

In the News

by MuseAmusant

Love, lies and Quidditch...

One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Dedicated to my dear and lovely friend, **Kyria of Delphi**, the undisputed queen of VK/HG fanfiction.

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Ottery St. Catchpole - The Burrow

With a resounding ***CRACK!*** of Apparition, a red-faced and visibly furious Hermione Jean Granger arrived and proceeded to stomp her way towards the Burrow's front door, causing the garden gnomes rootling about in the family vegetable garden to immediately flee and seek shelter in Molly Weasley's beloved cabbage rose bushes.

When she was mere steps away, the door was abruptly flung open, and Hermione found herself being squeezed nearly breathless by the arms and ample bosom of the Weasley matriarch herself.

"Hermione, dear, what's wrong? You look quite peaked," the older witch fussed. "Oh my, you're not ill, are you?"

"Yes, well... kind of. Just not the way you're thinking, Mrs. Weasley," Hermione hastily added at the older woman's sudden look of alarm.

Molly pulled back at that, her brow wrinkled in confusion. Then her sharp eyes examined the younger witch and noted the telltale flushed cheeks, narrowed eyes and the tight set of her lips. Quickly realizing that something was most definitely amiss, Molly led her inside and guided her to a comfortable kitchen chair.

After pouring them both a bracing cup of strong English tea and fetching some of her freshly-baked scones, Molly sat herself down with a heavy sigh.

"So tell me, Hermione, exactly what has my idiot son done now?"

"Oi, woman, you've got more than one son who resembles that remark!" With that statement, George's sparkling eyes and grinning face soon came into view as he pounded down the stairs and swiped a warm scone off the plate Molly had just set in front of Hermione.

Molly swatted futilely at her happily munching son with a kitchen towel as Hermione's lips twitched faintly with amusement.

"True."

At George's huff of entirely fabricated indignation, Molly shushed him with a look before turning her concerned gaze back on the younger witch.

"Well, let me rephrase then, dear," Molly began. "What has my *Ronald* done now?"

"I take it neither of you have seen this morning's *Prophet*, then?"

George's eyes narrowed. "Ronnie nicked it off the delivery owl as soon as it arrived and then took off like a pack of hungry Acromantulas was right on his tail. Thought that seemed a mite fishy, as Ronniekins has never had much use for reading unless Quidditch was involved. Just wait a tick," he said, striding over to the Floo for a quick visit to the joke shop.

Returning moments later, George was scowling darkly and brandishing his own copy of the offending wizarding publication.

"Oh, Ronald," Molly moaned after hastily scanning the article in question. "I'm so sorry, my dear. I've never exactly made a secret of my hopes that you would someday join this family, but honestly, I don't know what Ronald was thinking to lie about the two of you being engaged! Unless you *were* and that Lavender tart..."

"No, no, Lavender has nothing to do with this," Hermione hastened to reassure her. "It's all Ron, I'm afraid. Molly, I have no idea what Ron is playing at telling Skeeter that we're getting married! No offense, but..."

"No worries, dear." Molly smiled faintly. "Though I would dearly love for you to become a part of our family, I've suspected for a while now that you and Ronald were just too different to work out in a long-term relationship, let alone marriage. No, I rather think that one of you would've likely ended up in Azkaban before long!"

George laughed aloud at that. "Ronnie wouldn't stand a chance!" Then he sobered, eyes narrowing again in thought. "But I think I know what Ron might be up to with all this," he said, jerking his chin in the direction of the discarded newspaper.

At his mother's frown, George elaborated. "Look, mum, I know neither you nor Hermione are exactly Quidditch fans, but surely you know that the Vultures are in town to play the Chudley Cannons, right?" He sighed. "Ron's been on a right tear lately, going on and on about Viktor coming to town to steal *his* girl away."

The stormy look in Hermione's eyes prompted George to quickly add, "I know that you're not together anymore, and I think you were totally right to break things off with him when you did, 'Mione. Believe me, I totally understand, and I agree with mum that you'd eventually kill each other if you ever went mad enough to actually marry the delusional little git.

"But Ron can't get that fantasy out of his head about Harry and Gin and you and him riding off into the sunset to raise a Quidditch team together. Ron's absolutely convinced himself that Viktor is the biggest threat to that fantasy, and I'm afraid he probably cooked up this ruddy bit of nonsense to make Viktor think you're permanently off the market."

As Hermione slowly digested this new information, her thoughts turned towards the darkly handsome Bulgarian seeker, bringing a rush of warmth of surprising intensity, especially considering that it had been nearly a year since she had seen him last. Hermione found that she was willing to admit to herself, at least, that she wouldn't be entirely averse to any attempt of Viktor's to "steal" her away from her self-involved cad of an ex-boyfriend.

A big part of her decision to break up with Ron had been the uncomfortable realization on her part that Ron valued her mainly for how she could make life easier for him rather than any true romantic feeling for her. Ron was, clearly, perfectly content for her to pay their bills while he deigned to perform only the occasional odd job for a few extra galleons of pocket money, the better to keep the bulk of his day free to hang out in the pub with his adoring pack of loyal war groupies (who actually believed his boastful tales of being the true brains behind Voldemort's defeat) and playing Quidditch with his ne'er-do-well mates in the Burrow's back garden in the evening.

Realizing she had been woolgathering for several long moments while Molly and George watched her knowingly, Hermione blushed deeply before clearing her throat rather self-consciously.

"Be that as it may, George, I hardly think..."

Suddenly, the Weasley Floo flared bright green, and Harry immediately leaped on through, forcing George to dive out of the way to avoid having the young Auror land on top of him.

"Harry, mate, what the *hell*..."

"Language, George!" Molly and Hermione chorused as Harry coughed through the spray of Floo powder that liberally coated his hair and robes.

"Thank Merlin, I found you, 'Mione," Harry wheezed as Hermione aimed a gentle cleansing and dust-banishing spell his way. George helped Harry to a chair while Molly quickly poured the young wizard a cup of tea, which he accepted gratefully.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Hermione asked worriedly. "You were looking for me? Why? Has something happened to Ron?"

"Ron's fine, as far as I know," Harry grimaced. "He was holding court at the Leaky when I stopped in for a bite this morning. But never mind Ron for now. Hermione, have you seen Viktor today, by any chance?"

Hermione frowned at that. "No, Harry, why would I? We haven't seen each other in some time, you know. But why do you ask?"

"Damn," Harry swore with feeling. "Hermione, Viktor's coach reported him missing when he didn't show up for Quidditch practice this morning. A couple of his teammates mentioned that Viktor was talking about surprising you with a visit last night, and he hasn't been seen since."

Cape Wrath - The Scottish Highlands

Viktor slowly flickered back to consciousness as the first tentative fingers of pale morning light began to cross the horizon. He decided he wasn't entirely pleased with this development because it was accompanied by breath-stealing, agonizing pain in his entire body and a slowly dawning awareness of exactly how desperate was the situation he currently found himself in.

Deciding to set grim thoughts aside for the moment, Viktor shifted his focus to take stock of his physical state. After some moments of contemplation, he decided he was quite certain that both of his legs were broken. And, unless he missed his guess, quite probably his pelvis as well. The agony he experienced when attempting to take a decent breath strongly suggested multiple ribs were cracked, if not also broken.

On top of it all, from the look...and smell...of the foul and sodden mess he was currently lying in, his regrettable state of distraction had resulted in him crashing his broom into one of the more desolate boggy marshlands that the Scottish Highlands were rather infamous for.

"Da eba!" Viktor cursed weakly, but with true feeling.

If only he hadn't lost his heart years ago to a shy, yet spirited young witch with curiosity and intelligence sparkling in her lovely brown eyes.

If only he had found a witch to help him get over her once he learned of her attachment to that redheaded *chickidja*, Ronald Weasley.

If only he had ignored the copy of the *Daily Prophet* that had accompanied his breakfast of Turkish coffee and eggs.

If only he hadn't seen the headlines blaring an announcement of the highly-anticipated Weasley-Granger nuptials, accompanied by a huge picture of Weasley with his obscenely long, freckled arm wrapped about his beloved Nin's waist, his unworthy hand steadily creeping downwards to familiarly squeeze and cup her pert little bottom.

If only he hadn't chosen to vent his pain and fury by grabbing his broom and flying like a bat out of hell in a desperate attempt to erase that devastating image from his

mind.

Viktor growled low in his throat, angrily swiping away a stray tear before flopping back down with a sigh. Perhaps this was just as well, he mused dejectedly. What was life, after all, without his beloved Nin by his side? Perhaps this is why the fates had decided that the only woman he would ever love would end up in the arms and bed of another man.

His imagination promptly presented the heartbroken Bulgarian with an all-too-vivid image of his delicate, lovely Nin being divested of her wedding finery by the gangly redhead before leading her to their marriage bed, which wrenched a long, pain-filled cry that seemed to emanate from the very depths of his soul, inadvertently startling several small birds into simultaneously taking wing.

But they were the only ones to hear, to see his predicament, to bear witness to the agony tearing his heart to shreds.

Slowly, the badly injured wizard reached down to the small leather bag thankfully still attached to the shattered remains of his prized broom.

After several tries, Viktor managed to remove it and extricate an ornate silver flask and brought it to his lips to take a healthy gulp of rakia, feeling the slight burn as the alcohol slid down his throat, bringing a rush of welcome heat to his chilled and battered body.

He lay there contemplating his grave situation as an anemic sun slowly climbed, slightly brightening the quiet and barren landscape.

Then Viktor slowly slipped away into sweet unconsciousness once more.

AN: With grateful thanks to the incomparable **Blue Artemis** for the beta. Her invaluable assistance is deeply appreciated.

*Translated from the Bulgarian

Da eba!: Fuck!

chickidja: wanker, tosser