

You Can't Stop Love

St. Valentine's Day.

Otherwise known as "It's wonderful that I have a boyfriend but don't you think he could take five seconds to pay attention to me even if we are in the middle of a war?" day.

Hermione Granger-Lupin ate another spoonful of pink soup moodily.

I love Ron, but sometimes I wonder if he really notices me. Sure, we kiss, but he used to kiss other girls like that. The kisses make me feel special, but how do I know how he feels?

Lost in her thoughts as she was, it took her a few seconds to register that the prodding in her left thigh was something outside herself.

"Wha—oh, hi Meghan."

"Thank you for waking up." Her little sister Meghan Black glowered at her. "If you happen to see your *boyfriend* at all today, will you please tell him I want my CD burner back?"

"Your what?"

"My CD burner. You use it to make CDs."

"I know what it is. I just didn't know you had one."

"Where were you at Christmas?"

Hermione blushed a little. "Snogging Ron."

"I know." Meghan rolled her eyes. "We barely saw either of your faces all holiday. Anyway, if you don't mind asking him to give that back to me, I'd appreciate it."

"All right."

Meghan headed out of the Hall, but before she could make it, she was intercepted by Neville, who produced a large bunch of pink snapdragons from behind his back. Hermione watched the dragons snap at Meghan's braids and sighed.

Ron never does sweet little things like that for me. Maybe he's just not that kind of boy.

But was she terribly selfish to want just one St. Valentine's gift?

Hermione had her hand on the doorknob of the sixth year boys' dorm when she noticed the sign on the door.

SNOG CENTRAL

Please knock before entering

She rapped three times on the door.

A small gasp came from beyond it. "Just a minute!" Draco called out.

"In your dreams," Hermione answered, and opened the door anyway.

"Hermione!" Draco protested from the floor. Luna waved dreamily from her position across his chest. Neither of them wore a shirt, and her bra was half undone.

"As if I haven't seen it before." Hermione scooped Draco's robes and shirt off his bed and threw them at him without breaking stride on her way to Ron's wardrobe. "I'm surprised that's all the farther you got. It is St. Valentine's Day."

"This is just where we're warming up," Luna said. "We were going to go down to the Den for the big stuff."

Draco turned the color of Neville's snapdragons.

"The Den? Aren't Harry and Ginny down there?"

"No, they're somewhere else," said Luna. "Harry *really* didn't want to be disturbed."

Hermione pulled out a portable chessboard and a broken drumstick and set them aside. "If you're going to try and convince me they went down to the Chamber of Secrets, I'm not going to believe you."

"Believe what you like," Luna said airily. "What are you looking for?"

"Meghan's CD burner. Ron borrowed it..." Hermione sneezed and pulled back. "Does he *ever* wash his socks?"

"Not the Quidditch socks," Draco said, shaking his head to settle his hair into place. "He thinks he'll wash the luck out of them."

"Ugh." Hermione stared into the wardrobe with distaste.

"Why don't you just ask him to find it for you?" Draco suggested carefully. "He wouldn't mind."

"I'm not speaking to him."

"Since when?" said Luna.

"Since right now." Hermione attacked the wardrobe again. "Since he didn't even bother to remember what *day* it is."

A small cascade of dust, and—"Ah-HA!" She yanked a boxy item from the depths of the wardrobe and collapsed onto Ron's bed, coughing. Draco and Luna, she noticed vaguely, had left.

Suppose they didn't want to listen to me whine anymore. Not surprised.

She brushed the dust off the CD burner. A marvel of magical technology, it could find any song ever recorded, whether by magical or Muggle artists. After you paid for the privilege of buying the song—there was a tablet set in the top with forms where you could write down your vault number at Gringotts—you could record it onto a CD to listen to.

I wonder why Ron wanted it?

Curious, Hermione popped the burner open.

A shiny, unmarked CD sat within. She picked it up and turned it over, noticing the pattern of grooves on its rainbowy underside. *He recorded something on here. A bunch of somethings.*

She set the CD back in the burner, tucked it under her arm, and made her way out of the boys' dorm and up the girls' stairs to the third years'. Meghan's CD player, which Hermione was allowed to use "whenever I'm not", sat neatly on her nightstand, and Hermione scooped it up in her other hand.

Time to find out what Ron Weasley listens to.

Sitting down on her own bed, she popped the CD into the slot and pressed play. A short, country-sounding intro, and a man's voice began to sing.

*She's a yellow pair of running shoes
A holey pair of jeans
She looks great in cheap sunglasses
She looks great in anything
She's "I want a piece of chocolate"
"Take me to a movie"
She's "I can't find a thing to wear"
Now and then she's moody*

*She's a Saturn with a sunroof
With her brown hair a-blowing
She's a soft place to land
And a good feeling knowing
She's a warm conversation
That I wouldn't miss for nothing
She's a fighter when she's mad
She's a lover when she's loving*

*And she's
Everything I ever wanted
And everything I need
I talk about her, I go on and on and on
'Cause she's everything to me*

Hermione stared at the player.

Why did he record that?

Her hand reached out and pressed the skip button, seemingly of its own accord. The next song came up.

*We go out to a party somewhere
The moment we walk in the door
People stop and everybody stares
She don't know what they're staring for*

*She don't know she's beautiful
Never crossed her mind
She don't know she's beautiful
No, she's not that kind
She don't know she's beautiful
Though time and time I've told her so*

Hermione paused the music, her heart beginning to race.

Did he... could he have...

Quickly, she skipped to the next song.

*Every time our eyes meet
This feeling inside me
Is almost more than I can take
Baby when you touch me
I can feel how much you love me
And it just blows me away
I've never been this close to anyone or anything
I can hear your thoughts
I can see your dreams*

*I don't know how you do what you do
I'm so in love with you
It just keeps getting better
I want to spend the rest of my life
With you by my side
Forever and ever
Every little thing that you do
Baby, I'm amazed by you*

Hermione stopped the music and put her hand against her mouth to stifle the exceptionally girly squeal she could feel coming.

How many songs are on here?

The number on the screen came up. 12.

Twelve. A very magically powerful number, that.

She grinned and reached for her quill.

Why don't I just make it thirteen, then?

Scribbling down Moony's vault number—he'd given her limited access for her sixteenth birthday, with the understanding that anything she spent was accountable to him—she started the CD burner humming.

I know exactly what I want, too...

Dinner that night was only in the Great Hall for about half the school. Balcony tables, suitably shielded from the weather, were available all over the castle for those who wanted a little privacy with a girlfriend or boyfriend. Hermione was perhaps less surprised than she should have been to receive one of the red-ribboned invitations from a grinning house-elf.

Fourth floor, east side, seven o'clock. Great, that gives me two hours to get ready...

Ron was waiting beside the curtained alcove when she arrived, a small flat package in his hands. "Happy St. Valentine's Day," he said, handing it to her.

"Thank you!" Hermione took out her own gift to him, a deluxe box of Honeydukes' Sweet Surprises, and held it out. "This is for you."

"Thanks." Ron took it and grabbed hold of a flap of paper, then stopped. "Er, ladies first."

I don't believe it. Manners. Hermione carefully unwrapped her present. "A CD?" she said, popping open the jewel box and frowning with what she hoped was the right mixture of surprise and confusion. Some of the confusion she didn't have to fake—the disk which had been unmarked just hours before now bore a word written in delicate script with soft red ink. "Why does it have my name on it?"

"I made it for you." Ron grinned at her. "Ginny did the calligraphy for me, but I picked all the songs myself. Do you like it?"

Hermione laughed. "I don't know yet—I'll have to *hear* it!"

Ron pulled back the curtains to their dining table, his grin growing wider. A magical CD player sat on a low shelf nearby. "As you wish."

Hermione smiled back, popped the CD into the player, and started it. "She's Everything" came up.

"Well?" Ron asked, bouncing on his toes.

"As far as I can judge from the first twenty seconds, yes. I like it."

"Great." Ron started to sit down, then jumped up and came around the table to pull out Hermione's chair. "Please, sit down," he said a little awkwardly.

Hermione kissed a fingertip and brushed it against his cheek on her way past. "You're so sweet."

And you didn't notice.

"She's Everything" finished just as their first course arrived, and "She Don't Know" lasted halfway through the appetizers. "Amazed" took over from there, followed by "She's Got It All" and "Powerful Thing", which made Hermione laugh.

"Yeah, this one always makes me think of us," Ron admitted.

"I've never seen two people in my life," Hermione chanted, "'more determined to ignore the obvious...' How long did everyone else know about us, do you think?"

"Probably about as long as we've known each other. Our parents, at least. Mum was always dropping hints about you, even before we knew who you really were."

That started a round of reminiscences that lasted through at least five songs. Hermione started listening again halfway through "From This Moment On".

"You're the reason I believe in love," she sang along quietly, "'and you're the answer to my prayers from up above...'"

"Really?" Ron asked.

"Don't ask me questions when I'm singing!"

Ron shrugged. "Okay."

Hermione softened. "Yes," she said.

"Yes what?"

"Yes, really. You are the reason I believe in love."

Ron blinked at her once or twice. "I am?"

"I don't think I've ever really been in love with anybody else. I had crushes, but part of me always knew they were crushes." Hermione sighed. "And part of me must have known how much they would hurt me if I let them go on too long."

"It wasn't your fault," Ron said, reaching across and putting a hand on top of her sleeve. "You couldn't have helped what happened."

"I know, but I feel like I should have!"

"He made his own decision, Hermione. And you can't change the past."

"I wish I could, though."

"You can't."

"That's not the point—" Hermione cut herself off. "Let's not argue," she said. "Let's not argue on St. Valentine's Day."

"Fine with me." Ron withdrew his hand. "Let's just eat."

From This Moment On” ended, and a new song began.

You may think that I'm talking foolish

Hermione laughed without meaning to, and heard Ron chuckle as well.

You've heard that I'm wild and I'm free

“He was free,” Hermione admitted. “And...he messed up.”

*You may wonder how I can promise you now
This love that I'm feeling for you will always be*

Ron shrugged. “People do stupid things sometimes.”

You're not this time that I'm killing

Both of them winced. “Little close to home, that,” said Ron.

I'm no longer one of those guys

Hermione gave a short laugh. “Only he was, wasn't he?”

*As sure as I live, this love that I give
Is gonna be yours till the day that I die*

“Let's not talk about him anymore,” Ron suggested.

“All right.”

*Oh baby, I'm gonna love you forever
Forever and ever, amen
As long as old men sit and talk about the weather
As long as old women sit and talk about old men*

“Is that what old women do?” Ron asked.

Hermione smiled. “Probably.”

*If you wonder how long I'll be faithful
I'll be happy to tell you again
I'm gonna love you forever and ever
Forever and ever, amen*

They talked quietly through the rest of the song. Ron reached across to pull gently on Hermione's curls during the lines about brown hair, and Hermione caught his hand in her own. “It's a lovely present,” she said. “Thank you.”

“You're welcome, and that's all the songs I had,” Ron said as “Forever and Ever, Amen” ended. “You can stop it if you want—”

A guitar introduction began to play.

“What the—”

Hermione shook her head and put her finger to her lips. Ron stared at the player as a woman began to sing.

*I packed a cooler and a change of clothes
Let's jump in, see how far it goes*

“What is this?”

“My song for you,” Hermione said quietly.

*You got my heart in your daddy's boat
We got all night to make it float*

“What, you mean—then you—”

*We could sit on the shore
We could just be friends
Or we could jump in*

Hermione blushed a little herself. “I shouldn't have,” she admitted, “but Meghan wanted her burner back, and—”

"Sshh." Ron was listening intently.

*Whole world could change in a minute
Just one kiss could stop it spinning
We could think it through
But I don't want to, if you don't want to*

*We could keep things just the same
Leave here the way we came
With nothing to lose*

Hermione gulped as she recalled the patch job she'd done on this song—the ending was coming up much sooner than it should—

But I don't want to, if you don't want to—

The singer held out the last note, then tumbled off it.

But I want to

Hermione looked away.

I want you

The music trailed off and ended.

"You put that on there?" Ron asked. "Then you knew all the time."

"I'm so sorry, Ron. I should never have been in your things—I was angry, I didn't think you'd even remembered what today was—"

"I've been working on that for a month, and you just had to go and spoil the whole thing, didn't you?" Ron's voice was rising. "You just had to go snooping, poking around where you're not wanted—"

"I said I was sorry, what else do you want me to say?"

"How about telling me what that last song was supposed to mean?"

"Fine! It was supposed to mean thank you for the music, and exactly what it sounds like!" Hermione shoved her chair away from the table and stood up. "I don't want to, if you don't want to—and you're certainly acting like you don't want to—"

"Am I?" Ron was on his feet. "Am I really?" He rounded the table in two strides and stood facing her. "Let me change that, then."

He pulled her into a ruthless embrace, then cushioned her head with one big hand as his lips closed firmly over hers. Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned forward into the kiss, burying her fingers in his hair.

"I *do* want to," Ron murmured against her lips when they broke off.

"I never would have figured that out," Hermione said dryly.

"What, not even yet?" Ron sighed theatrically. "Guess I have to try again, then."

Hermione got there first.

*She was in the backyard - they say it was a little past nine
When her prince pulled up - a white pickup truck
Her folks shoulda seen it comin' - it was only just a matter of time
Plenty old enough - and you can't stop love...*

"Suds in the Bucket", Sara Evans
