

Dumbledore's Man

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Summary: It's Christmas at the Burrow, and it's shaping up to be an interesting one. After a surprise visit from her prat of a brother and the Minister of Magic, it's up to Ginny to talk to Harry. A HBP missing moment.

Author's Note: Because of when this fic is set in HBP, it's more of a *pre*-H/G story than anything. In other words, Harry's chest monster has already put in an appearance, but Ginny is still going out with Dean. Written for mah_akh for the winter exchange at the hpgwficexchange on LJ at <http://community.livejournal.com/hpgwficexchange>,

Ron was finally finishing his third helping of Christmas dinner, and Ginny sat, watching her family. This was one of those times that she really wished her parents didn't enforce the "No one leaves the table until everyone is done" rule. Or maybe she wished that her parents were *more* strict about that rule. If that were the case, Harry wouldn't be stuck out in the back garden with the Minister of Magic, and *she* wouldn't be stuck inside listening to Percy go on and on and *on* about whatever he'd decided was more important than his family.

From her seat at the table, Ginny stared out through the window into the garden, watching for Harry and listening half-heartedly to the conversation going on around her.

"Oh, Percy," her mum was saying. "How have you been doing? Are you eating well? Staying warm? Are you *certain* I can't get you anything to eat? Or drink? What about..."

"Are you changing your pants every day, Percy?" Fred said quietly so their mum didn't catch him. He pitched his voice higher to imitate her. "You know what happens if you don't."

"Here, Percy. How'd you like a knife to stab us all in the back again? Let me sharpen it for you," George added in a sarcastic tone as he shot a glare toward his estranged brother.

Ginny rolled her eyes over her mother's actions. All this fussing over Percy. It was obvious to everyone but Mum that he'd had no intention at all of coming home for the holiday until the Minister found out Harry would be there. Now Percy sat at the Weasley table, and Ginny couldn't help but notice that Harry--despite his lack of red hair--was more a part of her family than her own brother was.

That fact was reiterated when he had the gall to start in on the twins, accusing them of wasting their time on jokes when they were "in the middle of a war, for Merlin's sake" (never mind the fact that he'd been the one denying that fact just last spring), before he called Harry unstable and dangerous, stating firmly that she, Ron and the twins should stay away from him for their own safety. It was no wonder he was the sudden victim of flying parsnips.

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed one of the figures outside--the smaller one--start back towards the house. But instead of coming inside, the figure veered off to the south when it reached the gate.

Wonder what that's about, Ginny mused to herself.

But she didn't have much time to think about it, because Scrimgeour re-entered the house. He was trying to act nonchalant about what had happened outside with Harry, Ginny could tell, but his real feelings were so obvious that even a Flobberworm could've seen them. It was plain that the Minister hadn't got what he'd come for. He'd come in and thanked Mum and Dad for their hospitality, but she could tell from his voice that he was angry. Then he asked if they'd had a nice visit, completely missing Percy's disgruntled face as he ignored the rest of the family and glared out the window at Harry's retreating form.

And then Percy, the great prat, rose from his seat, cast a disdainful look at his siblings, nodded stiffly to their mum and dad, and left without so much as a good-bye, ignoring the blob of mashed parsnips when it dropped from his hair and onto his shoulder.

Git.

The meal resumed slowly, her mum sniffing quietly as she brought out the pudding, her father attempting to look unaffected by Percy's attitude. Fred, George, and Ron were heatedly arguing over which one of them was going to be the first to hex the self-righteous pillock. Fleur had turned her nose up, commenting on the rudeness of both Percy and the Minister, and Bill was quietly adding suggestions to Ron and the twins' ideas on how to deal with Percy.

And she, Ginny, seemed to be the only one to notice that Harry *still* hadn't rejoined them, even though the Minister had left a long time ago.

Pompous overblown windbag, Ginny thought savagely. They'd hoped that he'd be a better man for the job than Fudge was, but the only difference she could see between the two was that Scrimgeour, instead of denying the possibility of Voldemort's return, was trying to act like the Ministry was doing something. Not that they actually *were* doing something, of course. But they were putting up something of a decent front...as long as you didn't have the brains God gave a pygmy-puff. If you did happen to have any sort of brains at all... Well, then you could see right through the Ministry's act without a problem.

She kept glancing toward the door, watching for Harry. At the same time, she was making sure to watch the pudding her mum had set on the table, intent on saving Harry some. That was her plan, in any case, as long as it didn't involve sacrificing herself in order to keep Ron from eating everything in sight. She liked Harry, but she was willing to go only so far, even for him.

Ron was stuffing his mouth full with his second--or was it his third?--serving of Christmas pudding when her mum composed herself enough to notice that Harry hadn't returned to the table yet.

"Where's Harry gone off to, I wonder," Molly said, standing and gathering the empty dishes before banishing them to the sink. "He hasn't had his pudding yet."

"Dunno," Ron muttered thickly around the large spoonful he'd just stuck in his mouth. He'll be alright." He swallowed. "He told me this morning that he promised Dumbledore he wouldn't wander off. Probably just needs to be alone."

Ginny rolled her eyes. "He needs to be alone," she said derisively. "He needs to not be alone, if you ask me."

He glared at her. "Lucky for Harry no one asked you, then. You'd be out there pestering him when all he wants is some time by himself."

That stung. "I wouldn't pester him, you git," she replied testily. Her father gave her a sharp look at that, but she didn't care. "I just want to see if he's all right."

"Why do you care? You already have a boyfriend, or have you forgotten?"

"That's enough, the both of you." Her mum did *not* look happy. "It's Christmas, and we don't need any more fighting." Ginny winced as her mother sniffed and wiped her eyes on her apron. "One of you needs to go and check on Harry. Which one will it be?" Ron looked longingly at his plate, giving Ginny the perfect excuse.

"I'll go, Ron. You stay and finish your pudding."

*

Plink.

Plink.

He was right where she expected him to be--the place she'd always found him when he wanted to be alone over the summer. Leaning against the willow and staring out over the still, silent lake, he was tossing pebbles and watching them bounce and skitter across the ice.

Plink.

"Thought I'd find you here," she said, handing him his coat. "Mum was starting to get worried." She gave him a closer look and was relieved to see that he wasn't moping like she expected. Instead, he looked almost...satisfied.

He shrugged and tossed another pebble. *Plink.* "Sorry." Ginny noticed he didn't look sorry at all. "Just didn't want to go in there and interrupt the conversation with Percy. He doesn't like me much." *Plink.*

"Give me those." She reached over and took the pebbles out of his hand. "Harry, trust me, you wouldn't have interrupted anything. You know as well as I do that Percy only came so Scrimgeour could get you alone."

He grinned. "Well, yeah, but I thought that if I wasn't there, he might at least try to work something out with your mum and dad." He looked at her, his expression curious. "How'd it go?"

She felt the corner of her mouth raise in a wry half-smile. "How do you think it went, Harry? Mum fawned all over him, Dad ignored him. Fleur called him rude--rightfully so, for once."

"And your brothers?"

"Started a contest, trying to come up with the most creative way of hexing him."

"And who was winning?"

She couldn't stop her smile this time. "We don't know. Mum wouldn't let them try their ideas out. Said we weren't allowed to hex him. Not fair, if you ask me. He made us suffer with all his rules and regulations about cauldron bottoms, and we can't even give him a few boils on his arse." Her grin grew bigger. "Someone *was* able to hit him with the mashed parsnips, though."

Harry laughed out loud, then reached over, gently took the pebbles from her hand, and dropped them on the ice.

"Come on," he said, grabbing her arm and pulling her with him as he walked away.

"Where are we going?"

He paused, dropping her arm and shading his eyes with his hand. Turning in a complete circle, he grabbed her arm again and started off in the same direction he'd originally been heading. "Right... over... here," he said, stopping in the middle of the garden. The snow

was pristine here, save for their footprints. "This is perfect." He dropped her arm again and started gathering snow, rolling it into a large ball.

"Perfect? Perfect for-- Harry? What are you doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing?" he asked, as if it should be obvious. "Although... I think we need some props. Let's see... A Gryffindor scarf, a pair of glasses..."

"You're going to trip over that ego of yours if it gets any bigger, you know," she said, thrusting her hands in her pockets. Damn, it was cold out here.

He frowned at her, his brow wrinkling, "What?" She watched the sharp puffs of breath as he worked.

"Gryffindor scarf, glasses," she prompted. "It's you, right?"

"Erm, no," he said, looking confused. "I was making Percy."

"Why?"

He flashed a quick grin at her. "So you can pelt him with snowballs. Not quite as satisfying as hexing him, I'll admit, but..."

"It's brilliant," she said. "But I think we should get the twins and Ron. They'll want to help, too." For a second, she thought she saw a look of disappointment flit across his face, but dismissed that thought. There was no reason for him to be disappointed; they were friends and nothing more. Besides, she was going out with Dean.

Together, they managed to sneak past her mum, notify Fred, George and Ron of their plans, gather some warmer clothes for themselves, and collect the supplies they needed to make the snowman as realistic as possible. Fred carried the Gryffindor scarf, Ron had a skein of orange yarn, and Ginny carried an old pair of Percy's wire-rimmed glasses. Her mum had retired to the lounge with Bill and Fleur and her dad to discuss the wedding, so they didn't even have to sneak past her a second time and risk having to explain what they were doing.

In the end, after another raid of the house for props, they had a snowman effigy of Percy--down to the flashing "Big-Head Boy" badge--and a second one of Scrimgeour, built at Fred and George's insistence. They'd stated that Harry needed someone to "hex," too, and he'd finally given in when Ginny had argued in their favour. She found herself inordinately proud that she'd been the one to convince him.

Several hours (and a snowball fight) later, the models of Percy and Scrimgeour had been reduced to piles of snow leaning haphazardly on the ground. The button noses and eyes sat lopsided on the remnants of their heads, "Percy's" glasses were crooked on what was left of his face, and the yarn that had been their hair had slid to the side, or, in

"Scrimgeour's" case, onto the ground, in a lumpy, tangled, sodden mass. Looking down at herself and then at her brothers and Harry, Ginny realised that they weren't in much better shape than the snowmen. She couldn't feel her feet and her hands were tingling with cold, as were her ears, nose and chin.

"Come on," she said. "Let's go in. I'm cold. And hungry," she added, seeing the protest begin on Ron's face. "Mum's got some mince pies, fresh from the oven--she promised to have them done by now." She grinned smugly as Ron immediately dropped the snow he'd been patting into a solid ball and headed for the kitchen. It never failed.

Later that evening after they'd all cleaned up and dried off, Ginny found herself sitting with Harry in the lounge. The fire was crackling merrily in the grate and they were leaning against the sofa, extending their stocking-clad feet towards the flames, hoping to warm their still-frozen toes. She absently watched the dragons on her socks--a gift from Charlie--fly about. Every so often, they would drift over her toes and disappear for a moment to fly across the sole of her foot, reappearing again to fly across the top in a never-ending loop. Fred and George gone back to their shop--something that afternoon had sparked their imaginations, and she'd learned a long time ago not to ask--and Ron had disappeared to his room, where he was reading his gift from Bill, *The Forty-Seventh Giant Book of Chudley Cannon Facts, Collector's Edition*.

She took a sip of her hot chocolate and glanced at Harry out of the corner of her eye before letting her gaze fall on the tree in the corner. Its fairy-lights twinkled brightly, reflecting off the glass balls and tinsel.

It really was a pretty tree, she thought. Except...

"Is that a gnome?" she asked incredulously. She'd just got a good look at the angel on top. *Surely not.*

But when she turned to look at him, she saw the confirmation on his face.

"Why is there a gold-painted gnome on our tree?"

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies, Ginny." He shrugged almost apologetically.

"Oh, come on, Harry," she wheedled. "You can tell me." She leaned closer, and Harry slowly dropped his gaze into his mug.

He just shook his head and took another sip of his hot chocolate. "I promised I wouldn't tell," he said, lifting his eyes to hers.

"Fine, then," she said, frustrated. She hated not knowing things. Crossing her arms, she glared at the fire, glancing occasionally at Harry out the corner of her eye. He was sitting, a small smile on his face, occasionally taking a sip of chocolate. Frustrated as she was

about not knowing the story of the gnome, she had to give him credit. He was good at keeping secrets.

She looked over at him when she felt his toe nudge her leg. "What did Dean get you for Christmas?" he asked.

"A book."

"A book?"

"Hmmm," she said, taking a biscuit from the plate she'd placed between them.

"Is that all you're going to tell me? A book?" She grinned at his indignant expression as she chewed. She could keep secrets, too.

She relented a little later, after she had swallowed the last of her biscuit. "A book," she said, "explaining football. So I'd understand when he talked about it."

"A book. Better than what Ron got from Lavender, I reckon," he muttered under his breath.

"Really?" she asked, eager for some gossip. She needed more dirt against Ron. "What *did* he get from Lavender? Did he like it?"

"Can't tell you what it was. Sorry," he said. "He made me promise."

She glared at him. Damn him and his promises. He was keeping potential ammunition against her brothers to himself.

"But, no," Harry continued. "He didn't like it. Not from her, anyway. He might've been more receptive if it had come from--"

"Hermione," they both said together.

"Then again," he said, "maybe not. It was pretty hideous."

Ginny made a face. "If Ron doesn't stop thrashing about with Lavender like the giant squid in heat, Hermione won't be giving him anything, ever again."

Harry sighed, and she wished she hadn't said anything. It had to be tough on him, with his two best friends fighting and him stuck in the middle. She patted him on the arm consolingly, and then started casting about to find another topic.

"What did Scrimgeour want?" she asked, finally deciding to ask about what he'd been doing while she'd been forced to listen to Percy. The worst thing that could happen would be that he'd get angry, but she could handle his anger much better than his angst.

"He wanted to know where Dumbledore went when he left Hogwarts." Harry answered, sounding disgusted. "As if he thinks I owe it to him to tell."

"And what did you tell him?" She already thought she knew the answer to that question, but the topic had distracted him from Ron and Hermione, so she kept at it.

He gave a short laugh. "No idea."

"You don't remember what you told him?" she asked, confused. The conversation hadn't been *that* long ago.

"What? No, that's not what I meant. I meant that I told him I had no idea where Dumbledore went. It's the truth, or close enough." He gave her a warning glance. "And don't you ask, either. I really don't know."

"And you wouldn't tell me anyway because you promised," she finished for him. "It's all right, Harry. Was that all he wanted?"

Another mirthless laugh. "Course not. He wanted a poster-boy for the Ministry."

"Hmm. Bet you liked that," she said, teasing him. "You and that ego of yours."

He nudged her shoulder, nearly knocking her over. "Shut it, you," he said, his voice good-natured. "I still can't believe he had the nerve to suggest it. I told him I didn't approve of what the Ministry was doing and asked him when he was going to release Stan Shunpike."

Ginny gaped at him. "Did you really?"

"Yep, and then he called me 'Dumbledore's man, through and through.' Like it was an insult or something. He wasn't very happy with me." She watched his eyes light up with the memory.

"There, there, Harry," she said, patting his hand in an exaggerated consoling motion. "I can tell you're broken-hearted that you've upset the Minister."

He snorted. "Yeah, that's me. Depressed because yet another Ministry lackey doesn't like me. Like that's anything new."

She placed her hand on his arm. "There are lots of people who do like you, you know that, right? Ron and Hermione, the twins...Remus." She paused. "Me." She felt a jolt in her stomach as she said that, but ignored it. *You've given up on him, remember?*

He froze for a moment, then reached over and squeezed the hand on his arm. "I know it. And I appreciate it. Trust me; I'm much more concerned about your opinion than I am about the Minister's. Besides, there are worse things than to be 'Dumbledore's man.'"

"True." She refilled his chocolate and offered him another biscuit, which led to a discussion about Ron and his eating habits, which led to a conversation about Quidditch, which turned into an in-depth analysis of Gryffindor's competition for the Quidditch Cup and Puddlemere's chances to win against the Harpies in their next match.

When they exhausted the topic of Quidditch, they sat silent for a few moments, and she stared at the fire, occasionally glancing over at him. She enjoyed watching the dancing flames until she caught Harry staring into his mug, his face pensive.

"Harry?" she asked. "Is something wrong?"

"D' you really think I'm arrogant?"

Ginny looked up sharply at his quiet tone. "What?"

"The snowman thing. You said I'd trip over my ego—"

Ginny squirmed more upright and nearly slopped her drink in her haste to reassure him. "No! I know you better than that, Harry. I was just taking the mickey." She gave a wry smile. "I forget sometimes that you didn't grow up Weasley. That's just what we do."

"No, it's all right. I just wanted to make sure. I don't want to be like Malfoy."

"Oh, Harry. There's no chance of you ever becoming as arrogant as that ponce." He smiled, and she watched, delighted, as it lit up his eyes. He didn't smile like that very often.

He yawned and she glanced at the clock, startled to see that it was well past eleven o'clock. They'd been talking for over three hours.

"Sorry," he apologised. "It's been a long day. I think I'm going to go to bed. Coming?"

He stood and offered his hand to help her up, but she shook her head, smiling at him. "I think I'll sit here a while longer," she said. "Sleep well, Harry."

He reached down and put his hand on her shoulder, giving it a slight squeeze before turning and heading for the stairs. "You too, Ginny. See you in the morning."

And she was left alone in front of the fire, replaying their conversation in her head and watching the dragons on her socks as they dipped and soared to the sound of the crackling flames.

~End~

Author's note, take two: By some weird twist of fate, while I was writing this fic, one of my favorite fan-artists, Reallycorking, posted two pieces of canon art, one from chapter 16 of HBP and one from chapter 17, both of which provided me with inspiration as I was writing. First, go look at Confrontation, her rendering of Harry and Scrimgeour's conversation in chapter 16, at <http://community.livejournal.com/corkart/8240.html#cutid1>. Then take a peek at Mashed Parsnip, which she posted while I was adding in the parsnip incident, at <http://community.livejournal.com/corkart/9451.html#cutid1>. And don't forget to leave her a review!