy to do it!” cried Teddy as he clung to Bill. Bill stopped when he said that- it was the first time Teddy had ever called him that. He felt tears come to his eyes, realizing how much he loved hearing Teddy call him Daddy.

“Come on, buddy,” said Bill. “I’ll sit with you.” He carried Teddy over to the couch and sat down with him cradled in his arms. Hermione brought an ice pack over and gently placed it on Teddy’s head. “You’ll be fine. Now maybe you’ll learn to slow down on that broom, yeah?” Teddy nodded miserably and settled in as Bill cradled him in his arms. “Thank Hermione for fixing your hurts?” Bill said to him.

Teddy shifted his gaze over the Hermione. “Thank you, Miney,” he said. Hermione smiled and kissed him on the forehead before stepping back and heading to the bathroom to clean up the mess. She stopped when Teddy asked, “Are you my Mummy?” Bill and Hermione glanced at each other, not sure how to answer. “Scorp has a Mummy,” Teddy continued. “And James, and Freddie. Everyone has a Mummy. Are you mine?”

“I wish I were,” said Hermione quietly. They hadn’t prepared for Teddy’s questions, not knowing what he would ask or when. She sat down on the couch next to Bill and Teddy and looked at the two of them. “I’ll tell you what- why don’t you sleep for a little bit, and we can talk about it later if you still want to.” Teddy looked tired but mutinous.

“She’s right, Buddy,” said Bill as he rubbed Teddy’s shoulder. “I’ll hold you here while you sleep- it’s naptime anyway.” They sat quietly as Teddy drifted off to sleep.

“I’m sorry,” said Hermione. “I tried to keep up with him.”

“It was only a matter of time,” said Bill. “He’s a terror on that thing- I’ve even charmed the broom to stay in its lowest setting, and he’s still all over the place. I think I’ll have to confiscate it for a little while.” He looked at Hermione, who sat with tears in her eyes. “Hey, this isn’t your fault,” he said. He took her hand in his. “He’s had near misses before- this could easily have happened if it was me watching him. I should have taken that broom away before.” He looked at the sleeping boy in his arms. “He called me Daddy,” he said quietly. “I...He’s never called me that before.”

“Do you want him to?” asked Hermione.

“I don’t know,” said Bill. “It feels like I’m taking Remus’ place if he calls me that- I want him to know about his parents. “But it felt good when he called me that.”

“You being his daddy won’t change who his parents are,” said Hermione. “You can tell him all about Remus and Dora, keep their pictures up so he’ll know them and the sacrifices they made for him.” She looked up at the mantle to see the family pictures that were perched there- Remus and Dora’s wedding day, and a picture of the two of them, Remus’ hand on Dora’s swollen belly and smiled.

“You don’t think he’d be confused?” asked Bill.

“Kids are smarter than we give them credit for,” said Hermione. “He’s going to grow up with stories about his parents- we’ll make sure of it. There’s a place in his heart for both.” She felt Bill’s eyes on her as she spoke and turned to look at him.
“I love you,” he said quietly. “I should have told you long ago, but I do. What you just said-it was incredible, and it means so much to me. You’ve brought so much into my life- more than I thought I would want again. I’m a fortunate man.”

Hermione exhaled swiftly as he spoke, tears forming as she took in what he said, overwhelmed by his confession, and the sincerity behind his words. Ron had never spoken to her with such earnestness, and she had no doubt Bill meant every word of what he said. Her hand tightened around his, and she leaned in to kiss him before whispering, “I love you too.”
Bill looked up frowning at the knock at the door- it wasn’t Hermione- she just let herself in, as did most of his family, and he wasn’t expecting anyone. Even this long after the war, one couldn’t be too careful, so he grabbed his wand and went to open the door. “Fleur,” he said flatly. “I see you tracked me down. What do you want?”

“Aren’t you going to invite me in?” she asked. “I was hoping to talk to you.” Bill sighed. It was a rare afternoon alone for him since Hermione had taken Teddy to do some clothes shopping and to the park to run off some energy- he didn’t fancy spending his quiet time talking to Fleur. He also knew that she wouldn’t give up easily, so he impatiently waved her in. She sauntered into the house, looking around. “Why did you move here?” she asked. “Shell Cottage was perfect.”

“I have my reasons,” said Bill. He found himself reluctant to say anything about Teddy- mostly because it wasn’t her business. “What do you want, Fleur? I believe I said anything that needed saying the last time we met? We have no more business together.”

Fleur had the decency to at least blush a little. “I still want you back, Bill,” she said. “I was hoping that maybe you had thought about it since the last time we spoke, knowing how I felt about you. We were married and happy once; we could have that again.”

“No, Fleur,” said Bill. “We can’t. You cheated on me. You made me believe I wasn’t good enough for you anymore because of the scars on my face and the wolf in my blood, and then you tried not only to take half the money I earned for our family but our home as well, knowing it had been in my family for years. You hurt me badly enough that it took me a long time to have an ounce of confidence in myself even to start thinking about dating again. Even if I wanted you back, which I don’t, how would I know that you wouldn’t start finding me repulsive again? I believe that’s the word you used last time?”

Fleur sat down on the couch, unable to look at him. “You were always beautiful to me,” she said. “I only said those things because Gabriel forced me to make a choice, and I chose foolishly. I said what I said to make myself believe I was better off without you.”

“So, you chose money over me,” said Bill. “I remember that guy from our wedding- he was there. Were you with him then?”

“No,” said Fleur. “Not until after the war. He had gone to America during the war to avoid everything.”

Bill snorted. “So, you chose a rich coward over me, and now you want me to take you back? There has to be more to it than that.”

“I love you,” said Fleur. “I never stopped. I knew I had made a mistake, but it was difficult to leave.”

“And then your boyfriend ran out of money and found a rich mistress?” asked Bill snidely. Fleur didn’t say anything. “And what exactly would be in it for me to take you back out of all of this? You leave me after destroying my self-confidence and only come back after your boyfriend dumps you and you are out of options. Why don’t you turn on your Veela charm and snag another rich man to take care of you?”
“I don’t want to,” said Fleur. “I never should have left you. We could have had children by now, a loving home- I want that so badly with you.” She stood up again, walking toward him, her glow growing as she drew closer. She looked up at him, giving him that distinctive look that had always enchanted him before, never failed to get a growl out of him before grabbing her and carrying her off to the bedroom and ravishing her. The thought of being with him again made her weak in the knees.

“Do you think that’s going to work?” asked Bill. “I’m not the person I was when I was with you- and I never will be again. My life has completely changed- different home, different job, a whole different life. One that you no longer fit into.” He looked at the clock, knowing Hermione would be back soon. “It’s time for you to go. You need to forget about me.”

“Please, Bill,” pleaded Fleur. “I’m willing to do anything, just take me back.” She flung her arms around her neck and tried to kiss him. “I love you so.”

“Daddy!” Bill groaned and pushed Fleur away, turning to greet Teddy. Teddy ran into the room carrying a kite almost as big as he was. “Look what Miney gave me- if flies without magic!” He stopped short as he spied Fleur. “Who’s that?”

Bill glanced at Fleur, who was staring at Teddy with wide eyes. “No one important,” Bill said as he scooped Teddy up, glancing at Fleur. “She was just leaving. How was your day, Buddy?”

“We bought clothes, and had ice cream, and went to the park,” said Teddy. “Miney took me to see Freddie too. He’s still so little.”

“Teddy,” Bill heard coming from the other room. “Come on; we have to get your new clothes taken care of.” Hermione, loaded down with packages, walked into the room and stopped when she saw Fleur. “Oh,” she said quietly. “Well, why don’t I take Teddy and go upstairs? I’ll leave you be.”

“Hermione,” said Bill. “That’s not necessary.” He looked over at Fleur. “We’re done here. In fact,” he said as he put Teddy down. “I’ll see her out. Wait here.” He walked over to Fleur and indicated that she follow him. They walked out to the front porch where Fleur stopped.

“Since when do you have a child? One old enough that he would have been born while we were married?” she asked.

“Hermione,” said Bill. “That’s not necessary.” He looked over at Fleur. “We’re done here. In fact,” he said as he put Teddy down. “I’ll see her out. Wait here.” He walked over to Fleur and indicated that she follow him. They walked out to the front porch where Fleur stopped.

“Since when do you have a child? One old enough that he would have been born while we were married?” she asked. She looked furious, which made Bill laugh.

“That’s Teddy Lupin,” said Bill. “Don’t you remember the blue hair?”

“He called you Daddy,” said Fleur.

“I adopted him after Andromeda passed away,” said Bill. “At the time, I figured it might be my only chance to have a family. Since his Father was a werewolf, and we don’t know quite what that will mean, I was the most experienced option to take him in.”

“Surely, your parents could have taken him?” asked Fleur. “Doesn’t he tie you down?”

Bill frowned. “No, he doesn’t tie me down,” he said, exasperated. “My parents raised their children. It’s time for them to have a rest- be able to go where they want, visit their grandchildren, or do whatever. Not raise another child. He’s my son, I love him, and he stays with me.”

“Oh, well…I suppose that’s why you moved here then?” she asked.
“Need to know basis,” said Bill. “And you don’t need to know.”

“And what about Hermione? Isn’t she married to your brother? What is she doing here?” Fleur demanded.

“Once again,” said Bill. “Need to know. None of this is your business anymore. Now, I would appreciate it if you would leave and not come back. We are not getting back together, and you are not welcome here.” He walked back inside and closed the door. He heard Hermione and Teddy talking upstairs and wondered if she was angry. The look on her face when she offered to take Teddy upstairs was one of neutrality, but he could see the faint stamp of fear that she had tried to hide. Before heading upstairs, he went into the kitchen and grabbed a bottle, brought his wand to his temple and extracted the memory from that afternoon and capped the bottle tightly, stowing it in his pocket.

“When can we take Freddie to fly the kite?” he heard Teddy asking as Bill walked into his bedroom. Hermione was pulling clothes out of the package and running a cleaning charm over them with her wand before putting them away while Teddy ran in circles pretending to fly his kite.

“He’s too little right now,” said Bill. Hermione jumped and stopped working when she heard his voice. “Come on bud; it’s time to put the kite away and take a nap. I can see that you’re tired.” He took the kite and hung it up in the corner where Teddy could see it. He scooped Teddy up and flew him over to his bed while Hermione quietly finished putting his clothes away before heading downstairs. “Stay in bed,” Bill said to Teddy. “We’ll go see Gran and Gramps later if you get a good nap in.” Teddy nodded and turned over, rubbing his eyes.

Bill closed the door to Teddy’s room and hurried down the stairs to find Hermione. She was sitting at the kitchen table staring at her clasped hands. “Hey,” said Bill quietly. “Come here.” He took Hermione’s hand and let her to the living room and sat down with her. He pulled to bottle from his pocket. “Here,” he said. Hermione took the bottle and looked at the familiar grey wisp inside. “It’s from today,” Bill explained. “I want you to see what happened. I want you to know that I’ll hide nothing from you.”

“What did happen today?” asked Hermione. Bill gave her the gist of the conversation between them. “So she still wants you back?”

“Maybe not anymore- I hadn’t told her about Teddy- that was a rude surprise for her- one she didn’t take well,” said Bill. “She talked about wanting a family, but I don’t think she wants a ready-made one. You can look at that memory, Love,” said Bill. “It doesn’t bother me.”

“I don’t think I need to,” she said, handing the bottle back. “I trust you.” Bill took a quick breath when she said that, overwhelmed in knowing that she chose to trust him after everything that had happened to her. “Why didn’t you tell her about Teddy?”

“I don’t know,” Bill admitted. “At first, when we met for dinner all those months ago, it didn’t seem necessary. It wasn’t any of her business. And today, I was mad that she just showed up here, and I didn’t want her to know any more about me than she already did. I was hoping she’d be gone before you got back, and I would have told you about it anyway. Does it bother you that I didn’t tell her about Teddy, or you?”

“She doesn’t know about me?” asked Hermione.

“I don’t know,” said Bill. “I think she suspects something, but I wouldn’t elaborate. I don’t want her to bother you. Are you mad?”
“No,” said Hermione. “I’ll trust your judgment.”

“If she continues, I’ll tell her,” said Bill. “I just didn’t want to involve you unless it was needed.”

Hermione hesitated for a moment. “Do you think she will? Continue to try that is?” Hermione had often wondered who had re-initiated the relationship between Lavender and Ron when he had left her. She wanted to say for sure that it was Ron, but Lavender had to know they were planning to marry- it was all over the news, and they had so many friends in common- there was no way she couldn’t have known. She just didn’t care. Had she been after Ron the whole time, and he was just too weak to say no? Or had Ron come on to her one night, angry that Hermione hadn’t given in to his advances again? It was evident that Fleur didn’t give up easily- it had been six months since she had last seen Bill and she still held out hope of getting back with him. The only difference is that Bill hadn’t pressured her into going further than she was ready to go, and didn’t get upset about it. In fact, Bill had been a perfect gentleman so far- they hadn’t even spent the night together yet- they weren’t sure if it would confuse Teddy or not if she did, or if he would even notice.

“She might,” said Bill. “She’s very stubborn. I heard through the grapevine that her parents are upset with her for divorcing me and won’t give her a penny- so maybe part of it is money related- I don’t know.” He looked at her. “Hey,” he said, putting his finger on her chin and turning her head to look at him. “It doesn’t matter- I’m with you. I love you. She tried her Veela stuff on me today, and it had no effect. All I think about is you.”

Hermione smiled as he wiped her tear away. Bill always knew just what to say to give her confidence, in herself and in their relationship. She leaned over to kiss him, and he enthusiastically responded, pulling her towards him. He kissed along her neck, finding that sweet spot that she loved and smiled as she responded. “Stay with me tonight,” he whispered before he kissed her lips again. “Spend the night. Nothing has to happen; I just want to sleep next to you.”

“What about Teddy?” Hermione gasped as Bill nibbled her earlobe. “Wouldn’t that confuse him?”

“You said kids are smarter than we give them credit for,” murmured Bill. “He’s already asked when you can sleep over. He knows, in his way. Say yes, Mione.”

“Yes,” she whispered, kissing him fiercely. “Yes.”

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“We should head over to the Burrow,” said Bill later. “I promised Teddy, and I should tell them about Fleur, in case she tries to go to them to intervene on her behalf.”

“They wouldn’t do that would they?” asked Hermione.

“No,” said Bill, “but that doesn’t mean she wouldn’t try.”

“OK,” said Hermione. “I’m going to go back to my place to pack an overnight bag and feed Crookshanks. I’ll meet you over there?”

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“Well, he knocked right off to sleep,” said Bill coming back into the room. “Busy day-shopping, kite-flying and then chasing garden gnomes with James. Those two are going to be a handful when they get to Hogwarts.” He sat down next to Hermione and pulled her legs onto his
lap. “You’ve had a lot on your mind today,” he observed.

She did. The incident with Fleur stubbornly hung on, even though Bill had given her no reason to doubt him in the slightest, and she also had to admit that she was a little nervous about spending the night with Bill. It’s not like it was the first time- she and Ron had lived together practically since the war ended so it wasn’t that. She knew that she was ready for a little more intimacy with Bill, but she didn’t know how to initiate it without feeling awkward. Any time she had felt a more comfortable going a little further with Ron, he would take it as a sign that she was ready to have sex, and anything less was made to feel like a waste of time. Bill wouldn’t react like that- she knew it. But, she didn’t know how to tell him, either. She didn’t even know why she wanted to wait for marriage, aside from the archaic reasons her parents had taught her- perhaps Ron’s pressuring her just made her cling to her ways more stubbornly than she wanted to, but she still wanted to wait. That could change, but she would worry about that then.

“Bill, I think you should see a lawyer about Fleur- just in case,” she finally said. “I just have a feeling she is going to try something. There are inherent magical laws regarding marriage and divorce is not common. Well, it’s becoming more common, but still.”

Bill thought about it. “I suppose you’re right. I’ll floo tomorrow and arrange to see him. He helped with Fleur, and Teddy’s adoption- he should be able to help with this too.” He looked at her. “It’s bothering you more than you let on,” he observed.

“It’s not bothering me, really,” said Hermione. “I just have a bad feeling about it. I still trust you, and I’m not worried you’ll willingly go back with her.”

“You’re worried I’ll be forced to?” asked Bill. Hermione didn’t say anything. “I don’t see that happening. Yes, divorce isn’t common in our world, but it does happen. As far as I know, you can’t force people to be together if they don’t want to be, even if only one of them wants out. My solicitor didn’t say anything about it when Fleur left me.”

“I suppose you’re right on that,” said Hermione, feeling a little better, but she still made him promise to see his solicitor as soon as possible.

“What else?” asked Bill. He could read her like a book. “Are you nervous about staying over? I didn’t pressure you, did I?”

“You didn’t pressure me,” said Hermione. “I am a little nervous, yes, but not because of that. I want our relationship to grow. You’ve been so wonderful about letting me take things in time, and it couldn’t have been easy for you.”

“Hermione,” said Bill. “Not everyone is a horn-dog prat like my little brother. This wasn’t about waiting for you to be ready- it was about both of us. There have been a lot of changes in our lives. You’ve had your job which keeps you busy; I have the shop, Teddy, a new home. Given how badly we’ve both been hurt in the past, it only makes sense to be realistic about our relationship. I enjoy the time we spend together, I like watching you with Teddy, and I love that you enjoy family dinners, because my family is important to me. Fleur always hated going to those- to the point where we would argue about it.” He put his arm around Hermione and drew her to his side. “We’ve learned to love each other, and to be honest; I think you’re it for me. We’re not ready to move in together or to get married right now, but I know that soon, we will be. And that happened without hopping into bed at the first go, or even the second or third. I remember what Ron said in his note about wanting to make sure you were compatible before marriage, and that’s bollocks.”

They sat quietly together, thinking about their conversation, and Hermione knew then
that she would be able to tell him anything without fear. She felt her stomach give a tiny flip when Bill had said that he saw marriage in their future, and she knew then that she wanted it too. She finally spoke. “I see it too…you know- a future, together.” She took his hand in hers. “The reason I was nervous was that I wanted to tell you that I was ready to move our relationship further…be more intimate.”

“Why would you be nervous about that?” asked Bill. Hermione shrugged. “Sweetheart, I want you to be open with me. I won’t take it any farther than you are ready for- ever. You only have to tell me- I won’t get mad.” He could guess why she was nervous- another reason to want to punch Ron in the face. Ron never had much finesse, and probably took any advance on Hermione’s part as an invitation to more than she was ready for, and then showed disappointment when he went too far. Hermione smiled, relieved that he was patient. He ran his thumb across her knuckles. “Are you ready for bed? I think it’s been a long day for both of us.”

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Bill chuckled as Hermione came out of the bathroom wearing a baggy t-shirt and sleep shorts. “I like a girl that dresses to impress,” he joked.

Hermione smiled. “It’s not what I usually wear- but with Teddy around, I kind of wanted something a little more appropriate.” That got Bill’s attention. “I get hot when I sleep- so I usually wear a tank top and underwear- and even then, I’m kicking the blankets off half the time.”

“You’re adorable,” he said. “I’ll be back.” He excused himself to go to the bathroom to get ready for bed, while Hermione put her clothes away and slid between the crisp sheets. She loved his bedroom- it was spacious and airy- plenty of room for his king-sized bed, and a lovely view of the woods behind his house from the large windows. She couldn’t see much out the window now since it was dark, but she could see the night-flying animals swooping amongst the trees- owls and bats in their nightly hunt. The bathroom door opened and her mouth went dry as Bill walked over to the bed. She had always known that Bill had a fantastic body- that was obvious even when clothed, but to see it close up, clad only in sleep shorts was another thing entirely. Working as a curse-breaker had kept him quite fit, and Bill worked to keep it up when he left to work with George, and Hermione could barely take her eyes off him. He climbed into bed and pointed his wand at the lights to turn them off before turning to put his arms around Hermione.

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“Daddy, it’s time to wake up…” Both Bill and Hermione stirred as they heard Teddy come running down the hall. “Miney!” Teddy called when he burst into the room. “You slept over!” He jumped into bed and crawled between them, making both Bill and Hermione glad they had put their clothes back on.

“Hey bud,” said Bill. “Good morning. Want some breakfast?”

“Pancakes!” shouted Teddy. “And sausage. Do you want some too, Miney?”

“Of course,” said Hermione.

“Are you going to sleep over again?” asked Teddy. Hermione and Bill looked at each other and smiled. It had been a good night. “You could sleep in my bed next time.”

“We’ll talk about it, Teddy,” said Hermione.
“Draco Malfoy?” Bill stopped as he entered the solicitor's office, surprised to see the young man working behind the desk. “What happened to Mr. Anton?”

“He’s still around,” said Draco. “I’ve been working for him for a little while, and he’s slowly been turning some cases my way since he’s preparing for retirement. Is that a problem? I’m young, but he says I’ve proved myself.”

“I guess not,” said Bill. “You know why I’m here?”

Draco pulled out the file. “You said it had something to do with your divorce.”

Bill nodded. “My ex-wife is trying to get back into my life. She asked to see me six months ago and told me she wanted to come back. I turned her down, but she doesn’t seem to want to take no for an answer. I’ve been seeing someone, and we’re both concerned that she could try something involving the magical nature of our marriage.”

“It is true that marriages in our world are more complicated to dissolve than Muggle marriages,” said Draco. “The vows that are taken are magically binding, but as you well know, can still be undone. Since she was the petitioner and took responsibility for the unbinding, she could ask for a reconsideration.”

“What if I don’t want it?” asked Bill. “Can she force it? Is there a statute of limitations?”

Draco got up and looked for a book on the shelf, opening it up and reading for a few minutes. “There is a statute- two years.”

“We’ve been divorced longer than that,” said Bill.

“That’s the statute for forced reconciliation,” explained Draco. “After that, she can still petition, but they can’t force you to accept it.”

“Will they try?” asked Bill.

“Maybe,” said Draco. “Our laws are frustratingly complicated and tend to favor the woman. Mr. Anton has been helping me work on my divorce- but mine is a little different. Astoria is pregnant.”

“Congratulations I guess?” said Bill.

“It’s not mine,” said Draco flatly. “Her infidelity is making things much easier, but there are still a lot of roadblocks.”

“So, infidelity changes things?” asked Bill. He had been starting to worry a little- he didn’t want to lose Hermione.

“Yes,” said Draco. “Adultery is sorely looked down upon in our world. In my case, Astoria will most likely have to give me full custody of Scorpius and relinquish any claim to my inheritance. At least, that’s what we’re going for. Mr. Anton is pretty certain we will get it too.”

Draco shook his head. “I tried to tell my parents we were too young. They wouldn’t listen. I don’t regret Scorpius at all- he’s the best thing that ever happened to me. And right now, he’s all I’ve got.”
"I’m sorry," said Bill. "That has to be tough."

Draco sighed. "Enough about me. From the looks of everything, the court could push for reconciliation, but they can’t force it."

"Would it change things if I prove she left me for another man?" asked Bill. Draco looked up. "I slipped some veritaserum in her drink when I saw her six months ago. She left me for a classmate of hers- a wealthy one. She came back when he ran out of money."

"That definitely changes things," said Draco. "She withheld that information during the original case, and she is well beyond the statute. She doesn’t have a leg to stand on anymore."

Bill breathed a sigh of relief. "There won’t be any issues if I want to re-marry?"

"No," said Draco. "Are you getting married again?"

"Not yet," said Bill. "I just want to make sure the option is open."

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"Bill, we need you to come over right away." Bill looked at the fireplace to see Molly looking back at him. "Is there someone that can sit with Teddy?"

"Hermione is here," said Bill. "Is everything all right?"

"I’m not sure," said Molly. "We need you to come over right now."

"OK," said Bill. "I’ll just let Hermione know. I’ll be over in a few minutes." He got up and went to find Hermione. "I have to go to the Burrow for a while, Love. Can you stay here with Teddy?"

"Sure," said Hermione. "Are they all right?"

"I think so," said Bill. "Mum wouldn’t say. She just said I needed to come over right away."

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"Mum?" Bill came through the floo and stopped short, seeing Fleur and her parents sitting at the table with Arthur and Molly. "What the hell is this?"

"Bill, it is nice to see you again," said Monsieur Delacour. "We’ve come to discuss a reconciliation." Bill looked at his parents, who sat stone-faced at the table. "Would you sit with us?"

"No," said Bill. "I’ve already told Fleur twice that I am not interested, and that I will not take her back." He crossed his arms and refused to sit. Arthur nodded approvingly when Bill said that, and Molly mirrored Bill by crossing her arms and sitting back in her seat.

"You realize, of course," said Madame Delacour, "that you are obligated to reconcile if Fleur wishes it no?"

"No," said Bill. "I’ve already spoken with my solicitor on this. The statute of limitations is up, and her infidelity clinches the whole thing. I never have to see her again." When Molly
heard that, she stood up and walked away from the table.

“Infidelity…” stammered Monsieur Delacour. “I don’t know what you are talking about. Fleur had a lapse in judgment because of the werewolf attack. She has since come to her senses.” Bill gazed at Fleur, who had the decency to look down at the table.

“You do realize that she admitted it to me under veritaserum,” said Bill. Both elder Delacours looked up sharply when he said this. “You knew she left for another man, and you cut her off because of it. I assume you want us to reconcile so I’ll provide for her again?” He stared at the Delacours until they looked away.

“Regardless of the reason,” said Monsieur Delacour, “you must reconcile since she is willing. There is, however, the question of your adoption of the Lupin boy.”

“And stop seeing the Granger girl,” interrupted Fleur. “I know you are seeing her.”

“Yes, and the Granger girl,” said Monsieur Delacour. “Obviously, your dalliance with her would have to end, and the boy would have to go to your parents.” He started as Bill rushed up and slammed his hand on the table.

“Don’t you DARE tell me to give that boy up,” said Bill. “As for Hermione- yes, I’m seeing her. It’s quite serious as a matter of fact- we’ve been together for several months. I have no intentions of ruining my life for your daughter. I am under NO obligation to reconcile. If you try to force me, I will insist on a veritaserum testimony before the Wizengamot- since the marriage was performed here, the “reconciliation” hearing would be held here as well.” He smirked as he saw shock on all the Delacour’s faces. “I’ve done my homework, and I know my rights.”

Arthur cleared his throat. “Yes…well, I guess that’s it then. Molly and I support our son in this matter. Teddy is his son now, and we love Hermione like she was our own. Perhaps it’s time that Fleur moved on?” Molly glared at Fleur from behind Arthur, not daring to say anything in fear of losing her temper.

“It’s time for you to go,” said Bill. “I expect that this will be the last I hear of this.” He looked directly at Fleur. “If you, or anyone, goes anywhere near Teddy or Hermione, you will answer to me, and it won’t be pleasant. Stay out of my life. I don’t want anything to do with you-ever again. Am I making myself clear?”

“Yes,” whispered Fleur, tears in her eyes. “I’ll always love you, Bill.”

“Then I’m sorry for you,” said Bill. He stepped aside and watched Arthur escort the Delacours out the door before coming back in.

“You did well, Son,” said Arthur. “Sorry about that- they showed up without warning, hoping that we would take their side.”

“Like we would,” said Molly. “My boy, you’ve been through so much.” She reached up and touched his cheek. “My beautiful son. I’m very proud of how far you’ve come.”

“Thanks, Mum,” said Bill. “I couldn’t have done it without your support. I can’t believe they wanted me to give up Teddy and Hermione. That took some nerve.” He looked at the clock. “I’d better go. It’s a full moon tonight- this has left me agitated, and I need to calm down before I go home.”

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Hermione woke with a start when she heard the front door close. She had fallen asleep on the couch waiting for Bill to get back- not sure if he had intended for her to spend the night. “Bill, are you all right?” she asked hesitantly. She could see that he was tense, and knew that part of it was because of the full moon.

“I’m fine,” said Bill. His answer was curt, and Hermione wasn’t sure what to say. Bill had been out for several hours, trying to calm his temper by walking around, but he found he was unable to keep control. The moon rarely affected him this way, and he was confused as to why he couldn’t settle. It couldn’t be that he was still in love with Fleur after everything? The little bit of wolf he had in him always wanted her and was growling for some gratification, but he loved Hermione.

“Can you tell me what happened?” Hermione asked quietly. “You’ve been gone a long time.”

Bill sighed impatiently, trying to will the wolf to die down. “I can’t talk about it right now. It’s probably best that you go.”

“Ok,” Hermione said. “Will…should I come over tomorrow?”

“No,” said Bill. “I’m busy tomorrow.” He gritted his teeth, trying to keep his head straight. His wolf was fighting for control, wanting to find Fleur- he dared not look at Hermione for fear the wolf would target her.

“All right,” said Hermione. She reached over to run her hand down Bill’s back, pulling back as he flinched away. “I love you.”

“Just go, Hermione,” said Bill. “I’m…I’m sorry.” He waited until he heard the door click and locked it behind her, closing off the floo as well. He could feel the hurt coming off Hermione as she left, and regretted not taking some wolfsbane potion earlier in the day. He had felt fine before everything happened, and had not anticipated his temper getting set off as it had. The gall of the Delacours to insist that he give up Teddy and Hermione and take back their traitorous daughter was almost more than he could bear. He went into the kitchen and grabbed a small bottle of the potion and drank it down before putting the kettle on and sitting at the table to wait for the water to boil.

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Hermione apparated just outside her home but wasn’t ready to go in yet. What had she done wrong? She knew that Bill could be short-tempered at the full moon, but she didn’t understand what that meant yet- he had always been in control before. She would give him his space for now and hopefully, in a few days, things would be better.
“Hermione, someone left a note for you.” Hermione looked up to see one of the mediwitches holding up an envelope with her name on the outside. She stuffed the envelope in her bag and headed home for the day, hoping that maybe it was a note from Bill. She had not contacted him the day previous and was growing worried that something was wrong. She smiled to see the vase of flowers by her doorstep when she arrived, and picked them up and brought them inside, plucking the card from them and tearing the envelope open as she took in the fragrance of the blossoms. *I’m sorry. B.W.*

She loved that he sent her flowers- and enjoyed taking the time to figure out the meaning of his carefully selected blooms. She pulled the other envelope from her bag and opened it. It was a clipping of next weeks Wizengamot hearing schedule, and circled was a reconciliation hearing for Mr. and Mrs. William Weasley. “This has to be a joke,” she muttered to herself. She went to the fireplace and tried to floo-call Bill only to find it blocked. Trembling, she looked back at the flowers, taking a closer look at the arrangement and grabbing her flower language book. Laurestina- I die if neglected, Motherwort- concealed love, Musk Plant- weakness, China Pink- aversion, Rue- disdain, Butterfly weed- let me go. The book slipped from Hermione’s fingers as she fell to the floor in grief.

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Bill awoke to hear someone pounding on his front door and got up, throwing a shirt on as he went. He had asked Molly to get Teddy in case the wolf caught up with him again, but after taking the potion and taking some time to think, he realized that the wolf had only been agitated by the events from two nights ago. He was not interested in Fleur, and he remembered that he had been very abrupt with Hermione that night and that it had been undeserved. He opened the door only to be bombarded by angry Weasleys and Harry, all demanding to know what the hell happened. “What the hell is this?” asked George angrily, waving the Daily Prophet at Bill. “How could you do this to her?”

“Do what?” asked Bill. He looked up to see Ginny, Harry, George and even Charlie staring angrily at him. “What are you all so mad about?”

George threw the paper at him and pointed out the article. “You’re reconciling with Fleur?” he demanded. “What the actual fuck Bill? Hermione is loads better than that bint.”

“What are you talking about?” Bill asked, confused. “I’m not getting back with Fleur. Ask Mum and Dad- they were there when her parents tried to convince me to reconcile, and I refused.” He looked down at the article. “They must have petitioned the court assuming I would say yes.” He looked up at them again. “I would never leave Hermione- I love her. Oh God- what if she’s seen this?” He ran over to the fireplace and tried to call her, only to find it blocked. “I have to get over there. Can someone go over to Mum’s and check on Teddy?” He ran upstairs to put some proper clothes on and returned to find that Harry had gone to Molly’s, leaving George, Ginny, and Charlie behind.

“What’s going on Bill?” asked Charlie. “Hermione is smart- she’ll know that it’s wrong.” He was met with silence. “Something you want to tell us?”

Bill described what had been happening- the meeting with Draco, and then the meeting with the Delacours. “I was so angry at them for suggesting that I give up Teddy and Hermione- and it was a full moon. I hadn’t taken my potion because I was feeling ok and I returned from the
meeting agitated. I was pretty short with Hermione, and I asked her to leave. I knew I hurt her feelings, but…the wolf…I was barely staying in control.”

“That hasn’t happened in a long time,” said Charlie, frowning. “You’d better go to her.”

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“She’s not here,” said the Medi-witch, much to Bill’s frustration. “She’s taken some sick time- I don’t know when she’ll be back.”

Bill grabbed a sheet of paper and scribbled off a quick note to her, folded it and handed it to the witch. “Can you see that she gets this when she gets back?” he asked her. “It’s crucial.” He had been looking for her- she wasn’t at home, or at least, she didn’t answer, and she wasn’t at work. Harry, George, and Charlie were out looking for her as well and had come up empty.

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Hermione rolled over and looked at the clock for what felt like the millionth time. She had gone to bed after staring stupidly at the flowers but found herself unable to shut her brain off. Nothing made any sense anymore. What had changed in that short time that made Bill decide to take Fleur back? Couldn’t he even tell her to her face? “I die if neglected.” She should have known that her virginity would be a problem- how could she have been so stupid? Sighing, she got up and went to put the kettle on, hoping a cup of tea would help her think straight. Could she go through all this again? Maybe she was meant to be alone- if Ron and Bill could leave her so easily with no regret, should she even bother letting someone else into her life, just to go through the pain again? She needed time to think about what she wanted to do next- so she had called in some sick time at work, blocked her floo and cast anti-apparition charms, and magically locked her door so no one could get in. She needed time. Time to find a place to go where nobody knew her.

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“Mum, it’s been three days,” said Bill. “I can’t get in touch with her- no one has seen her or heard from her. I don’t want to lose her.”

“I know,” said Molly. She was worried too- not sure how to get in touch with Hermione, and she was afraid that Hermione would run before giving Bill a chance. Her heart ached for her son- he had been hurt so badly, and she wanted him and Hermione to be happy together. “Harry is watching the floo network, and Ginny keeps trying her flat. We have to have faith that we’ll find her.”

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“Hermione, please, open the door,” called Ginny, “I know you’re there. Please, I need to talk to you.” She waited for a few minutes before knocking again. “I’m not going to go away. I’ll stay out here until you finally talk to me.” She transfigured a plant into a chair and sat down, intending to follow through on her promise. “Here’s me sitting out here Hermione,” she called. “I’m going to start singing if you don’t answer the door.” She launched into singing the Hogwarts school song as loud as she could, ignoring the neighbors who were staring at her. She got about halfway through the song when Hermione finally opened the door. She looked terrible. “Hermione,” breathed Ginny. “Oh sweetie, please let me in. You’re suffering for no reason.”

Hermione let her enter and went to sit on the couch. “What do you want, Gin? I’m trying to pack.”
“Where are you going?” asked Ginny.

“I don’t want to tell you,” said Hermione. “I just need to start fresh somewhere else.”

“You were going to leave without saying goodbye?” Ginny teared up, unable to believe her friend would do that. “Please don’t leave.”

“I can’t be here anymore,” said Hermione. “Bill is getting back together with Fleur- and he didn’t even have the decency to tell me to my face.”

“He’s not getting back together with Fleur,” said Ginny. “I know what the Prophet said, but that was wrong. Bill reckons the Delacours petitioned the court without telling him- they showed up at Mum and Dads and tried to convince him to take Fleur back. They wanted him to give Teddy up too. Bill told them off, and Dad kicked them out of the house. He said he would never give either of you up.”

“Then where did those come from?” Hermione pointed to the flowers. Ginny frowned as Hermione pointed out the different flowers and what they meant. “I got this card too- and someone sent a copy of the Prophet article to me at St. Mungo’s.”

“Can I call Bill over here?” asked Ginny. “I don’t think he sent those. I can’t imagine he would- he’s so broken up right now. Please, Hermione- he loves you. He would never go back to Fleur.” She took Hermione’s hand in hers. “I know that Ron hurt you- and it’s taken ages to work your self-confidence back up- I get it. But you’re a smart girl, and you need to sit down and think about this. What could have happened that would make Bill change his mind so suddenly? Nothing. Everything was fine right?”

“Until the other night after he got back from the Burrow it was,” said Hermione. “He didn’t say what happened there- he just told me to go.”

“You need to let him talk to you about it,” said Ginny. “Let him explain.”

“Even if I did,” said Hermione, “I don’t know if I can handle this. It’s just too much pain, and I was wrong to open myself up to it again.”

“Come to the Burrow with me.” Ginny pulled Hermione along. “Mum’s there- everyone else is at work. Let us talk to you before you make a huge mistake. Please?” Ginny looked at her pleadingly. “You’re supposed to be my sister- I know it. I don’t want to lose that because you’re afraid.”

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Hermione sat that the table with Molly and Ginny, cups of tea in front of them and James playing in his playpen nearby. “I’m glad you came to talk to me, Hermione,” said Molly. “We’ve been so worried. You know that Bill isn’t going back to Fleur?”

Hermione nodded. “Ginny told me. I’m just…are you sure?”

“Very sure,” Molly nodded. “I was here- the Delacours came to us hoping we would help change Bill’s mind- but that would never happen.” Molly toyed with her cup. “When they were married, we accepted her- she seemed to love him so much. We didn’t understand when she left- you probably know more about that then we did. Bill told us everything later on- what she said to him, that she left him for another man. Our hearts broke for both of you, and everyone loves that you two found each other.” Hermione looked down. “Ginny says you are leaving?”
“I was planning on it,” said Hermione. “I just think a fresh start- maybe clear my head. I’m tired of hurting.”

Molly studied her for a moment before speaking again. “Can I tell you a story?”

Hermione looked back at Molly, who had been a mother to her over the years, especially since her own was gone. She never judged, and had been patient when Hermione had been avoiding everyone. She nodded.

“You know that Arthur and I got together when we were at Hogwarts together, but he was not my first love.” A distant look in her eye, Molly continued. “My fifth year, I started seeing a Ravenclaw- his name was Bartrand. We dated through sixth year, and I thought I loved him, and that he loved me.” She sighed. “The summer between sixth and seventh year, he stopped writing and visiting. My letters went unanswered, and when I showed up at the train to Hogwarts in September, he was sitting in a compartment cuddled up with a fellow Ravenclaw. I remember him just looking through me when I saw him- like he didn’t even see me anymore. I was devastated- and barely left my room- only going to class and dinner. Arthur asked me to the first Hogsmeade weekend, but I said no. I was afraid to try again- I didn’t want to get hurt. We had been friends throughout our school years, so I knew him pretty well, but I just didn’t want to get my heart broken again. Luckily for me, Arthur is a stubborn man, and he begged me to give him a chance and go to the Yule Ball with him.”

“What changed your mind?” asked Hermione.

“My friends, and my brothers, Gideon and Fabian,” said Molly, wiping a tear. “They were a few years behind me, and I think they were responsible for a few mishaps that Bartrand found himself in that year, but it was never proven. Fabian and my friend Jane talked me into giving him a chance- so I did, and I never regretted it. Arthur told me that he had wanted to ask me out for ages, but had been too intimidated. We were together ever since.” She put her hand on top of Hermione’s. “I know that we were younger than you are now, but if I hadn’t taken a chance, I never would have my family. Bill took a chance after what happened to him, and up until the other day things were going well, right?”

“You two belong together,” said Ginny. “I just know it. Don’t be afraid to try again because you got hurt. Isn’t he worth the chance?”

“Yes,” whispered Hermione.

“I lost so much when I lost my brothers,” said Molly. “Arthur was my rock when they were killed. I was so angry for a long time after that- they went from the bane of my existence as children to my protectors at school, and then they were gone. It taught me to keep the people I love close, and to never take a good partner for granted.”

“Tell Bill to come see me,” said Hermione.

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She looked up at the frantic knocking on her front door and opened it to find Bill standing before her. He waited to be invited in, not sure how she felt, or what their future held. “Hermione,” he breathed. He was relieved to see her- he had been afraid she would leave, and almost panicked when Ginny told him that she had been talking about it. She stepped aside to let him in, and he stepped in and hesitated before taking her hand. “I was afraid I wouldn’t see you again. Thanks for seeing me.”
Hermione nodded mutely and led him to sit down. “Ginny told me you’re not reconciling with Fleur.”

“I’m not,” said Bill. “I never was. I didn’t get a chance to tell you what happened that night.” He described the meeting and how angry he was. “I didn’t mean to take it out on you. It was the full moon, and I was having trouble maintaining control. I had to have Mum come and get Teddy- and I’ve never had to do that before. I’m so sorry that I took it out on you.” He got off the couch and knelt down in front of her. “I had gotten lax on taking my wolfsbane- I’ll never let that happen again.”

“But who sent those?” asked Hermione. She pointed to the flowers and Bill turned to look at them, frowning.

“I didn’t send them,” he said. He got up and studied them, his stomach turning as he took in the flowers and their meanings. “Oh God…this…these are just horrible.” He looked back at Hermione and took the flowers in his hands, going to sit next to her again. He picked up the Laurestina and transformed it. “Instead of Laurestina, I would have picked Dodecatheon- you are my divinity.” He transformed the Motherwort. “Honeysuckle- generous and devoted affection.” He changed the musk plant. “Spanish Jasmine- sensuality.” The China Pink became “Red peony-devotion. The rue became “Red carnation- pure love.” Finally, he picked up the Butterfly weed and transfigured it into a primrose. “Look it up,” he said to her.

Hermione took her flower language book and read for a while. “I can’t live without you,” she whispered. She looked at Bill, who was watching her anxiously and started crying. Bill took her in his arms and held her close.

“I’m so sorry, Hermione;” he whispered as he tightened his arms around her. “I swear, I’ll never ignore the wolfsbane again. Please don’t leave.”

After leaving the Burrow, Hermione had spent a great deal of time thinking about what Molly had said, and about her past romantic history, what little there had been of it. She knew that she could not compare Bill to Ron and that she couldn’t hold him responsible for Ron’s actions either. Hermione studied Bill, wondering where she would be if he hadn’t come into her life. Would she have eventually moved on to someone other than a Weasley? Would she still be huddled in her flat, alone and hurting? Bill made her feel alive again- made her long for a family of her own, for children, and a home. "I'll stay," she whispered.
"Things all right with Hermione?" Bill looked up at Molly, who was trimming Teddy's hair. He had been quiet all day, thinking about the events of the last week.

"Very good," said Bill. "We've patched things up. I just wish that I could prove that Fleur sent her the flowers and the article. I hope this is the end of it and she'll leave us alone from now on."

"I hope so too," said Molly. She continued trimming Teddy's hair for a little while. "We still haven't heard from Ron- after all this time. I wish I knew where he is, and if he's happy. It would be something at least."

It made Bill angry, knowing that Ron had abandoned his family, not seeming to care that people would be worried about him. He had no desire to find him, but he wondered if he should try to use his old contacts to do so to not worry his parents anymore. "Do you want me to try to find him?"

he finally asked. "I could probably call in some favors."

Molly put down her scissors and studied Teddy's hair while she thought about it. "No, don't trouble yourself," she finally said. She glanced over at the clock, which had sprouted a few new hands as family members were added and noticed Ron's hand was still on "lost." "As much as it hurts that he hasn't bothered to send word, I know he is at least safe. He'll contact us when he's ready." Bill marveled at him Mum sometimes. As much as she loved her children and sometimes tended to hover, she was also remarkable about giving them their space too. He knew that Molly had not liked Fleur, but she had never said anything negative about her, and had supported their wedding and worked her fingers to the bone to make it beautiful. She accepted Percy back into the fold without question after the war and welcomed each new family member and grandchild with joy, even as she mourned the death of one of her sons and the disappearance of another.

"Well," replied Bill. "Let me know if you change your mind." He ruffled Teddy on the head. "Looking good, bud." Teddy beamed and changed his hair to the same color as Bill's, which made him smile. It reminded him of the striking similarities between Draco Malfoy and his son, Scorpius. "Mum- I'd like to invite Draco and his son to family dinner sometime if he's willing. Would that be all right?"

"I don't see why not," said Molly. "He was pleasant enough when he came to help clean out Andromeda's house- seems like he's done some growing up. Why do you want to invite him?"

"I got the impression that he doesn't have a lot of friends anymore," said Bill. "Between the war and his impending divorce from Astoria, he's become an outcast of sorts. He has his Mum, but his Dad is in Azkaban, and he has his son. I see him from time to time when we drop the boys at preschool, and the boys are friends."

"Well, invite him then," said Molly. "There is always more than enough food for a few extra mouths."
"Hermione, let's have a girl's day for your birthday!" Ginny was practically bouncing with excitement as she waited for Hermione's answer. "We can go to the spa, lunch- you name it! Harry's treat!"

"I couldn't ask you to do that," said Hermione. "We can go, but I'll pay my way."

"It's for your birthday," said Ginny. "Harry insisted. That way, you'll look nice for your dinner with Bill." She grabbed Hermione's hand and started pulling her towards the fireplace. When they arrived, Hermione was startled to see Angelina, Audrey, and Luna waiting for her. After squeals and hugs all around, the girls all settled in, getting their nails done, massages, and facials- the works, all on Harry. Hermione looked at the girls gathered around and felt complete. A year ago, she had been in limbo with Bill- he had asked her out, but she had been too afraid to say yes. The year before that, she had buried herself in her work, avoiding everyone she knew and wallowing in her insecurities and pain. Now, she sat here with friends, getting ready for a birthday dinner with Bill, and happier than she had been in a long time.

After their time at the spa, they all sat down to lunch at the Leaky and reminisced about their days at Hogwarts. For the first time since the war, they shared good memories of those that had been taken from them too soon- Fred, Tonks, Remus, Colin Creevey and many others- especially laughing about all the pranks and shenanigans that Fred and George had gotten into during their Hogwarts days. It made Hermione miss them, but it felt good to talk about their memories at the same time. "So where is Bill taking you tonight?" asked Audrey.

"We're going to The Chimera Inn," she replied. It was the nicest restaurant in Diagon Alley, and the ladies all nodded approvingly. "It will be nice- not that our other dates aren't. We usually take Teddy somewhere and then spend time together after he goes to bed. It's just the two of us tonight."

"You seem happier with him, I think," said Angelina. "Then you did with Ron." The ladies went quiet, hoping Hermione wasn't offended. "Sorry," said Angelina, "I probably shouldn't have said that."

"It's all right," said Hermione. "I won't say I wasn't happy with Ron. We had our good times- and in some ways, I do miss him. But I'm glad we didn't get married. I wasn't comfortable with getting married so quickly after the war- maybe we would have made it, but I sometimes wonder. I think that Bill and I are a better match."

"I think everyone can see that," said Ginny. "Don't get me wrong- if you and Ron had married, I would have supported you and been thrilled for you. But- you and Bill are so well suited to each other- I can't believe I never saw it before."

"Well, to be fair, Bill was gone most of the time- being older than us. He was at Hogwarts when you were growing up, and then he was off working for Gringotts. Then he met Fleur- it's only in the last few years that any of us have spent time getting to know him," said Hermione. "I have to admit that I may have had a small crush on him in the fourth year." There was a chorus of oohs from the rest of the girls before Luna admitted that she had as well. "I never thought anything would come of it, and I put it to rest after he got married," continued Hermione. She sighed. "I never thought my life would lead me here- but...I'm finally happy."

Ginny stood up and hugged her. "It's all that we wanted," she said, tears in her eyes. "We wanted to see you smile again and mean it. You have the career you wanted, you have a family, and a man that loves you."
Hermione opened the door to find Bill smiling at her. "You look gorgeous," he said, kissing her on the cheek. "Good day at the spa?"

"Very," said Hermione. "You look very handsome." Handsome wasn’t the word for it- she still often found herself surprised that someone as striking as Bill would be interested in her, especially looking the way he did tonight. As they were going to the most popular Wizard restaurant in London, Bill had taken care to dress in his best- black trousers, grey button-down shirt and black tie. He took her by the hand and they apparated to Diagon Alley, heading over to the restaurant. Though it was well known that Bill and Hermione had been seeing each other for a year, both often faced offers from other interested witches and wizards, and many times, they were not shy about it. Blokes seemed at least willing to back off when Bill was around, but women commonly refused to take no for an answer, even with Hermione was standing right next to him. Hermione found it irritating, but trusted Bill and knew she had nothing to worry about- his reaction to the attention was so different than how Ron reacted. Ron had basked in the attention, and sometimes even tried to egg it on, wanting Hermione to get upset and fight for her man. On the other hand, he would react violently if someone approached Hermione and then he would get upset at her for attracting another man- as if she did it on purpose. Bill was very different- a simple "no thank you," to the interested lady and he then refused to acknowledge her again no matter what the girl did, his eyes on Hermione and his hand holding hers to signify that a dalliance was not up for discussion. This evening had been no different- their waitress showed way too much attention to Bill and practically ignored Hermione, and even wrote her phone number on the receipt when they had finished eating. Bill made a point to leave that particular piece of paper behind as visibly as possible when they left. In spite of that, Bill and Hermione had a wonderful time at dinner, talking about their day and sharing bits of their food with each other- it was the best birthday Hermione had in a long time.

They arrived back at Hermione's flat afterward where Hermione found a cake on her kitchen table. "It's from Mum," said Bill. "She insisted, and she also insisted on taking Teddy for the night. She missed your last few birthdays and is determined to make up for it."

Hermione smiled and made a mental note to spend more time with Molly in the future- she had missed her but had been too caught up in her depression and problems after Ron left and didn't want to feel awkward on top of it. "I'll have to thank her tomorrow- it's so sweet of her. Would you like a slice?"

"In a little bit maybe," said Bill. "Come back to the living room for a moment?" He led her back in and sat down on the couch with her. "I wanted to talk to you about something- well...see how you felt about..." He stopped and took a breath. "Hermione, we've been together almost a year, and we've taken things pretty slow- which I'm glad for. We've gotten to know each other better without any pressure, and we're both in a perfect spot in our lives, professionally." He pulled a small box out of his pocket and fidgeted with it as he spoke. "I thought about asking you at the restaurant- but I didn't want to make a public spectacle of it- I thought it better to keep it between us." He opened the small box and got down on one knee before her. "Will you marry me?"

"Yes," breathed Hermione. There was no doubt for her at all in her answer, and she was glad that he chose to do this privately. Ron had made such a show of asking her to marry him, and she had felt pressured into saying yes. She had loved Ron and planned on marrying him- someday, but she had felt so messed up after the war that she was afraid to say no. She never liked being the center of attention, and the planning of the big splaishy wedding had worn her down and made her feel ill.
She felt none of that now. "I would love to marry you." Bill slid the engagement ring on her finger- a white gold ring with a small diamond on it- and kissed her.

"I suppose we should tell Mum and Dad when we pick Teddy up," said Bill the next morning. He had stayed the night with her, which had been very pleasurable for both of them.

"They don't know?" Asked Hermione. That surprised her given that Bill had sought advice from Arthur when it came to just dating her. "Does anyone know?"

"Just the person I bought the ring from... and Harry," said Bill. "I got that at a Muggle shop, so I wasn't recognized. I remember what your first engagement was like, and I could see that you were embarrassed and pressured into it. I didn't want that for you- if I had told Mum, she would have been there taking pictures and sizing you up for a wedding dress before you even said yes."

Hermione laughed. "And Harry?"

"Well...I asked for your hand," said Bill, looking a little sheepish. "I know he thinks of you as a sister, and I didn't feel right just asking without talking to him first. He's pretty protective of you."

"I take it he was ok with it?" Asked Hermione.

"After the obligatory speeches and a bit of posturing, yes," said Bill. "I was wondering, what kind of wedding do you want? I think we should have an idea before we tell Mum. I don't want the big affair that my first wedding was- but I don't want to take anything away from you either."

"Something simple," said Hermione. "maybe like George and Angelina, but with your Mum's help, so she doesn't feel left out. So I guess the question is when?"

Bill put his arms around Hermione and kissed her on the forehead. "As soon as you want, as far as I'm concerned." She looked at him in surprise. "Mione, a few months ago, I planned on asking you to marry me at Christmas. Then I almost lost you. I don’t know what I would have done if you had left- well, I would have spent every last minute looking for you. I knew then that there could never be anyone else- and I didn't want to wait anymore. I'm ready to begin my life with you, move you into our home, with our son and maybe a few more little ones down the line. I'm ready any time you are."

Hermione thought about it for a few minutes- she didn't want to spend a long time planning- the simpler, the better as far as she was concerned. "I have some ideas," she finally said.

"Mum? Dad?" Bill called out as they shook the ash from themselves after flooing to the Burrow. "We're here."

"In the kitchen," called Molly. She was making breakfast for Teddy, who was sitting at the table coloring, and for Arthur, who was reading the paper. She smiled as Bill kissed her on the cheek. "Breakfast?" She asked them.

"Thanks, Mum," said Bill. He pulled a couple of extra place settings from the cabinet while Hermione went to sit next to Teddy and look at his pictures. When they had all set up to start eating, Bill glanced at Hermione, who nodded. "Um...Mum? Dad? We have something to tell you." Molly and Arthur both looked up, and Bill could see the expectant delight in Molly's eyes, knowing what she was already thinking. "We're getting married."
Arthur clapped Bill on the back and Molly got up and delightedly hugged them both. "It's not like it's a surprise, son," said Arthur. "But we're thrilled."

"Absolutely delighted," said Molly. "Have you talked about the wedding at all? I'd be happy to help you."

"We have talked about it actually," said Bill. "Mum, I know you like your big parties, but I already had a big wedding, and Hermione...well..."

"I don't think I could stomach planning another spectacle like what Ron's and mine would have been," said Hermione. "I know that was all on the Ministry- but I...we want something quiet and low-key. Like George and Angelina's."

"Oh," said Molly. They could see her deflating a little, but she smiled. "Of course, we can do whatever you want, dear."

"We still want your help, Mum," said Bill. "We've chosen Samhain."

"That's only a little over a month away!" cried Molly. "Are you sure you want it that quickly?" She began to start listing things to do in her head as she ate, thinking about cakes and food and invitations.

"Yes," said Bill. He took Hermione's hand in his. "I'd do it tomorrow if we could. Just family and a few friends- here at the Burrow?"

"Here?" Asked Arthur. "Even though you and Fleur..."

"It wasn't the location that was the problem," said Bill. "The orchard is beautiful in the fall- we don't need the huge tent this time. Just loved ones, a bonfire, and some great food. What do you think?"

Molly nodded. "Of course we can have it here- I'll take care of the food and the cake- don't worry about a thing. Let's see..." She started counting under her breath. "Twelve for the family. Percy is a ministry official- he could conduct the ceremony. Who else?"

"Luna," said Hermione. "I don't get to see her too often. And Professor McGonagall and Neville Longbottom."

"I may invite Draco and his son," said Bill. "We've been getting coffee every once in a while after dropping the boys off. He's grown up."

"Well- there is a lot to do. Bill, I think Percy would like it if you asked him to officiate. Would that be a problem?" Bill looked at Molly. Percy had been welcomed back into the fold after the war, but most of his siblings still held him at arm's length after everything that happened, much to Molly's consternation. She tried to include him as often as she could, and everyone had been coming around, albeit slowly.

"Of course, Mum, I'll ask him," said Bill after Hermione nodded. Hermione and Percy had always gotten on well, but she understood how people felt. She liked Audrey very much and wanted them to feel included.

Molly smiled and took Hermione's hand. "Welcome to the family, finally."

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The next month bustled with activity. Everyone was predictably happy when the announcement was made, and Percy even teared up when Bill asked him to perform the ceremony. The excitement was added to by the news that Audrey was pregnant and due in March, which sent Molly over the moon with delight.

A few days after Bill and Hermione got engaged, Bill headed over to Malfoy's office to talk to him. Draco looked up in surprise when Bill walked in. "Your ex giving you trouble again?" He asked, looking perplexed.

"No," said Bill. "She's finally gone- not before she pulled a few shenanigans, but I think she finally got the message. I'm here because I'm getting married."

"To Granger, I take it?" Draco asked. "News gets around, and I'm not blind."

"Yes, Hermione and I are getting married- on Samhain," said Bill. "I wanted to get adoption papers for Teddy so she can adopt him after the ceremony."

"Not a problem," said Draco. "I'll get them drawn up immediately. Congratulations. I always thought Weaslebee was too thick for her. She may have been a swot in school, but she's blossomed into quite a woman."

"I agree," said Bill. "How are things with Astoria?"

"Almost done," said Draco. "Once the child is born, and it's proven the child is not mine, we can complete the divorce. She gets nothing, except visitation with Scorpius. She doesn't even seem very interested in that, sadly. Her loss- he's a great kid. Better than I'll ever be."

"I wanted to invite you to the wedding- you and Scorpius," said Bill. "And you're welcome to the Burrow for family dinner whenever you like."

"Your parents and family would be ok with that?" Asked Draco, surprised.

"Sure, mate," said Bill. "You need to be around other people more, you know. I was lucky enough to have a large family to lean on when Fleur left. I can see that you are struggling- you need a friend. I'm offering."

"Thanks," said Draco. "I...well, I haven't had that in a while I guess. I'll come to the wedding- I'll work up to the dinners."
"Nervous?" Harry asked as he walked into Ginny's old bedroom at the Burrow. Hermione was standing in her wedding dress, looking out the window at the orchard. The day before, Molly, Arthur, Bill, George, Harry, and Ginny had set up a wedding arch made from branches, leaves, and flowers and set out a few benches for people to sit on. He stopped when he saw her. "You look gorgeous," he said. He didn't know what else to say. Hermione's dress was simple- a long white dress with satin sleeves and silver velvet inlay, and a wreath of flowers in her hair.

Hermione looked back at the mirror and fussed over her hair again. "Thank you, Harry," she said. He could see that her hands were shaking and he reached out and took hold of them. "I'm not nervous," she said quickly. "I mean...I'm ready for this- Bill is different... and I'm not worried..."

She trailed off as Harry squeezed her hands.

"Would it help if I told you that Bill is upstairs trying to keep Teddy calm? He's pretty excited about being best man." Harry laughed- his Godson had been beside himself when he found out that "Miney" was going to marry his daddy. "Seriously, Mione," Harry continued. "It almost killed me- watching what happened to you. I still don't understand it, and I never will, but I think you're better off. I think you two were meant for each other." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box, which he put in her hand. "I have something for you." She opened the box to find a bracelet of rose quartz stones. "Luna and Ginny picked it out- Luna said something about love rituals and hopeless romantics." He shook his head, smiling. "Maybe she has something there. Even though you shut yourself away for a while, you didn't give up, and you took a chance again." He took the bracelet out of the box and put it on Hermione's wrist. "I hope you're as happy with Bill as I am with Ginny."

"Harry..." Hermione didn't know what to say, and she threw her arms around him, hugging him tightly. He had been her rock the last few years, and she had been thrilled to ask him to walk her down the aisle. She let him go, and he kissed her on the cheek and left to check on things.

Ginny came in to keep her company until the wedding started- Hermione had asked her to be her Matron of Honor. "You doing all right?" Asked Ginny.

"I'm good," said Hermione. "I heard Teddy is pretty excited."

"Well, he gets a new mum today," said Ginny. "And he gets to stay at our place while you're on your honeymoon. He and James together are a handful- so we're in for an interesting ride. If it gets to be too much, Mum said she would take him."

Teddy was in good hands either way, and Hermione wasn't worried. Ginny grew serious for a moment. "I'm so happy for you Hermione. I was hoping for a long time that you and Bill would get together and get married- you get to be my real sister. Not that you weren't already."

Hermione smiled. "You've always been a sister to me, Ginny. You didn't let me shut myself away, but you still gave me space. I couldn't have gotten through everything without you and Harry."

"I think you would have," said Ginny. "But I'm glad we made it easier. So...are you ready to head out?" She could hear the men heading outside and went to the window to see them walking over to the orchard. "Bill looks great," she said. "Maybe you'll have to pull him into the trees when no one is looking and have your way with him." She wagged her eyebrows at Hermione, who swatted her on the shoulder. Ginny took a few last moments to fuss over Hermione's hair and
makeup before pronouncing her perfect and opening the door.

Hermione took Harry's arm and watched Ginny walk towards the arch, where everyone had gathered. Luna, Neville, Professor McGonagall, Hagrid, Draco, and Scorpius were all sitting on the benches with the rest of the Weasleys, while Bill, Teddy, and Charlie stood up front with Percy. George and Ginny had created a makeshift aisle with ever-lighting candles and ropes of flowers and leaves and the effect against the sunset was breathtaking. It was relaxed, and small and exactly what Hermione had always wanted. Her eyes found Bill, who was standing at the arch, resplendent in new dress robes with his hair tied back with a black ribbon, and she inhaled at the sight of him. There was no veela allure to mask the scars on his face, but he didn't need it- he had never needed that with Hermione. She fell in love with him, scars and all and she tried to keep herself from running down the aisle to him- never more ready to be his wife then she was at the moment. When they reached the arch, Harry kissed Hermione on the cheek and put her hand in Bill's. "Take care of my sister," he said to Bill, trying to remain stoic. Bill nodded and watched as Harry reached out to take Teddy by the hand, and he laughed when Teddy refused to leave his side.

"I'm marrying Miney too," the little boy declared. "She's MINE." He looked so handsome in his little dress robes that Hermione couldn't resist holding her hand out to him.

Percy cleared his throat as Teddy settled into standing between the couple and Hermione handed her flowers over to Ginny. She took Bill's hand in hers and smiled at him. "You look beautiful," he whispered to her, squeezing her hand. She squeezed his back and turned her attention to Percy. He worked his way through the ceremony having Bill and Hermione repeat the vows and exchange rings. After Bill slipped the wedding band on her finger, he brushed the tear from her cheek with his thumb, wanting to lean in for a kiss, but he knew that Percy would get cross if he did things out of order. He loved this witch with all his heart and couldn't take his eyes off her - the candlelight lent a soft glow to everything around them, and complimented the warmth of Hermione's skin and hair, making her glow in the dusk of the evening. Soon enough, it came time for Percy to pronounce them husband and wife and Bill took Hermione tenderly in his arms and kissed her, before picking Teddy up so he could kiss her on the cheek. As the small crowd cheered, Percy held up his hands to quiet everyone down again.

"There is one more small ceremony that needs to be completed," Percy said. "Hermione Jean Granger-Weasley, having entered into marriage with William Arthur Weasley, hereby accepts Edward Remus Lupin as her adopted son, and by the signing of this document, agrees to become his custodial parent, along with her husband." He produced a set of documents and a quill and gave them to Hermione, who smiled at Bill and ruffled Teddy's hair before signing the papers. A cheer went up as Percy took the documents, and using his wand, sent them over to Draco, who caught them and tucked them in a pocket inside his robes.

"You're my mummy now?" Asked Teddy. Hermione nodded, and Teddy reached up, wanting to be picked up.

"Sweet Teddy," said Hermione as she picked him up and hugged him. "Now you're mine."

After a hearty and delicious meal and a wonderfully decorated wedding cake, all provided by Molly, everyone gathered in the orchard again as George set off his stock of fireworks. James, Teddy, and Scorpius all shouted and clapped as the fireworks went off before going back to chasing each other, their parents all looking on in amusement at their antics. Not long after the fireworks ended, Draco approached Bill and Hermione. "Thank you for inviting me- it was a
beautiful ceremony."

"Thank you for coming, and for taking care of the adoption papers," said Hermione. She still was taken aback at how much Draco had changed over the last few years and had felt bad for him when Bill told her about his marriage. "We'll have to get the boys together again soon- they had a lot of fun tonight." Hermione glanced over at Scorpius, still amazed at how much he looked like his father.

"I'll get these papers filed first thing Monday," said Draco. "I should get Scorpius home. It's going to take forever to get him wound down- too much cake I think."

"You'd better hurry- I think Mum is sneaking him another piece," said Bill, grinning. He turned and pulled Hermione into his arms as Draco hurried off to take the cake away from his son. "So- a wife and mother, all in one night. How do you feel about that?" He asked her as he nibbled on her neck.

"I think I'm ok with it," said Hermione, sighing against him. She was ready for their honeymoon- they were spending a week in Italy, and as far as she was concerned, she could go anytime. "We should probably see Teddy though. Ginny is getting ready to take him and James home."

They walked over to where Ginny was making James gather his things, and trying to wrangle the boys to keep them from running off. Bill knelt down to Teddy. "Hey Bud, you going to be a good boy for Aunt Ginny and Uncle Harry?"

"I want to come with you," demanded Teddy. His chin was wobbling and his lower lip was starting to stick out in a pout. "She's mine now. I don't want you to go."

Bill picked Teddy up and sat down with him, Hermione sitting next to him and taking Teddy's hand in hers. "I know you want to come along, but this is a special trip for Hermione and me, and we're going to be going to all kinds of places that you'll be bored at, like museums."

"Not Miney anymore," said Teddy, rubbing his eyes. "She's Mummy now."

Hermione exhaled and smiled at the name. "Come here, little man," she said, holding her arms out to him. He slid onto her lap and allowed himself to be cradled in her arms. "You're going to have such a good time here," she said. "You get to play with James, and I'll bet that you'll be going to Gran's house a lot too. And in a week, Daddy and I will be back, and we'll have presents and all kinds of stories to tell. We'll miss you loads, and you won't even notice we're gone. Do you want James to be lonely this week?" She thought about offering a playdate with Scorpius, but she didn't know how Harry and Draco felt about each other and didn't want to ask too much.

"I guess not," sighed Teddy. "How many presents?"

Bill laughed. "Knew that one would come back to bite you." He ruffled Teddy's blue hair. "Don't know, bud. I'm sure there will be a few though. So can you be a good boy?"

"Yes, Daddy," said Teddy. He leaned over and hugged Bill, who kissed him on the top of the head, and then he turned to throw his arms around Hermione. "I'll miss you, Mummy."
A Merry Christmas

When Hermione and Bill returned from their honeymoon, Teddy launched himself at them and wouldn’t let go. He and James had a spectacular time, including a sleepover and Gran and Gramps place one evening, but he was happy to have his parents back again. The happy couple had brought back loads of presents for him, unable to resist spoiling the little boy with all of the nice things they found during their travels. They all visited with Molly and Arthur for a while, telling them about their trip before heading home and settling into married life. It wasn’t long before Christmas was upon them and the little family looked forward to celebrating their first Christmas as a family. Hermione had not bothered with Christmas decorations the last few years—since she was usually working, and celebrated Christmas away from home, it just seemed like too much fuss. This year, however, she had cut back on her shifts at St. Mungo’s to the standard work week instead of constant double shifts, and found she had time to decorate. Since George and Percy both lived in smaller flats, they couldn’t host everyone for the holidays, and Molly and Ginny had traded off since the Potters had Grimmauld Place- Hermione was glad to be able to offer their home for the Christmas celebration this year.

The week before Christmas found Hermione unable to get out of bed, and Bill watching over her with worry. She was exhausted and nauseous, and the added stress of trying to get everything ready for Christmas was causing her to worry. “I’m going to take Teddy to school,” said Bill as he rubbed her back. “Are you going to be there for his Christmas programme later?”

“I think so,” said Hermione. She felt awful, but she didn’t want to miss Teddy’s show—she had been helping him learn the song for a week, and he would be so hurt if she didn’t make it.

“Maybe you should see a healer,” said Bill. “Just to make sure.” He rubbed her back again, hoping it would help her feel better.

“I suppose it couldn’t hurt,” said Hermione. “Maybe I’ll stop by on my way to the preschool.”

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“You’re sure?” asked Hermione again. She wasn’t certain how she felt about this—she knew they both wanted a family, but she had wanted to wait a little while. “I was on the potion.”

“Of course I’m sure,” said Healer Wyndham. “I’ve been doing this for a few years now.” The old healer winked at Hermione. “About seven weeks. A honeymoon baby. Congratulations!” Hermione’s old mentor looked at her closely. “This is good news, right?”

“I…I just didn’t expect it to happen so fast,” said Hermione. Her head was whirling, trying to take the news in and she started thinking aloud. “I suppose we’re in a good place for it financially; we’ve plenty of room in the house— we just hadn’t talked about how long we wanted to wait before adding onto our family. I think Bill will be happy with it…”

“I’m sure he will be dear,” said Healer Wyndham. “Your young man is a sweetheart— and he’s so good with the little boy he adopted. I’m very happy for you.”

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Hermione arrived at Teddy’s school and found a seat between Bill and Draco. He could see that she was preoccupied, but she was still attentive to Teddy’s show and watched the two little
boys with their classmates with delight. After the show, they took Scorpius and Teddy out for some ice cream and sat talking as the boys dug in. “You sure you don’t want some, love?” asked Bill. He knew Hermione loved ice cream and was surprised that she wasn’t indulging. When he offered her some of his, she looked vaguely ill and shook her head. “Have you eaten anything today?” he asked her.

“I had some tea this morning,” said Hermione. “I just haven’t felt like having anything else.” She could tell that Bill was concerned, but she wanted to wait until they were in private before saying something- and she wasn’t quite sure how he would react. She reached over and helped Teddy wipe his face. “What are you doing for Christmas, Draco?”

“We’ll be with my Mum,” said Draco, wiping Scorpius’ face as well. “I thought Astoria would want to spend time with Scorpius, but- well…” he trailed off, not wanting to say anything in front of his son. “Mum always loved to make a big thing of Christmas- but it will be a quiet day this year- just the three of us.”

“Would you like to come over for New Year’s Eve?” asked Bill. “We’re not big party people- but we thought we’d have a few people over that night.”

“I’d like that,” said Draco.

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“Bill?” Hermione stood in the doorway to the kitchen, hesitating before coming in. “Can I talk to you?”

“Of course,” said Bill. “Is everything all right?”

“Um…well… I guess- it depends on how you look at it,” said Hermione. She knew she shouldn’t stall, but she just couldn’t seem to come out with the news. She walked into the kitchen over to where Bill was sitting and he drew her onto his lap. “I…well, I went to see the Healer.”

“Okay,” said Bill. “I’m glad you took my advice. And?”

“I’m pregnant.” Hermione sat tensely on his lap, unsure of what his reaction would be.

Bill smiled. “I thought so,” he said. “I could smell it- I smelled it on Ginny, Angelina, and Audrey almost right away.” He put his hand on her belly.

“Why didn’t you say something?” asked Hermione. “Are you…you’re not mad about it are you?”

“Why would I be mad about it?” asked Bill. “I know you were on the potion, and I didn’t expect it to happen so quickly- but that doesn’t make it any less of a happy occasion.” He put his arm around her and pulled her close. “I’m thrilled,” he said. “I didn’t say anything because I thought it would be weird to announce it to you when it’s your body.” He sighed. “We’re having a baby, sweetheart. How do you feel about it?”

“A little worried,” admitted Hermione. “I was shocked at first, but I’m happy about it- a little excited. But I’m also scared.”

“I know- I remember the first night I brought Teddy home and finally got him to bed,” said Bill. “I stood in the doorway to his room watching him sleep, and I kept wondering if I had done the right thing. It’s overwhelming, but we’re in this together. We have a good home, good jobs- we can handle this.”
“I guess so,” said Hermione. “At least I don’t have to take the potion for a while.” She sat up straight. “Merlin, I’ve been taking it all this time- what if it hurts the baby? And all the things we need to do- we need to get the baby’s room ready and baby-proof the house. I need to get some prenatal potions, and find some pregnancy books- and make sure arrangements are made at work when I need to be gone. I have to get maternity clothes and set up baby appointments…” She would have kept going, but Bill silenced her with a kiss.

“We have plenty of time, Sweetheart,” he said. “Let’s take one thing at a time- first, let’s just be happy that we’re having a baby and take a moment to be glad about it. I couldn’t be happier about it, and I hope you feel the same.”

“Oh, I do,” breathed Hermione. “You’ve made me feel so much better.” She sagged into his arms, relieved that he was happy about it, even though she had known he would be. “I love you,” she whispered.

“I love you,” said Bill. He still had his hand on her belly and was caressing it lovingly, thinking that he couldn’t wait to feel kicking. “When do you want to tell people?” he asked her. “Do you want to wait a little while?”

“At least until after the first appointment,” said Hermione. “It’s going to be a few days after Christmas.” She put her hand on top of Bill’s. “I can’t wait to tell Teddy that he’s going to be a big brother. How do you think he’ll take it?”

“Once he understands, I think he’ll like it,” said Bill. He nuzzled her neck- he had barely been able to keep his hands off her before, and now that she smelled so good, she was even harder to resist. “Wanna go upstairs and celebrate?”

Hermione managed to make it through the rest of the week and got her preparations done, though her morning sickness had hit with a vengeance. Christmas morning found her hunched over the toilet, retching in misery and wondering how she was going to get through the day. Bill was with her, rubbing her back and holding her hair back, unsure of what else to do. “Maybe we should ask Mum to do Christmas,” he said. “I know you didn’t want to say anything until after the first appointment, but she’d understand.”

“No,” said Hermione, sitting up and wiping her mouth. “She’s had to host so many times- it’s the children’s turn- she should get to relax.” After sitting for a few minutes and waiting to see if she would vomit again, she got up. "I know I'm done for now. I'll have a few crackers and some tea- that will help settle my stomach and then I can get moving." She was glad that Bill had brought the presents down and filled Teddy's stocking the night before- she had just put the kettle on when Teddy came running into the room.

"Mummy! Presents!" He shouted, jumping up and down. "Can we open them?" He grabbed Hermione's hand and started to pull her into the living room.

"Give me a minute Teddy," she said. "Why don't you go in and see what's in your stocking with Daddy?"

Bill and Hermione agreed that Christmas would not be an extravagant affair for their family- Harry had a penchant for going overboard on his Godson, and neither Bill or Hermione were high maintenance people- much to Bill's relief. Fleur had always hinted about expensive pieces of jewelry or holidays abroad involving shopping trips- Bill could easily afford it on his Gringotts salary and earnings from the joke shop but growing up in the Weasley family meant
more conservative Christmases. Jumpers and other hand-made items from Mum and Dad, and various inexpensive gifts from his siblings. Bill loved that Hermione didn't expect or didn't want fancy things. Not that he was cheap- he wanted to give her everything because the pressure wasn't there to do so. This year, he had already purchased a new set of pots and pans for her- she had mentioned an interest in cast iron cookware, so he was indulging her a bit. After her announcement, he had gone out to get her another gift- a beautiful white crib. He had to admit that he was excited and probably getting a little ahead of himself, but he couldn't stop thinking about the look on her face when she asked to talk to him- like she was afraid he was going to be angry that she was pregnant. He wanted her to know how happy he was about the baby, and how much he was looking forward to expanding their family.

After helping Teddy open his presents, Hermione gave Bill his- a new leather jacket and a new holster for his wand, and they snuggled on the couch for a while before getting up to get the house ready for guests. Hermione had become quite adept at cooking for a crowd- she wasn't as skilled as Molly of course, but she managed to put together a good meal for fourteen people- thanking her lucky stars that Molly had volunteered to bring dessert. One less thing for her to do.

"That was lovely, dear," said Molly as she carried plates into the kitchen. "I have to admit that it's nice not to have to cook all the time. Not that I mind, of course."

"Thanks, Molly," said Hermione. "I enjoy making a big meal." They both looked up as Arthur came into the kitchen and asked them to go back out to the dining room.

After everyone had come back in, George stood up. "We have an announcement to make," he said, looking at Angelina who was holding a seven-month-old Fred in her lap. "We having another baby- in May."

Molly beamed happily as everyone got up to offer congratulations. Bill and Hermione looked at each other knowingly. Bill had told her about it already, and Hermione was glad they had decided to wait until after Christmas- she didn't want to steal George's thunder. That was two grandchildren in a few months time, and Hermione couldn't wait to tell them about the third one.
"How is the morning sickness," asked Healer Wyndham as she prodded around Hermione's stomach.

"All day and all night sickness you mean?" Asked Hermione. "I can't keep anything down." She had been thankful that she had time off between Christmas and New Years because she was so ill she could barely do anything. Bill was lucky that George had arranged for extra help at the shop because he ended up coming home during the big Boxing Day sale to help her- vomiting regularly had left her weak and trembling, and that didn't mix with an overexcited four-year-old. The anti-nausea potions he had brought her had done no good, and she was afraid to take stronger ones without talking to someone first. Prenatal was not her specialty, and she was reluctant to make a judgment call in her current condition.

After being prescribed a stronger medication and given a few other potions to help her regain some of the nutrients she'd lost in the last few days, Healer Wyndham offered to let them hear the heartbeat. Bill held Hermione's hand as they listened to the sound of their baby's heart and they both grinned with excitement. "Let's go tell Mum and Dad now," said Bill. "I know it's early, but I just can't wait." Bill's enthusiasm was contagious, even though Hermione had thought about waiting until the first trimester was over- but she supposed they were almost close to that point anyway. "We can tell everyone else at New Year's," said Bill. "Mum and Dad aren't coming- they're going to something at Kingsley's." Hermione couldn't bear to say no to him, so they headed over to the Burrow.

"Hey, anyone home?" asked Bill as they came through the floo.

"In here," Molly called from her usual place in the kitchen. She smiled as they walked in. "I wasn't expecting you today- Arthur is playing with some of his new Muggle toys, and I was thinking about fixing some lunch. Where's Teddy?"

"He's at preschool," said Bill. "We had some errands to run today and thought we'd stop by." They turned as Arthur came into the room carrying a remote control car- a gift from Harry and Ginny. "We have something to tell you since you won't be around for our New Year's party." Bill looked at Hermione, who smiled. "We're having a baby."

Molly dropped the pan she had been pulling down from the cabinet and stared at them, stunned as Arthur clapped Bill on the back and hugged Hermione. "Another grandbaby?" cried Molly, hurrying over to embrace both of them.

"In July," said Hermione. "I'm eight weeks right now."

Molly sat down. "Three grandbabies coming," she said, fanning herself. "I do hope one of them is a girl...not that we won't be thrilled with boys mind you- but we already have three of those. How wonderful!" Molly could barely contain her excitement. To think that in four short years they had gone to wondering if they would all survive to see the new century to welcoming six grandchildren, and probably more in the future. There had been a lot of heartaches, for everyone, between Fred, Ron's disappearing and abandonment of Hermione, and the end of Bill's marriage to having all of her children finally happy again.

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The announcement was made at the New Year's party and along with the congratulations came the
teasing from George about getting knocked up on the first try. "You must have super-sperm, bro," said George, clapping Bill on the back.

"This coming from the guy who has a seven-month-old and has another one on the way," Bill said back. He smiled at Hermione, who was coming from upstairs with Ginny after showing her the crib that Bill bought. Ginny hugged her brother and then ran off to chase James, who was running with Teddy and Scorpius- both trying to avoid their parents who were getting ready to put them to bed.

"Congratulations mate," said Draco. "How's Teddy with the whole thing?"

"It hasn't registered with him yet," said Bill. "We told him after Christmas and well... he doesn't quite get it yet. He was asking me for a brother for the last year, but he doesn’t quite understand where they come from."

“Scorpius has been asking too,” said Draco. “He actually does have a baby brother, but Astoria hasn’t taken him for visitation yet. Claims she has too much to look after the new baby- she can’t handle both.” He rolled his eyes at that. “He still asks about her- I have no idea what to say.” He looked over at his son, a warmth in his eyes that had never been in his own father’s eyes. “He doesn’t deserve that- he’s a great kid.”

“It’s her loss, Draco,” said Bill. “She’ll end up regretting it someday. Or, maybe she’ll come around when the baby is a little older.”

“Maybe,” said Draco. “She’s already found out the consequences of cheating and having a baby with another man. She’s been shunned by most pure-blood homes and events- my mother’s doing of course. Eventually, she’ll push her way back in, but it will never be the same. I just worry about Scorpius and how he feels about it. I don’t ever want him to feel like he is unwanted, and I don’t want to see him hurting.”

“I wish I had some words of wisdom for you on that one,” said Bill. “Look at Harry, I guess. You knew how he grew up right?” Draco shook his head. “Dumbledore made his muggle aunt and uncle take him in right after his parents died. They were awful to him- abuse, starvation, negligence. Harry should have come to Hogwarts completely screwed up and hating everyone and everything around him. I know you didn’t get on in school, so you had a different opinion, but for someone with the start in life that he had, he was remarkably kind and good. Scorpius has you, and your Mum to love him, and he already had friendships with Teddy and James. I know you’re not big on Weasley dinners, but he’d be welcomed with open arms and treated as one of their own- just like they did with Harry and Hermione, and Audrey and Angelina as well.”

Draco turned and studied Harry for a moment, watching as he bounced James on his knee and tickled him before sneaking him a cookie. “Was his life really that bad?” he asked.

“I didn’t meet Harry until he was a fourth year,” said Bill. “Dad told me about how Fred, George, and Ron had gone to get him before second year. They had bars on his windows and were feeding him a bowl of soup a day, half of which Harry fed to his owl. Harry doesn’t talk about it, and he never sees his aunt and uncle- even though I guess he sees his cousin from time to time. First year was even worse- his uncle took the whole family to some island when the letters from Hogwarts started coming and then tried to shoot Hagrid.”

“Hagrid?” asked Draco. “What was he doing there?”

“Dumbledore had to send him to get Harry when it was clear he wasn’t getting his letters,” said Bill. “Hagrid took him to Diagon Alley to get his supplies and introduced him to the life of a
Wizard.”

“I remember that day,” said Draco. “I met Harry at Madam Malkins. I didn’t realize who he was of course, and I was a braggart and an ass as usual.”

“You were young,” replied Bill. “And under the influence of your father. You should talk to Harry for a while- he’s really a great guy. And don’t worry about Scorpius. He has plenty of love in his life.”
Hermione smiled as she watched Molly coo over her namesake, Percy’s firstborn as she ran her hand over the slight bump on her belly. When Percy had told everyone the baby’s name, Molly had burst into tears and hugged her son- she had taken his defection hard and had never given up hope that he would come back to them, and she had not been wrong. Percy blushed a little at his mother’s reaction, but put his arms around her and hugged her back. He had never been one for physical affection, but now that he had his own little girl, he could see the appeal.

Hermione stood with Ginny, who was watching Molly and her granddaughter with delight. “We’re going to start trying again,” said Ginny. “All these babies…”

“What about the Harpies?” asked Hermione.

“We’ll figure it out,” said Ginny. “I’m a starter now, so they’ll work with me. I know Harry wants a big family- not seven, mind you, but more than one. I think we’re ready to start again.” She had been thinking about it since Fred was born. Between getting to hold and play with him, and seeing all of the pregnant bellies around her, she couldn’t wait to have another one. Ginny put her hand on Hermione’s belly. “I wish I could feel the kicking,” she said.

“Not for a few months I think,” said Hermione. “Bill checks every day- he swears he felt something yesterday and started going on about the baby being a beater. That’s just what I need.”

By the time Roxanne was born in May, on her big brother’s birthday no less, there was no doubt that Hermione had one very active baby inside of her. Teddy was beginning to understand that the baby was in Mummy’s tummy and he ran up every day to touch the baby and feel it kick. She and Bill agreed to wait until the baby was born to find out the sex and set about to decorate the nursery and get the house ready for the new arrival. Hermione had started to cut back on her hours at St. Mungo’s due to the amount of time she spent on her feet and was set to take a year off after the baby was born. She was looking forward to the time she would be able to spend with the baby, and with Teddy before he started primary school in the fall.

“Only two months to go!” said Angelina while Hermione held their new daughter. “Are you ready?”

“Getting there,” said Hermione. “If by ready you mean not sleeping, having to pee all the time, and my arms and stomach itching dreadfully. Healer Wyndham gave me something for that, and it helped thank goodness.” She winced as she felt a well-placed kick near her bladder, and then struggled to get up before George came and helped her and took the baby so she could go to the bathroom. She sometimes felt like she would never be ready, especially when she thought of all the lists she made and hadn't checked off yet, but Bill had been able to keep her from over-doing it. When she came back from the bathroom, Bill had arrived and was holding Fred while Angelina fed Roxanne. She walked over to tickle Freddie and kiss her husband and tried to relax a little.

“Daddy!” Bill, who had been repairing a broken downspout turned around to see Teddy running towards him. "Daddy- Mummy says to come quick. She had an accident."

Bill picked Teddy up and started towards the house. "Did she fall?" He asked worriedly.
"No," said Teddy. "She had an accident- like me. It's all over the floor. Then she said her tummy hurt."

Bill put Teddy down on a chair in the kitchen and told him to stay there. He hurried into the living room to find Hermione hunched over in pain. "Water broke," she hissed as she held onto the couch for support. "Hurts."

"Ok Sweetheart," said Bill, trying to sound reassuring. "It's ok. Let's get you sitting down for now so I can get Mum. All right?" Hermione nodded, her eyes closed as she took deep breaths. Bill went to the Floo and called out for the Burrow. "Mum? It's time. Can you come get Teddy?"

Molly stepped through and hurried over to Hermione. "All right dear?"

"I'm ok," breathed Hermione. "It'll be fine. Teddy's bag is next to the fireplace- the blue one." She looked up to see Teddy shyly watching her. "Come here Teddy," she said to him, holding out her hand. "It's all right- it's time for the baby to be born. You're going to be such a great big brother." She pulled Teddy close and kissed him on the forehead. "You'll be good for Grams?"

Teddy nodded. "Can't I come with you?" Hermione saw how worried he looked.

"No Teddy," she said gently. "But you can come and see us after. Grams and Gramps will bring you as soon as the hospital lets us have visitors, ok? I love you."

"Love you too Mummy," said Teddy, hugging her again. Bill picked Teddy up and kissed him on the cheek before giving him over to Molly.

"Good luck," said Molly. "I'll let everyone know." She went back through the floo with Teddy and his bag.

"Ready sweetheart?" Bill took Hermione's bag from next to the fireplace and went to help her to stand.

"I'm scared," she said, staying in her seat. "I don't know if..."

Bill helped her up. "I'll be with you the whole time," he said. "Let's go have a baby."

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"Myra Grace," said Hermione. "After my mum." They gazed down at the sweet little girl in Hermione's arms. They had already agreed on asking George and Angelina to be Godparents- George and Bill had grown close over the years of working together, another positive outcome of Ron's abandonment.

"Ready for visitors?" Bill kissed Hermione on the forehead. "I think Teddy is going to break down the door soon." Hermione nodded, and Bill went over and opened the door. Teddy came running in, carrying a package, Molly and Arthur coming in behind him.

"Another girl, Mum," said Bill. "You should be careful what you wish for next time." Molly beamed as she looked down at her newest Granddaughter while Bill helped Teddy climb up in the bed. "Be careful, bud. Mummy is still sore." He still felt like he was in a daze, looking at his family- his wife, son, and daughter- something he had never thought he would have. "What's in the package?"

"A present for the baby," said Teddy. He was studying Hermione as he spoke. "Mummy, can I hold her?" Bill helped Teddy sit straight, and Hermione put the baby in his arms, teaching him
how to hold her. "She has red hair like Daddy," Teddy said, his hair changing to the same shade of red. "Can her hair turn colors too?"

"No Teddy," said Hermione. "That's a gift you got from your mother. Someday, when you have children, they may inherit it from you though. Should I open this?" Teddy nodded as he looked at his little sister. Hermione opened the box to find a stuffed monkey.

"Teddy insisted," said Arthur.

"It's wonderful," said Hermione. "Thank you, Teddy." She took the baby back as she started to fuss. "She's hungry," Hermione told Teddy. "After I feed her, you can give her the monkey, okay?" Teddy nodded and left the room with Arthur, giving Hermione privacy as she learned to feed the baby with Molly's help and Bill looking on. After Myra latched on and was feeding, Hermione relaxed against the headboard and watched Bill as he ran a finger along Myra's sparse red hair. "She looks like you," she said to Bill.

"She looks like both of us," said Bill. "She's so beautiful. I can barely believe she's ours." He looked at Hermione, who was smiling at him with tears in her eyes. "Thank you. This..." He stroked the baby's head again. "She's amazing. You're amazing."

"So are you, Love," said Hermione.
Bill and Hermione settled back into their home with their little family after a few days in the hospital and soon got used to a schedule around a newborn and an active four-year-old. It was quickly apparent that Myra was going to be a daddy's girl, and that Bill was hopelessly wrapped around her tiny little finger, and neither Bill nor Hermione would have it any other way.

Over the course of the next two years, Teddy and Myra, and all the other Weasley grandchildren continued to grow and flourish, and before long were joined by Lucy- Percy and Audrey's youngest. Family dinners at the Burrow had never been a quiet affair, but the addition of so many family members and children had turned them into raucous, joyous events, especially when joined by former school friends and occasionally, Draco and Scorpius Malfoy.

At Lucy's first family dinner, Bill bounced two-year-old Myra on his knee and talked with George and Harry about Quidditch statistics while Hermione went to help Molly in the kitchen. She arrived to find Ginny in tears at the table, with Molly holding her hand. "Ginny, what's wrong?" Hermione hurried over to sit next to her.

"I just don't know if I can sit out there with a new baby again," said Ginny. "I'm happy for Percy, and Lucy is beautiful but..." Tears welled in her eyes again. "We've been trying for years now to have another, and all that's happened is a miscarriage."

"You had a miscarriage?" asked Molly, gathering Ginny in her arms. "Why didn't you say anything? I'm so sorry." She rocked her daughter as if she were a child again, while Hermione rubbed her back. They looked up when Harry quietly entered the room.

"It was about a year ago," said Harry. "She didn't want to say anything because she said she felt like a failure. She didn't want to talk about it at all. When I saw her come in here, I thought she might finally break down and say something." His green eyes were sad as he watched Molly hold his wife. "I don't know how to help her."

Hermione got up and hugged Harry. "You are, just by being there," she told him. She led him to sit down at the table and took his hand. "I'm so sorry about the baby," she said to them. "Is there anything we can do?" She felt helpless for Ginny, and she remembered her mother telling her about the miscarriages she had experienced and that they had been unable to give Hermione a sibling.

"There may be," said Harry. "We have a book at home...a potion book. Ginny picked it up a few weeks ago. There is a potion in there that is supposed to help er...boost conception. We've looked all over but haven't been able to find it in any shop. Neither of us was good enough at potions to be able to make it ourselves. Hermione- would you make it for us?"

Ginny looked hopefully at Hermione. "The healer said that I might not be able to conceive anymore because of the miscarriage- the chance is very low anyway. Please, Hermione?"

"I'd like to see the recipe before I agree," said Hermione. "If it's not dodgy, and I'm capable of it, of course, I will."

"Thank you," said Harry, looking relieved. "I'll drop the book off tomorrow if you like. The
ingredients are costly and hard to get, but they are available. If you agree, I'll get them ordered.”

Harry came by the next morning as Hermione was giving Myra her breakfast and gave her the book. While he waited for her to read through the recipe, he helped Myra with her breakfast, making faces at her to make her giggle. "This is interesting, Harry," Hermione said as she put the book down. "It's got some ingredients in common with standard healing potions- I remember some of the other ingredients from potions class, but I've never seen them used this way. I would never have thought of it- it will help with any scar tissue left behind, promote conception and hopefully prevent another miscarriage.”

"You can do it?" Harry went weak with relief as Hermione nodded. "Thank you. Ginny has been getting more and more depressed. She doesn't understand why it's been so hard for her and no one else seems to be having any trouble."

"The human body, magical core or no, doesn't always react like we think it will," said Hermione. She glanced down at the book again, wondering if she would have the same problems her mother had. "This takes a few weeks to brew properly- so I'll start as soon as you get me the supplies.”

It was only a four months later that Ginny came over to visit, looking a little shy. "Auntie Gin!" squealed Myra as she ran through the living room towards her favorite aunt. Hermione was feeling under the weather and had barely gotten up from the couch, so Bill had stayed home to look after Myra. Bill swooped Myra up before she could tackle Ginny and threw her over his shoulder, wincing as she shrieked with laughter.

"Hey Gin," said Hermione as she sat up. "What's going on?"

Ginny burst into tears and threw her arms around Hermione. "I just came to tell you that it worked." She sat back and saw Hermione looking at her questioningly. "The potion- it worked. I'm pregnant!" Hermione clapped her hands and hugged Ginny again. "We're not telling everyone yet," continued Ginny. "We're going to wait a while, just to make sure. I just wanted to tell you, since you helped us."

"I'm so happy for you!" Exclaimed Hermione. "How long have you known?"

"I found out last week," said Ginny. "I'd been feeling awful, but I didn't want to get my hopes up. I went to the healer yesterday to make sure."

"I'm happy for you," said Bill, coming to sit down. "I'm sure Harry is pretty ecstatic right now."

"Cautiously happy," said Ginny. "We both are. The healer is scheduling extra appointments just to be safe, but I'm already a little further along than I was last time- not by much, so we're taking it one day at a time. But I wanted to come and thank you, no matter what happens- this is because of you."

“It was my pleasure, Ginny,” said Hermione. “I’m so glad it worked. Take care of yourself and let us know if you need anything.” Ginny hugged both Hermione and Bill and went back home.

“That’s great,” said Bill. “I’m so glad you were able to help them.” He frowned in concern when he saw that Hermione was deep in thought. “What? What’s wrong?"

“I… I haven’t been feeling well either- I’ve been bloody awful,” said Hermione. “Maybe… I think I
might be pregnant?"

Bill sat up. "You think so?"

"Maybe," said Hermione. "Now that I think of it, this is how I felt when I was pregnant with Myra." She grabbed her wand and pointed it at her stomach, nearly dropping it when a glow emanated. "I guess that answers that. I’m pregnant.” She looked up at Bill, who was smiling broadly.

"Well, I suppose we haven’t been very careful lately," said Bill. They had tacitly agreed that they were ready to try again a few months ago, so it didn’t come as a shock to either of them. Bill came over to hug Hermione. "I’m thrilled, Love.” He sat down next to her and drew her in to cuddle at his side. “Having Teddy and Myra has been great- I can’t wait to add another.”

"Me too," said Hermione. She enjoyed the moment snuggled up with Bill. “So if Ginny makes it through her pregnancy, there will be two around the same time. That should be fun.”

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Both Ginny and Hermione made it safely through their pregnancies, and Albus Severus and Lucas William were born within a week of each other. "Severus?" George arched an eyebrow as he held the little boy in his arms. "Albus I can understand, but Severus? You've lost it, mate." Harry grinned as he held Lucas, who had just been born.

"Well, we thought about 'George,' but Ginny didn't want to give the little guy a complex," he said before getting serious. "Everyone's forgotten about him," he said quietly. "He sacrificed everything because he loved my mum, and no one even talks about it." He bounced Lucas gently in his arms as he looked at his little face. "This one's going to have your hair I think, 'Mione."

"He looks like my dad," said Hermione. She thought about her parents, sad they would never know their namesake grandchildren. "He would have been so pleased.” She felt Bill's arm go around her shoulder and smiled as he pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I should probably write Minerva and tell her Hogwarts has eleven years to prepare for these two. I bet they're going to be a handful."

"They'll get plenty of practice when Teddy and Scorpius start, followed by James," said Bill. "And then a few years later when Roxanne, Molly, and Myra come in at the same time. Hogwarts doesn't stand a chance."

Chapter End Notes

This part is a bit autobiographical. I suffered two ectopic pregnancies after having my son, and chances were extremely low that I would be able to get pregnant again. I went to a homeopathic practitioner who prescribed some drops that would reduce the swelling and scarring in my uterus and fallopian tubes, and I ended up getting pregnant and having my daughter.
These Happy Golden Years

Chapter Summary

So this is the end. Many thanks for the kudos and comments- they are always welcome, and I hope you enjoyed the rest of the story. A story that would not have come to be without Floatsodelicately's original work. I do have a few more Hermione stories in the works- a George/Hermione and a Sirius/Hermione that I hope to be posting soon.

Bill looked up as Arthur came through the floo, and put down the spoon he was using to feed Lucas. "Hey, Dad, what's going on?"

"Nothing much- just came over to see everyone." He bent down to swoop up Myra who had come squealing towards her Grandad. "These three are growing so fast," he said as Teddy came into the room as well. "Much faster than you lot did it seems." He winced as Myra tried to climb on his shoulders. "Ouch child- your Gran is right- you are part monkey." Myra giggled at being compared to her favorite animal and hugged her Grandpa around the neck. "Anyway, part of the reason I came over is to see if you lot are available next weekend to help out. That storm we had knocked over the old broom shed- we're going to build a new one."

"Do you need a new shed?" Asked Bill. "We can always bring some brooms over if we want to play Quidditch in the orchard."

"Molly likes having it," said Arthur. "That way, we can keep brooms around for the children, and I want to make a bigger shed so Molly can store her gardening supplies as well. Figured we'd make a weekend of it- build a shed, have some food. You know your Mum... Anyway, since it's supposed to be nice next weekend, she wants it done before it gets too cold."

"We can make it," said Bill. "Hermione is off next weekend- but I'll check with her to see if she made any plans." He wiped Lucas' face and lifted him out of the high chair, bringing him to the living room to sit and play. "Anything else Dad? You look like you have something on your mind."

"Molly's been talking about Ron again," said Arthur. "I know how you feel about him..."

"Dad, I know what I said, but that was before I became a father," said Bill, watching his children playing on the carpet. "I'm still very angry with him- and I doubt that will ever go away, but I understand how you feel. I know Mum is hurting."

"I don't know whether to be angry at him for so cruelly cutting us out of his life for no reason or if I should miss him," said Arthur. They didn't talk much about Ron, but Arthur saw Molly staring at pictures, or at the clock from time to time, and didn't know how to feel about it. She still ran her fingers over Fred's picture every time she dusted, and Arthur did often as well, still feeling the sting of his loss after all this time. But Ron-and thinking of him made him feel helpless and angry, and years of having children and losing friends and family did nothing to help him come to terms with Ron's abandonment.

"Both are understandable," said Bill. "There's nothing wrong with feeling both love and anger..."
towards him. He's your son, and he always will be- piss poor decisions or no. He will be back someday-I know it."

"What happens when he comes back?" Asked Arthur. "How will the others handle it?"

"I imagine like they always do," said Bill. "Ron did some shitty things, Dad- to you and Mum, to George, and to Hermione- and I think it will take everyone some time to get over that. Eventually, everyone will get over it, I suppose. I'm still angry at him for abandoning George, and for what he did to Hermione, but I would never have gotten the life I have now if he hadn't left. I won't say I'm grateful to him- but my life is better because of it."

"What do you think would have happened if he had stayed?" Asked Arthur.

"Honestly? I don't know if he and Hermione would have made it," said Bill. "He was cheating on her- don't tell Mum. I won't say any more than that because that is between him and Hermione- but even if they had married, they probably would have split up. Then Hermione probably would have been gone from our lives for good."

"Where did we go wrong with him?" Arthur picked up a toy and handed it to Lucas, who had scooted over near Arthur's feet. "The cheating, the running out- where did that come from?"

Bill watched Arthur playing with Lucas, and felt sad for him. "I wish I knew," said Bill. "I remember Harry telling me once about what Ron saw in the Mirror of Erised- standing tall- the best of all of us. I supposed that over the years, he felt...I don't know...average? Don't blame yourself, Dad." He could see Arthur was struggling to keep it together. "There were a lot of us- and we all had our thing, except Ron. I was the oldest. Charlie had his dragons and Quidditch. Percy had his books and ambition. The twins had each other; Ginny was the girl- Ron just never recognized what made him special. Maybe if he had, things would be different."

"What do you think that was?" Arthur looked at his eldest son, wondering when he had gotten so wise.

"Ron- well, he could relate to all of us," said Bill. "At some point in our lives, Ron was a best friend- a loyal brother. He sat by me when I was beginning to realize that Fleur was pulling away from me. He and Charlie always went on about Quidditch together. He was the first to accept Percy back after everything that happened, and not hold it against him. Fred and George- well, before he ran off, he was always there for George- helping him through Fred's death. He and Ginny have always been close. He was there when we needed him, a true friend and loyal brother- and he was that way with his friendships too. He was brave, and he loved all of us. If he would have remembered that, he would never have left."

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The next weekend, everyone gathered to build a new shed- Charlie even came from Romania to help out. With everyone's help, it took no time at all, until a squabble broke out amongst the grandchildren about what color to paint it. "I want PINK!" declared little Molly, shadowed by Roxanne and Myra.

"Blue," declared Teddy, with James and Fred in agreement. "Broom sheds are for BOYS to store our brooms in. Not for girls." The argument was settled by painting the shed white, blue and pink, and everyone leaving a handprint on the doorframe. Ginny and Hermione even put Lucas' and Albus' prints on as well, but not before Ginny gave Teddy a lesson on who belonged on a broomstick.
Hermione felt Bill's arms go around her as she watched her now two-year-old son go to sleep, worn out from the joint birthday party that had been held with Albus, Roxanne, and Fred. "It was a good day, yeah?" Asked Bill, as he nibbled on her neck. He looked down at his sleeping boy, who looked so much like Hermione. "Maybe one more of these, you think?"

Hermione turned and looked at her husband. "Another one?"

Bill grinned. "We could have a whole Weasley/Potter Quidditch team at Hogwarts if we hurry up."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I think there are more than enough Weasleys and Potters without one more- is this a mid-life crisis thing?"

"Ouch," winced Bill. "You wound me, Love. Honestly- I just think one more would make our family complete. Don't you think?" He started kissing her on the tender spot of her neck that made her go weak.

"I guess one more wouldn't be so bad. As long as it's not twins- I don't think my nerves could handle that." Truth was, she had been thinking about it more and more- having another child. Her heart and home were already full, but there was always room for one more. She grinned as Bill swept her up in his arms and carried her off to their bedroom.

"No twins eh?" smirked Bill. "I'll do my best to rein it in..."

"Again?" Molly laughed as she fanned herself- those hot flashes were a bitch. Ginny and Hermione looked at each other and grinned. "Maybe we'll have girls within a week of each other this time."

FIN

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