

Ginny Weasley and the Yule Ball

by beaweasley2

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For all of us who have read the Goblet of Fire, we remember the Yule Ball and the days leading up to it from Harry's point of view. However, for Ginny Weasley there were ups and downs, brotherly interventions, discoveries, and of course all the preparations, excitement and anticipation of the big event as seen through her eyes.

In The Library

Chapter 1 of 8

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Ginny and Hermione were at first a bit put off by Hogwarts's newest celebrity always hanging out in the library and browsing through the books, or doing his school work on the table closest to Madam Pince's desk. But the library was more than just a sanctuary for the international Quidditch player; it was also a place to escape the flock of girls that always followed him. However, because of the flock of giggling girls that followed Viktor Krum into the library every day, both Ginny and Hermione had taken to doing their homework deep between the shelves for privacy.

So that's why Ginny and Hermione were at the end of a long row of bookshelves, searching for the book Hermione wanted to finish her Charms essay when Krum showed up, moving tentatively between the tall bookshelves. This wasn't the first time he had followed them through the rows of shelves during the last few weeks, either. Viktor usually kept a polite distance. He rarely spoke to them, except in short inquiries and muffled hellos, unless Hermione appeared to be alone. Except today, Viktor stopped in the row near them and seemed to be waiting, watching Hermione.

"I need a different book; I'll see you in a bit," Ginny said with a wink at Hermione and walked to the end of the aisle so she could watch discreetly and effectively close the aisle to intruders or prying eyes from that end at least. As Ginny passed Viktor, he smiled slightly at her and then stepped over to where Hermione was standing.

"I haff wanted to ask you." His English was broken, he seemed to be concentrating on choosing his words carefully. He looked warily at Ginny, who was trying to look uninterested. "Do you haff book on the," he stopped and thought carefully, "transfiguration of peoples?"

"Human transfiguration is in the Transfiguration section," Hermione said, turning and pointing across the library, "and those are down there a few shelves over." He nodded, although he didn't turn away but continued to stare at her instead. "Are you doing human transfiguration for your classes?" she asked.

"Yes, but ve do not haff as many book of the transfiguration, as you do here, on the ship," Viktor answered, his voice low.

"If you need help finding any books, you can always ask Madam Pince; she's always here to help students," Hermione said, trying to be helpful.

"She gave me a book," he said and hesitated. "I like your library. It is very nice." He looked around as if searching for something.

"It's a very nice library." Hermione smiled. "I see you in here quite a bit?"

"Ve did not bring many books on the ship. Only those needed for classes, and ones that Professor Karkaroff think I may need. But sometime I need a different book, so it is nice that ve can use this place too." He looked directly at Hermione. "But I like being in here. It is quiet." Suddenly several loud whispers and some giggles were heard from somewhere in the library, followed by a reprimand by Madam Pince.

"It's usually quieter, actually." Hermione gave a disapproving look down the aisle. Ginny shrugged. A girl from Hufflepuff walked by and sat down at one of the tables. "Funny, I never noticed her in here before," Hermione stated.

"She follow me sometimes." His tone was so matter of fact that Hermione stifled a laugh in her hand and looked at him. "You haff a pretty laugh," he said, smiling at her.

"Thank you." Hermione blushed deeply at the compliment and smiled at him. He was the first person, besides her father, who had ever complemented her on her smile before.

As she spoke Viktor stepped closer to the books and tried to appear as if he were intently searching the titles as a girl passing by the row stopped to stare at him. Ginny gave her a meaningful glance, and the girl walked on. "Do she go?" he asked Hermione.

"Yeah, she's gone," she replied, looking down the row.

"They follow me all every where," he sighed.

A few giggles erupted somewhere followed by a harsh, "Shush, you there, quiet," from Madam Pince.

"You're famous; it's understandable," Hermione acknowledged.

"I guess. I see you here much time. You like to read much?" Viktor asked her.

"Well, yes I like reading. I find the library to be one of my favorite places usually," Hermione stated as another group of girls crowded together in the row of books one shelf over. Viktor saw them and shifted several books to close the gaps and make a screen.

Hermione stifled a giggle herself. He looked at her, began to speak, and then closed his mouth. "Yes?" she asked tentatively.

"Do you go to the Ball?" Viktor asked.

"I planned to go," Hermione stated.

"Oh." Viktor looked down and started to turn away.

"Are you looking forward to the Ball?" Hermione asked him curiously. "You must attend quite a few, being an international Quidditch player and all?"

Further down the row Ginny suppressed a giggle herself. Viktor had never spoken to Hermione for this long before.

"I do not haff many Balls before," he said. "Yes, I look forward to this Ball." He was looking intently at her, and then he turned quickly as he heard another soft whisper.

"I don't see him, so maybe he left already," came a female voice from their left and was answered by another female voice.

"I thought that he came in here." The voice sounded disappointed.

"But I haven't been asked yet, to go," Hermione said quietly, without knowing why.

"I would like to go, do..." Viktor suddenly froze and turned to go. "They find me," he said, downcast. "I go. May I speak to you again?" he asked hopefully.

"Sure." Hermione smiled warmly at him. "You know where to find me."

"Yes, I do," he said simply but firmly before he made a slight bow to her and left the bookshelf, smiling. At that moment Hermione understood that he was coming into the library because of *her*!

"Hermione?" Ginny asked, coming around into view from the other row. "I saw Viktor Krum leaving. What did he want?"

"He was trying to ask me something." Hermione looked at Ginny, a little bewildered.

"I could only get pieces of what you were saying. What do you think he wanted? Hints on the next challenge?" Ginny asked.

"No, he didn't even mention the tournament at all." She looked at Ginny with her head cocked curiously. "I think he was going to ask me to the Yule Ball!"

"Really! Oh, Hermione, that's wonderful!" Ginny said beaming, trying to keep her voice low. Ginny was surprised. She knew Hermione was actually hoping that her brother would pluck up the courage to ask her. But so far Ron seemed to be trying for someone with a pretty face and was not considering her.

"I was hoping that someone else would ask me..." Hermione said, as if reading Ginny's thoughts, and then shook her head. "*Bute* wants to ask someone *pretty*!"

"You're pretty, Hermione! Even if my dolt of a brother can't see it." Hermione looked up, shocked, at Ginny. "Oh, come on now, of course I know! He's an idiot if he can't see it! I think he takes you for granted actually. But then, he has the mentality of a frog!" Ginny smiled wickedly at Hermione. "Maybe you should go with Viktor."

"Every girl in the school wants to go with him..." Hermione looked past Ginny down the row of books. "They follow him everywhere!"

"Yeah, but he's looking to ask you, isn't he?" Ginny had a mischievous grin. "Every girl in school will be so jealous of you. I know that Ron will definitely take notice if you go with him." She started to laugh and Hermione shot Ginny a questioning look. "Look, my brother can be really thick most of the time. I bet he hasn't even noticed you're a girl yet. He thinks of you as a friend and all, but he can't see what's right in front of his nose!"

Hermione had to laugh at that. "He sure acts like it, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he does. Besides, why wait till he figures it out? Viktor seems like he's interested in you. Why not? It will do you good to go with Viktor; tell him yes!" Ginny replied sincerely.

"Maybe I will." Hermione was smiling as her mind raced over what Ginny had implied. If Ron really was that thick, maybe, just maybe, this would wake him up.

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A few weeks went by and even though Viktor could often be seen going into the library, he was always surrounded by flocks of giggling girls. He carried a regular scowl more often now, and when he was in the library, he stayed close to Madam Pince's desk so that they would keep their distance.

Several times as he passed Hermione, he briefly greeted her or simply nodded, although he sometimes offered her a smile. But he didn't seem to want all those other girls clustering around him when he spoke to her. Both Ginny and Hermione remembered Harry and Ron complaining about the girls in the school roaming and congregating in groups and laughed.

Remembering Ginny's advice, she wrote a brief note on some parchment and slipped it into a book from the end of a nearby shelf. As she passed by the table where Viktor sat she handed him the book.

"I finished with that book you wanted, here! I marked the part you mentioned." She gave him a nod to the book, handing it to him so he could see the slip of parchment, and then stepped over to Madam Pince's desk to check out the other books she carried. "I was wondering where I might find a book on the uses of animal bile in potions?" she asked the librarian a bit louder than her normal volume when in the library. The tiniest glance back told her that Viktor had heard her as well.

"Yes, we have several." Madam Pince wrote down several suggestions on a slip of parchment and handed it to Hermione. Hermione thanked her and walked back to the section, deep in the row of tall bookshelves where she knew the books were. A few minutes later Viktor slid down the row, scanning the titles of the books until he was fairly close to Hermione. She looked up from the book she held open in her hands and nodded to him with a smile.

"Thank you for the book," he said softly as he watched a girl pass them. "I wanted to speak to you, but I ..."

"Have a fan club that seems to follow you everywhere," Hermione finished for him, grinning.

"Vell, yes, they are everywhere I go. They follow me when I swim. They watch me stretch in morning. They watch me in the hall..." his scowl deepened as he spoke. "I think if they could keep up, they would follow me when I fly."

Hermione looked at him with understanding. "It must get so annoying at times."

"You say ann-oi-eng?" he asked.

"It means the same as bothering, or pestering," she clarified.

"Oh, yes, it is. I am sorry, my English is not too good," he said.

"You're doing fine, really," Hermione encouraged him.

"I want to ask you some time for a while..." he watched as his flock of followers was shuffled back to their seats by Madam Pince, "to go the Ball if you have not been asked by someone else yet?" His stance was confident but his eyes were imploring.

"I thought that you had already asked me?" Hermione gave him a sideways glance, smiling from the book she held open in her hands.

He looked startled. "No. I think maybe you go with Harry Potter. You are close, no?"

"Harry and I are friends, and no, he hasn't asked me to the Ball. No one else has asked me yet." She cocked her head and looked up at him. "Are you asking me to go with you to the Ball?"

"Vell, yes." He stood up suddenly very formally. "I would think it an honor to ask you to the Ball."

"Then I would be delighted to go with you." Hermione beamed at him before three girls came into the row of books and startled them. Hermione buried her nose in the book in her hands, and Viktor began examining the titles on the shelves. He quickly took two books from the shelves and left the library looking happy.

That night Hermione told Ginny all about Viktor asking her, right down to the tiniest detail. Both girls were laughing and talking about Viktor and his flock of fans when Lavender and Parvati came into the dorm room. When the two girls asked what was so funny, they only laughed harder. Lavender and Parvati shot Hermione and Ginny disapproving looks as they flopped down on Lavender's bed watching them.

For Ginny this was the best, having a best friend like Hermione and sharing private 'best friend' moments and secrets together. It was almost like having a sister at Hogwarts, something Ginny always wanted, having grown up surrounded by brothers.

Several days later Ginny was sitting with Hermione in the sunlight on a bench, talking about how the Beauxbaton girls seemed to be so conceited and self-assured, how formal and aloof the Durmstrang students seemed, and about how their classmates were behaving towards the students of other two schools.

Viktor walked by on his way back to the entrance hall. He gave Hermione a nod and smiled quickly at her, then scowled at the flock of girls following in his wake.

"Wait until they see you with him." Ginny suppressed a huge grin. "They will all be so jealous!"

Hermione laughed with her. "I have hardly had a moment's time alone with him since he asked me. The only time we can talk anymore is in the library. Madam Pince has started asking people why they are coming in and sending anyone not seriously studying away." She looked at the girls that were trailing Viktor as he left their view. "They all seem to be getting desperate."

"Shame though." Ginny had a mischievous grin. "Maybe he should just tell them he already has a partner, then they will leave him alone," Ginny suggested.

"His friends from Durmstrang already tried that. They don't believe him," Hermione said, pointing at his flock of followers and laughing.

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Notes:

In the chapters: In *The Gryffindor Common Room* and in *The Yule Ball*, Ginny, Hermione, Harry and Ron's conversations are quotes, copied from JK Rowling's book that I felt compelled to include, especially in the 'scenes' which Ginny is present, as given to us by JK Rowling herself. (US GoF p 398-401) I also used some of the conversations and several descriptions of the Yule Ball from JK Rowling as well, (US GoF p 403-432) and thus they are borrowed. Since I don't know JK Rowling to ask her permission, I hope she doesn't mind.

The 'dance class' in *A Big Brother's Advice* Twice has been borrowed from the film version and is not strictly canon. But I liked the idea of Neville being a good dancer, so I used it.

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A Big Brother's Advice ? Twice

Chapter 2 of 8

Ginny accepts her big brother's advice, letting Fred and George fix her up with a date for the Yule Ball.

As the girls made their way back to Gryffindor tower, they saw Neville coming up behind them. "Oi, Hermione, wait up will you?" He was huffing from having run up the stairs to get to them before they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady. "Can I have a word?"

"Sure, Neville." Hermione stopped to wait for him. "Ginny, I'll see you later, okay?" Ginny nodded and walked off. Hermione watched her go and then turned to Neville. "What's up?"

Neville looked at her apprehensively. "Well, I was wondering if I could ask you something?" he said, still short of breath.

"Of course," Hermione replied.

"You're always nice to me and everything." He paused to watch her face carefully, "I... as the girls go, I think you're very nice and I was, if you're not going with anyone yet..." He looked at her imploringly. "Maybe we could go, together... just as friends... if you want to, that is?"

"Oh, Neville." Her voice told him what he was already dreading. Rejection showed clearly in his eyes. "I would have liked to go with you *Really*, you would have been a good dance partner and everything. But Neville, I'm so sorry, but I've been asked already." Hermione reached out and stopped Neville from leaving as he turned, looking crushed. "Neville, I would have gone with you." He looked dubious. "No, Neville I would have, really. We would have had a fun time together, as friends. But I already said yes to some one else."

"It's okay," Neville said, disheartened as passed her to go into the Gryffindor common room.

Hermione called after him encouragingly. "I know you'll find someone, Neville. Don't get discouraged."

Just then Fred and George stepped forward from where they had been watching the scene in the hall from the adjoining corridor. They approached Hermione as Neville slumped past them and passed through the hole behind the portrait of the Fat Lady. "That wasn't very nice," George admonished.

"What wasn't?" asked Hermione.

"Turning down poor Neville like that," Fred stated.

Hermione started to say to him. "I didn't turn him down exactly..."

"Sure sounded like a turn down," Fred said, cutting her off.

"I'd say it sounded that way to me." George accused her, turning to look squarely at Hermione.

"No I didn't!" Hermione snapped at them. "Well, sort of... Look, I just told him that I have already been asked, and couldn't go with him. That's all!"

"Hey, if you don't want to go with Neville, fine with us," Fred replied, holding up his hands.

"For *your* information I *would* have gone with Neville, *happily*! He's a really good dancer! *And* he's a *really* nice guy!" Hermione emphasized clearly to the twins. "*But I've already been asked and said yes to someone else!*" She blurted the password at the portrait of the Fat Lady, who had been watching the scene, and scrambled inside. The twins stood rooted to the stone floor, surprised as the portrait closed behind her.

"She's right. I heard Missy tell Violet that Neville had been showing a few of the boys dancing steps in an old classroom. He's apparently a very good dancer," the Fat Lady said firmly. "*I'd* have been *delighted* to be asked to go to the Ball with Neville!"

Her lofty tone ruffled Fred, who snapped the password at her. "As if you could get off your frame and dance with him!" he said angrily as he followed George into the common room. The portrait slammed rather firmly behind them.

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Ginny was sitting in a large, puffy chair waiting for Hermione to come in. She looked up as Hermione plopped down in a huff next to her. "What did Neville say to you?" she asked, concerned.

Fred and George entered and sat down in a pair of chairs at an old table. They were close enough to hear Hermione and Ginny talking, but not close enough to be noticed. They pulled out their books to appear as if they were doing their homework, a subtle subterfuge at best, for eavesdropping on the girls conversation.

"He asked me to the Ball," Hermione stated sharply.

"What did you tell him?" Ginny piqued.

"That I was sorry, but I had already said yes to someone else," Hermione said flatly.

Ginny looked at her confused. "So what upset you then?" she asked.

"Your *brothers* that's what! They heard Neville asking me." Hermione crossed her arms and exhaled sharply. "They heard me telling Neville no and had the nerve to say that I just turned him down because it was Neville!"

"But would you have gone with Neville if he'd asked you?" Ginny asked her.

"I suppose I might have. Neville's really nice. When he asked me he said that we'd go just as friends. He said he wanted to go with me because I had always been nice to him." She paused to consider for a moment. "You know Ginny, I might have really considered going with Neville. Yes, you know, I think I would have."

Fred gave his brother an incredulous stare that was reflected right back at him.

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As the dance loomed nearer, the girls started acting much more obvious about who they would like to have ask them to the Ball, although they were still congregating in groups. Several girls even became bold enough to ask guys to the Ball. Ginny watched Harry and Ron as they struggled to find partners, secretly wishing Harry would ask

her.

One evening Professor McGonagall posted a notice for all the students fourth year and above to meet in the Transfiguration classroom after dinner. It was to be a meeting about the Ball. Ginny looked wistfully at the posted notice over the shoulders of two other third year girls.

"Oh, I wish I could go," one sighed.

"We could if someone asked us!" the other declared.

"That's just it, we have to be asked by a fourth year!" the first girl responded back as the two moved away. "But I'd go ~~if~~*if anyone* asked me to go, just as long as I *could* go!"

Ginny nodded in quiet agreement as she slipped out of the common room to head to dinner.

In the Great Hall everyone at the Gryffindor table was talking about Professor McGonagall's notice. Speculation was rampant, although nobody knew what it was about.

Ginny, feeling a bit down, went and sat between her brothers, Fred and George. "What's up, sis?" George asked, surprised by the visit.

"Nothing," Ginny stated, not looking at him. She knew that Harry still had not asked anyone yet, but he wasn't even considering asking her either. She secretly wished he would but knew it was completely hopeless. *He hardly ever acknowledges me anymore*, she thought, feeling a bit down knowing this.

"It's not 'nothing' if your face looks like *that!*" George insisted. "What's eating at you?"

"Who do we get to hex for making you look so down?" Fred asked, making an attempt at humor.

Ginny let out a big sigh. "It's..." Ginny said as she looked up and saw Harry and Ron sitting a few spaces past Fred, "silly really. It's no big deal."

"If you look like *this*, it's a big deal." Fred turned Ginny's face up to look him square in the eye. "Did Ron say something?"

"We could always straighten him out if he did!" offered George beside her.

"No, it's not Ron. Really, he didn't do anything," Ginny stated matter of factly. She saw Harry talking to Ron, who was laughing at something Harry said to him.

"Okay, was it Harry?" asked George, noting where Ginny was looking.

"No." Ginny shook her head. "It's something I heard from one of my dorm mates coming down to dinner. Everyone is talking about the Ball." Ginny slouched in her seat.

"Don't worry, Ginny, you'll get asked," George stated.

"We could fix something up for you if you like?" Fred asked, still looking intently at his sister.

He wasn't joking about it; he was actually being serious Ginny thought.

"Yeah, if you like, we can take care of it!" George put his arm around her and gave her a reassuring hug. Just then Dumbledore stood up to give the evening speech before the feast, which was brief as usual, and suddenly the platters and bowls filled with food.

Fred and George tried to make Ginny laugh as they ate. By the end of dinner, they managed to make her laugh so hard she spit her pumpkin juice all over Lee Jordan, who was sitting across the table from her.

As the plates disappeared, Professor McGonagall arrived to lead all the fourth years and up to her classroom. Ginny smiled and waved to her brothers as they headed away, before she got up and headed back to the Gryffindor common room.

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As soon as McGonagall opened up the door to the classroom, they noticed that the normal tables and desks had been removed. Instead, rows of benches lined the length of the room along opposite walls.

"Everyone find a seat now," she called out as they filed in. "Come on in now, settle down." Professor McGonagall directed. Once inside, the girls mostly congregated together on the left side and the boys on the right.

Filch entered, pushing a small table with a large phonograph under a very large magnifying horn. Mrs. Norris followed him and settled at his feet.

The class turned out to be a class on dancing.

Ron, Harry, Fred and George were making comments to each other as Professor McGonagall spoke, trying to stifle their laughter. However, Professor McGonagall noticed and pulled Ron off the boys' bench to stand in the middle of the room with her, effectively quieting everyone else. Professor McGonagall began explaining how to do a simple waltz, using Ron to demonstrate the steps.

"Oi, guys," Harry called quietly over to Fred and George. "You guys ever going to let him forget this?"

"Never!" Fred and George chorused, both beaming with malicious glee flashing in their eyes and mischievous grins on identical faces.

Ron struggled to follow Professor McGonagall's coaching as she lead him forcefully and tried desperately to avoid stepping on her feet too much. Ron's cheeks and ears were red the whole time.

"Alright then, everyone find a partner and pair off," she finally announced as she limped around matching Gryffindors into pairs.

Fred raced over to grab Angelina in his arms the way Professor McGonagall had held Ron. "May I have this dance?" he asked as he tried to turn her in a circle, almost tangling her feet with his.

"Just as so I can still ride a broom tomorrow!" she admonished, him laughing.

George zipped to over Alicia just as Rolando approached her and spun her around to face him. She almost fell, tripping over their feet, but he managed to pull her back onto her feet and against his chest. Some of the other students laughed at his 'dip', and others his 'nice recovery' as Alicia broke out laughing.

Fred watched Neville doing a few dance steps with Helen and was rather surprised. He poked George in the ribs and pointed to Neville, who spun Helen around to the music and then gracefully performed a small dip. George caught his twin's eye and raised his eyebrows. Fred gave George a nod.

However excruciating the class was, at least it provided Fred and George plenty of opportunities to slide over and nudge Ron, tripping him up. Harry couldn't help but laugh at them, watching their antics. In fact, Harry was paying far more attention to his friends, causing him to trip up several times as well. All in all the class wasn't too bad.

As Fred and George left, they followed the fourth year guys as they all headed back to the Gryffindor common room, talking amongst themselves about the class.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking, bro? Might not be a bad idea," George said to Fred loudly enough so that Neville, who was in the back of the group, could hear them. George then lowered his voice and whispered, "Neville would be a nice match for Ginny."

"He just might be, bro," Fred agreed, watching Neville. "He might just be the ticket," he said a bit louder. Neville looked back at them and blushed as he caught their stares. He quickly faced forward again and tried to bury himself within his dorm mates.

"Actually, Neville is quite good," Fred admitted loudly again.

"Ginny would at least get to dance, and she'd have a good time," George said softly.

Neville, who could hear bits and pieces, knew that they were talking about him. He couldn't make out all of what was said, but he knew that it was about him. He tried to speed up to get away.

"Oi! Neville, give us a moment will ya?" George called. Neville froze.

"We got something we want to ask you," Fred stated as they stopped right next to Neville. "Where did you learn to dance like that?" Fred kept his gaze on Neville as several students passed by them.

"My Gran has parties all the time. She taught me," Neville stated nervously.

*If this was going work they had best reassure him a bit* thought George. "You're a really good dancer," he stated matter of factly.

"Are you taking anyone to the Ball then?" Fred asked bluntly.

Neville blanched. "I, um, asked, but she said no." He looked embarrassed. The corridor was emptying of students and getting quieter.

"We heard about that," Fred said.

"Hermione told our sister Ginny," George pointed out, then cringed when Neville looked down at his shoes, blushing. He had meant that to sound *dice*.

Neville scuffed his toe on the stone floor. "She said she would rather go with some one else."

"The way I heard it, she *is* going with someone else," Fred said.

"When you asked her, she already had a partner for the Ball, and so she said no," George finished with a warm smile and then looked squarely at Neville. "But what she told Ginny was that she *would* have gone with you."

"As friends of course; if she hadn't accepted going with this other fellow," Fred added. Neville looked stunned. "So, have you tried and asked anyone else yet?" he asked.

"Ah, I, ah, no..." Neville stuttered. Fred and George had pulled too many pranks on him, not for him to feel nervous.

"How about asking Ginny?" George asked.

"Ginny? I don't think..." Neville looked puzzled. "She's cute, but I've never talked to her much."

"*We* think it would be okay," Fred said as friendly as he could. "Don't see why not. You've always been nice enough to her, haven't you?" he asked, but Neville just shrugged.

"Could put in a good word and all," George said with a smile.

"Would she go with me?" asked Neville. He sounded uncertain, but at least he smiled at the thought.

*Good, he was starting to warm to the idea* George thought, hoping he didn't look as smug as he felt.

"Trust us..." both chorused together.

"Give us a couple minutes with our sister to suggest it, let her know you want to, and then ask her tonight," Fred said, placing his hand on Neville's shoulder, reassuringly. Fred could see that Neville was beginning to like the idea.

"We'll get Ginny alone so it'll be easier. We'll give you a signal, and then you come over and ask her," George said as they turned to go and walked into the common room.

Ginny was sitting with nine others in the common room, doing her homework as Fred and George walked up. "Can we have a moment with our sister?" Fred asked them and pulled Ginny aside.

"We have solved your problem!" George said with a flourish.

"I didn't know I had a *problem* to solve," Ginny said, a bit confused.

"The Ball! You want to go or not?" Fred asked her.

"*Yes!*" Ginny answered enthusiastically. "I want to go..."

"So we found some one who is going to ask you," George said proudly, cutting her off.

"Brother approved," Fred announced, equally as proud.

"Nice gentleman," George assured her.

"And he can actually dance." Fred sounded like this was a major factor in the decision process.

"Which is a bonus!" George added. "At least you'll have fun."

"Okay, okay, who is it?" Ginny asked, looking around.

"He's a bit shy to ask you, but he wants to," George said. "You need to be available so he can."

"So you need to be alone for a bit. Sit over there by yourself," Fred said.

"Not all guys are as self-assured as we are." George puffed up his chest, which made Ginny laugh at him.

"Yeah, sitting with a bunch of other girls, well, it makes it hard on us guys," Fred said as he looked around.

"Okay, I'll stay over here for a while," Ginny said. "Are you sure he wanted to ask me?"

"Well, when we mentioned that he had our approval," Fred said as Ginny gave him hard look. "He was actually pleased. Seemed right glad that we thought that you might say yes," he added.

"He was afraid you'd say no to him." George shrugged. "Rejection and all."

"Which is very intimidating to a guy," Fred said, grinning.

"So we thought we should help him out a bit." George turned to his brother. "Good deed done. Shall we depart?"

"Remember what we said, Ginny. You'll have good time going with him." Fred looked at her seriously. "When he does ask, consider going with him, okay?"

Ginny watched her brothers plop down in the cushy chairs nearest to where they had left her and tried to look like they were busy reading. She pulled out her Herbology book and began to read, but she couldn't concentrate. *Who is it? Who would Fred and George consider... they said 'brother approved'?* She flipped through the pages, barely looking at the pictures. *But I get to go... I actually get to go!* She looked up as Fred and George casually stopped another girl from coming over to see her. She noticed that they blocked most of the guys too. Ginny peeked around the room, trying to be inconspicuous. Dean, Neville and Seamus were sitting across the room, playing Gobstones. *They aren't even looking at me.* Whom ever it was, she wished they would come and ask.

Soon, the room began to empty as people went to bed. Fred and George, however, stayed in their chairs tossing Exploding Snap cards at each other over their books. Ginny was getting tired of reading her Herbology book. Herbology wasn't a hard subject for her. *What I need is my Transfiguration or Charms book. I really need to get my essay done too...* Both Fred and George shook their heads when she got up to go. Ginny slumped back down in her chair. Only Seamus and Neville were left at the table. *But they're talking to Lavender and Louise. Neville and Seamus probably already asked them to the Ball, so it can't be either of them. I'm sure Fred and George wouldn't fix me up with a guy in their year, but maybe a fifth year? Would they?* At another table sat most of the fifth year Gryffindors. *And they are all studying for their O.W.L.s.* But as Ginny watched them, none of them even looked her way. She opened her book again, reading about some of the plants Professor Sprout hadn't mentioned in class yet. Finally she heard a small voice beside her, and she looked up to see Neville standing there, looking fairly nervous.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"My Herbology textbook. I'm reading up on the plants Professor Sprout showed us this week," Ginny responded. It was the only book that was still in her bag when her brothers pulled her aside. Everything else was still piled on the table.

Fred and George, however, were looking carefully elsewhere and trying to act like they were not watching them. But Ginny recognized their antics. *If Fred and George were acting like this, then he must be the one they were talking about. But Neville?* But Ginny didn't know Neville all that well. Taking this as a hint of what her brothers had planned, she decided to make it easier on Neville. "That's one of my favorite classes."

She looked at Neville thoughtfully and seriously considered going with him. *He's always been nice, shy... but he's a clutz and forgetful... gets nervous easily...* However, Ginny had only been around him when she was with Hermione. The image of Hermione helping Neville with spells they had learned in class flashed in her mind. *He always tries so hard to learn them... and he does really good when he's not nervous.* Some of the girls coming back from McGonagall's dance class mentioned with awe that Neville was surprisingly a very good dancer. *At least Fred and George were right. I'd have a great time if I went with him to the Ball*

"I like it too," Neville was saying while he tried to get the nerve to ask Ginny what he had really wanted to ask. Ginny was sure about that now.

*Nah, he is nice just not as self-assured as my brothers are... but as a friend... So lead him in the right direction,* she thought. "How was class tonight? What did Professor McGonagall teach?"

"Dancing." He looked at Fred and George, who gave him an encouraging nod. George also gave him a thumbs-up, discreetly, just above his book. "Doyou-u wannago to-d, the-a Ball-with me?" he blurted out as he turned away from her brothers. He looked so nervous and yet so hopeful.

"Sure," Ginny said, trying to hold her smile. *Do not laugh, don't laugh...* she beamed at him. If she hadn't already known what he was going to ask her, she would've needed him to repeat it. He had asked her so fast she could barely make out the words properly. *If I laugh now, he'll think Fred and George were just pulling another prank on him! Keep cool...*

"We can go just as friends if you like," Neville continued.

*He hadn't even taken a breath* "Okay." Ginny had to keep her face in control. *Must not laugh... must not laugh...* she thought sternly as she continued to smile.

"I can dance and all... and... you said yes?" Neville had the most shocked expression she had ever seen him use.

"Yes, I'd like to go to the Ball with you, Neville," Ginny said, smiling.

She watched as Neville turned to her brothers with a big smile and then looked back at Ginny. "Right then, okay, that's... great, thank you." He turned to go.

"Neville!" Ginny called, "I'm really happy you asked me, really. I know that we will have fun; thank you." Neville's gleeful expression as he turned to the boys' stairs was delightful to see. Fred and George picked up their things and headed for the stairs, each giving Ginny a knowing wink. They looked smug and happy, but definitely smug.

Ginny raced to get her things and ran up the girls' stairs to tell Hermione her good news.

*Author's note: I know that Professor McGonagall's dance lesson was from the movie version and not canon, but honestly, it was so brilliant and funny, I just had to use it. The very thought of Ron dancing with Professor McGonagall, being snickered at by Fred, George and Harry was too good to ignore. Besides, I liked the fact that Neville was a good dancer*

## Ginny Tells Hermione

### Chapter 3 of 8

A bedtime girl talk and best friend secrets? for Ginny, sometimes Hermione is the next best thing to having a sister.

Ginny opened the door and ran into the room, calling out to Hermione as she came in. On the left side of the room, Louise was sitting with Lavender on her bed, listening to her gossip. Both Lavender and Louise shot Ginny a curious glance as she rushed across the room to Hermione's bed.

When Ginny threw open the curtains that enclosed Hermione from her dorm mates, Hermione looked up, smiling, and held up a finger to her lips to quiet her. She was sitting at the head of her bed surrounded by books and had been making study notes on a parchment. Hermione pointed to Parvati sleeping in the next bed.

Parvati, in the bed behind her, stirred. Ginny covered her mouth at the silent, friendly reprimand, then tried to control her voice so she would not wake the sleeping girl. "You'll never guess! You'll never guess what my brothers just did!" Ginny said quietly, bursting to tell her.

Hermione motioned her to sit on the bed between the books. "Okay, tell me. What are those two up to now?" Hermione asked, ready to hear the worst.

Across the dorm room, Lavender stopped gossiping with Louise and became quiet and still. Both girls were now listening intensely to what Ginny might say. Ginny could almost imagine their furtive looks as she leaned close to Hermione. "They fixed me up with a partner to the Yule Ball." Ginny looked positively elated, and Hermione was genuinely happy for her.

"That's great, Ginny! I'm so glad," Hermione whispered, beaming at the good news. Keeping her voice just above a whisper, she asked, "So who is it?"

"Neville, actually," Ginny answered back softly, shrugging. "At least I get to go now!" She was having difficulty keeping her voice low.

"Neville asked you?" Hermione asked in a hushed voice, surprised. She smiled and then raised her voice a bit higher. "I'm glad he asked someone. He asked me, but I had to say no."

"I remember you telling me he asked you." Ginny kept her voice low enough to not to wake Parvati, but loud enough so Lavender and Louise could hear. "You told me you would have gone with him." Ginny suppressed a giggle, knowing that Lavender and Louise were hanging on their every word. "He asked you when we were leaving the library, didn't he? You told me about it right after Fred and George asked you," Ginny said aloud, then lowered her voice further, "why you turned him down." She had an impish grin, feeling a bit pixyish. She knew that she was giving the girls a bit of new gossip, implying that one of her brothers had asked Hermione to the Ball.

Lavender could be heard whispering to Louise. *The room is so quiet they could probably barely hear Hermione and me breathing* Ginny thought. *Lavender is such a gossip! It's just too much fun teasing her.* More than once, Ginny and Hermione had spoken in hushed tones like this, omitting names or certain words. And because of Ginny's discretion, Hermione often shared her secrets with her.

Hermione caught the subtle implications and winked at Ginny. "Yes, after we left the library, remember? He stopped us in the hall so he could ask me. I regretted telling him no. It really hurt his feelings." Hermione peeked through the gap between the curtains. When she sat back she indicated to Ginny silently about the rapt curiosity of the other two eavesdroppers.

Ginny turned around to sneak a peek and then turned back to Hermione, clasping her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing too loudly and waking up Parvati, who was still sleeping in the next bed.

Lavender was straining to hear them now, practically leaning off her bed trying to listen to them talk. Her friend Louise had moved toward the foot of Lavender's bed and closer to Hermione's side of the room. Clearly both girls dearly wanted to be in on the gossip. Ginny and Hermione were having fun at their expense.

"Yeah, Fred and George told me that. Apparently he was a bit crushed." Ginny shook her head, laughing silently.

"I was afraid of that. He's a nice guy," Hermione said with a sigh. "I hated to hurt his feelings, but I tried to explain that I had already been asked to the Ball." Lavender and Louise looked stunned and looked at each other. Hermione and Ginny kept their heads close, as if in deep personal discussion, trying not to be obvious when they peeked at the other girls.

"Guys get really insecure about rejection, and he's really shy to begin with," Ginny whispered. "So Fred and George spoke to him and told him I'd say yes. Apparently he was really nervous about asking me."

"With Fred and George coming up to him in the first place, knowing that your two brothers have been pulling pranks on him since his first year here, and then to have them talking to him about asking *you* to the Ball, it wouldn't surprise me he was nervous one bit!" Hermione had to stifle a laugh at the thought of Neville's face when both Fred and George approached him. "I *bet* they did make him pretty nervous."

"Well, they did say that they gave him," Ginny began softly, then smiled as she raised her voice a tiny bit louder, "brotherly approval and all." Ginny shook her head. "As if I need their approval about whom I go to the Ball with!"

Lavender lost her balance, nearly falling off her bed, trying to listen to them, making Ginny and Hermione turn in her direction. She dropped her brush so it would seem as if she were merely retrieving it. Ginny stifled a laugh, watching her. Hermione gave Lavender a questioning stare and then turned to Ginny. "So are you excited?" she asked.

"Yes, I am... a bit. I get to go and all. I know that he and I will have a good time at least. That's what Fred and George said," Ginny replied with a small smile. "They said that he was a good dancer, actually."

"He *is* a good dancer!" Hermione whispered back, leaning very close to Ginny as she reached for a book right next to Ginny's leg. "In the 'class' Professor McGonagall gave tonight, he was dancing all over the place. He knew every dance Professor McGonagall showed us."

Ginny felt much better about this. *It is one thing to believe Fred and George about Neville being a good dancer, but it means so much more being confirmed by Hermione*

"At least you will be dancing with a good partner." Hermione sat back against her pillows and gave a small chuckle. "I feel for the girls who dance with some of the blokes in our house. Some of them were dreadful!"

"I bet my brother Ron was one of them." Ginny laughed a bit at the thought of Ron actually dancing.

"Professor McGonagall pulled Ron out to dance with her to demonstrate how to do a box step. He was dreadful!" Hermione grinned at the thought. "But if he were to practice... and if someone took some time teaching him, he'd be much better." Ginny smiled at Hermione knowingly. "So what are you going to wear?" Hermione asked.

"I'll have to write to Mum and see what she comes up with," Ginny said with a sigh. "I just hope it isn't too dreadful."

"When I write to my mum I can ask her to send one of my gowns from home for you, if you like? I think I may have a gown that you could wear, Ginny. I do have a bridesmaid dress that's a soft pink and simple, with a nice full skirt. It's pretty, actually." She gave Ginny a wink. "Or with a bit of magic we can always fix anything your mum sends to you..." Hermione paused. "Either way you'd have a second choice, or have more to work with... if you want to, that is?"

"I'd appreciate that," Ginny said, suddenly looking more hopeful. "It'll depend on what Mum can find. I can always write to her and say I want to wear something with pink in it."

Hermione took out a piece of parchment and a spare quill and handed it to Ginny. "Might as well go ahead and write your note. Oh, and tell her who you're going with. I'm



sure that your mum will know his family and she will be very happy about it."

Ginny thanked Hermione and began her letter. She looked up at Hermione. "Can I tell her who you'll be going with? She will be so surprised."

"I think that will be okay," Hermione said. "I just don't want to make a big deal of it." She took another slip of parchment and wrote a letter to her mum asking for her to send the bridesmaid dress hanging in her wardrobe at home.

Ginny wrote her mum a long letter about how Neville had been approached by both Fred and George and how they had set her up with him. She knew that her mum would get a laugh from it. She asked as directly as she dared if she could have a new gown rather than a secondhand one. She added plenty of concerned questions like: "How are you?" and "How is Dad?" "How's work going for him?" and "What's new with you?" mixed in to keep the letter light and friendly. Well, she did want to know actually. Then she added about Viktor Krum asking Hermione and a few of the details she thought her mum would enjoy. Ginny sealed the letter and tucked it into her robe pocket. "I'll send yours tomorrow too, if you'd like?" Ginny asked as she stretched, suddenly feeling a bit tired.

"Sure, thanks." Hermione scribbled the last line of her letter and handed it to Ginny.

"Well I really must let you get some sleep," Ginny said as she rose off the bed. "See you at breakfast, then."

"Yeah, see you." Hermione started to remove her books and pile them on the bedside table.

Both Lavender and Louise were sitting, watching Ginny leave with disbelief. "Who asked *her* to the Ball?" Lavender finally asked as Hermione climbed into bed.

"A friend of ours actually. I'm really glad too. Ginny will have wonderful time." Hermione stretched and yawned, then uttered the spell to close her curtains with her wand, hiding a smug grin.

"But who is it?" Lavender persisted. "And who are you going with? Why won't you tell me?"

"But I've already told you, Lavender. I'm just going with a friend," Hermione said. She snuggled down into her big soft bed, listening to the wind rattle her window. She fell asleep smiling.

## The Dress Robes

### *Chapter 4 of 8*

As every girl knows, choosing the dress for a Ball is a big deal. But if you are a Weasley?

Two days later, Errol, assisted by another owl, came swooping into the Great Hall, struggling with a large box. The second owl swerved away just as the string binding the box snapped. Both Fred and Ginny jumped up and grabbed the box before it fell on the table, and Errol collapsed in a heap on top of it, exhausted. The hint of green fabric that showed through a gap where the box opened a bit immediately told Ginny what was inside. The dress robes her mum had sent for the Ball had arrived. Ginny did not want to show everyone at the Gryffindor house table her dress robes and tried to hide the box, but both Fred and George would have none of that.

"Well go on, let's see it then!" Fred said, holding on to the box from across the table and preventing Ginny from successfully stashing it under her seat. Fred pulled the box toward him while she pulled it to her, trying to keep it closed, and the box opened. The mint green dress robes nearly fell out onto their plates.

George jumped up instantly. "Oi, careful there, watch it!" he said, grabbing at the voluminous amount of fabric before it fell into the porridge.

Fred, still holding onto the bottom half of the box, tried to catch the other end. "Hang on a sec, I got it!"

"Watch that piece the porridge, Fred!" George cried out as he tried to collect the mass of fabric. Lee Jordan moved the bowl of porridge and the platters of eggs and toast out of their way with a few flicks of his wand.

Ginny tried to catch the robes with the top of the box. "Don't get it messed up!" she exclaimed as her brothers struggled with her dress robes.

"Nah, we got it Gin," George said, and together they managed to keep the dress robes out of the food on the table.

"It's a nice color for you," Fred stated with an encouraging smile as he examined the mint green fabric. He leaned over so that the part he held could be collected without falling into their plates.

"Blimey, Gin, this is some dress!" George said as he pulled the dress robes to his side of the table. However, now that he was holding up the dress robes at Ginny's side, George got a good look at it and smiled. "It's... well... not all that bad, Ginny," he said, trying very hard to keep a straight face for his sister. "It will look good with your... er... your hair."

"It's pretty, Ginny," Fred added, trying to be encouraging. "Like a princess."

"Give me that," Ginny snapped, embarrassed. Fred held out the bottom of the box for Ginny as she grabbed the dress robes from George and shoved them into the top of the box. He tried to stifle a laugh as he watched her try and wrestle the dress robes back into the box.

"Here," Fred said, handing over a pair of matching green shoes. "These came with it."

George picked up a letter that had nearly landed in his eggs. "There's a note from Mum too," George said, handing over the note. Ginny shoved it into the box as well. She quickly left, trying desperately to ignore her brothers' looks as she carried the dress robes up to Hermione's room.

"Mind if I come in?" Ginny asked as she approached Hermione's bed.

"No. What do you have there?" Hermione looked up from the essay she was finishing for her first class that morning. A plate with half eaten apple slices and toast sat on her bedside table.

"I just got my dress robes from Mum," Ginny said, plopping onto Hermione's bed and tossing the box with her dress robes next to her. Ginny had to remove a book she sat on, a common occurrence when visiting Hermione in her room.

Ginny looked at the book, confused. It was a guide to wand sewing techniques *Flick and Stitch Made Easy* vol. 1.

Four more books lay on Hermione's bed with several markers in the pages. Along with her Charms book and her Astronomy book lay *The Magical Homemaker: Magical Alterations Made Easy* resting partially under *A Witches Guide to Sewing*. The top book was lying open to the chapter describing the charms needed to do wand-sewing techniques. The book came complete with three charmed sewing needles, which lay on the book along with thread, pins and measuring tape. A small sewing basket sat next to Hermione's knee.

"What's all this?" Ginny asked, pointing to Hermione's collection of books and sewing items.

"Mum sent my dresses last night, and I had her send these in case we needed to alter them any," Hermione said as she set down her essay and pointed to the small sewing basket. "I ordered this book from Flourish and Blotts," Hermione added, indicating *A Witches Guide to Sewing*, "the day after you told me Neville asked you to the Ball. You know, just in case. And this one I borrowed from the library." She touched *The Magical Homemaker: Magical Alterations Made Easy*. "Do you want to see the dresses Mum sent?" Hermione asked excitedly.

Apparently Hermione had received two gowns from her mum, both covered in plastic and hanging on her wardrobe door. The first one Hermione opened was a rose pink, floor-length Muggle gown with lots of ruffles sewn in rows on the hem and along the neckline and short, puffy sleeves. The gown also had a big sash around the waist that tied in the back.

"You wore that?" Ginny giggled, eyeing the dress.

"Yes, at my cousin Michelle's wedding," Hermione smiled, lost in some little private memory. "My dad said I looked like a princess."

"That's what Fred and George said about the dress robes Mum sent. 'Like a princess.' I was hoping for pretty or even beautiful," Ginny said with a sigh.

"Ginny, it's the shape of the dress that really counts. Besides, maybe we can fix it," Hermione said cheerfully. "You can leave the dress here. We will have a look at it after dinner, alright?"

Ginny nodded and ran her hand along the box. *The dress looks a hundred years old. But maybe Hermione is right. Maybe we can fix it up some!* "I'm sure Mum picked out the nicest one she could," she said as she followed Hermione from the dorm room.

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After dinner, Ginny and Hermione were back in Hermione's room, looking at the dresses Mrs. Granger had sent. Hermione removed the plastic covering the two dresses hanging on the wardrobe door. The first was a simple, pale pink, tea-length dress with a ruffle along the neckline. The other was the rose pink bridesmaid gown.

Hermione held the rose pink gown up to Ginny. "And it looks like it may even fit you!" she said, smiling. She unzipped the gown and held it open. "Go on then, try it on."

Ginny pulled off her school robes and slipped into the dress *yes, it fits. But horny horklumps, this dress isn't much better!* Hermione zipped up the dress, and Ginny turned to face her.

Hermione looked critically at the dress. "This color looks good with your skin, Ginny, but it's a bit off with your hair. Let's see the one your mum sent."

Apprehensively, Ginny opened her box and pulled out her dress robes. She stared at them, utterly dismayed by the old, second hand dress robes her mum sent her. "It looks over a hundred years old *at least!*" she sighed. "I think I'd rather wear this one."

Ginny's gown was a mint green brocade with tiered layers of filmy iridescent mint green gossamer at the waist and bustled in the back. The long sleeves ended with a wide ruffle of the gossamer fabric. It had a wide collar and small fabric flowers in the opaline mint fabric all over it, and large, green satin rosettes all around. "If this was the best one Mum could get, I wonder how bad the others were," Ginny said, trying to hold back the disappointment in her voice.

Hermione laid the dress robes Mrs. Weasley had sent on her bed and looked at them objectively. "Ginny this isn't that bad," she stated, and Ginny shot her an incredulous grimace. "No! Really it will be fine. We could cut up the dresses and combine parts to make new dress robes. This color is really pretty and goes with your hair much better. If we use this fabric," she said, indicating the tiered layers of filmy opaline mint, "and... maybe we could use the collar, add or... remove the ruffles..." She pointed from the Muggle gown Ginny had on to the dress robes and back again as she spoke.

"I don't like the sleeves," Ginny stated, "on either dress."

"Okay, let's start by removing them." Hermione quickly checked the book, *A Witches Guide to Sewing*, to look up the spell and then confirmed it in *Flick and Stitch Made Easy*. Hermione used her wand to carefully separate the sleeves from both the dress robes and the gown. She then began to separate the seams of the layers of filmy iridescent mint fabric on the dress robes, laying them carefully aside.

Ginny watched, then began to try the spell herself, flicking off the rosettes and little flowers. "Be careful with those! We may need them," Hermione admonished, pointing to the flowers. Ginny raised her eyebrows, but was a bit more careful when removing them.

Hermione removed the collar. Next she began removing the ruffles from the bridesmaid dress and took off the sash. All Ginny was left with was a very simple, floor length, sleeveless dress with a low neckline. She stood looking at her reflection in the mirror by Hermione's bed.

"Okay, it's a nice start actually. What did you have in mind then?" Ginny asked. *The dress does fit me well, and the skirt is nice and full. It also swishes when I move*

Hermione looked at the collection of pieces on her bed. "I was thinking if we were to add this collar here," she said, placing the collar along the neckline and pinning it in place. Next Hermione held up one of the opaline pieces, studying the wide crescent shape. The smaller top curve to the piece was almost the size of Ginny's waist. "And place these iridescent pieces along the waist," she said. Hermione carefully pinned the longest layer first to the rose pink gown around Ginny's waist, carefully matching the points of the fabric in the front, and then pinned the second, medium length piece over it the same way. Finally she pinned the third and shortest piece and stood back to admire the effect. Each layer lay nicely over the full skirt with the edges curving down, back and around, accentuating the hemline nicely. The rose pink of the skirt underneath showed through the first layer of the iridescent fabric, the second layer showed much less, but the third didn't show much of the pink at all. The effect was great. "Do you like this?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, it's pretty!" Ginny turned, swishing the skirt and looking in the mirror. "We can attach the sash, couldn't we?" Ginny held up the sash at her waist. "It will give me a bow in the back."

"Yes, and I really think a few flowers in the front would look really good too." Ginny shook her head but Hermione cut her off. "Just a few as an accent, not a whole bouquet!" she said, laughing as she pinned a few flowers where the collar met in front and two just below on the bodice. Hermione smiled. "Well, what do you think?"

Ginny was pleased with the effect of the dress robes turning this way and that in the mirror. "I like it!"

"Alright then, the hard part is sewing all this in place. Take it off carefully so we don't lose any pins and you don't get poked," Hermione warned her.

Once the new dress robes were off, Ginny looked at the sleeve holes. "What about this?" she asked, pointing it out to Hermione.

"We could turn it under or we could trim it with a bit of the green fabric," Hermione suggested as she examined the cut edge where the sleeves were removed. "Which

would you like?"

"A touch of the green I think?" Ginny said. "Don't you?"

Hermione examined the leftover pieces of the dress robes now scattered around her bed. "We could use the ruffle from the sleeves," she suggested, picking up one sleeve. "Or cut a sleeve from the skirt and use the same material as the collar."

Ginny eyed the ruffle on the sleeve and the skirt. "I think the ruffle from the sleeves." They removed the ruffles carefully, then Hermione pinned them to the armholes. However, the old style of the ruffle had one side that was longer than the other, so that the sheer fabric fell nicely from the wrists but still allowed the use of the wearer's hands. Hermione pinned the first ruffle to the sleeve hole with the fuller side up, falling over her arm. Ginny crinkled her nose as she looked at the new sleeve. "I'm not sure if I like that. It's too... poofy that way. Like a wing. But if we went the other way and put a flower at the top here... it would be cute." Ginny held a small fabric flower up to her shoulder.

"Aren't you glad we saved the flowers?" Hermione asked teasingly as she removed the ruffled sleeve and re-pinned it.

"Yeah, they are nice. *If* they aren't *all* over the dress! Just a few placed here and there are nice." Ginny looked at her dress robes while Hermione hung them up. "It is so much nicer than I expected. When Mum said she'd send me dress robes, I was worried. You saw Ron's; they are ghastly!" She picked up the largest part of the old dress robes. "I would have hated wearing this, actually. I'd *never* have told Mum though; she would have been crushed... and disappointed."

Hermione showed Ginny the pages she marked in the books on the various sewing techniques. "There are a few spells and wand movements. If we practice on the fabric of the old dress robes before we try it on yours, we might do a better job of sewing it. Thankfully we have time before the Ball."

The next few nights after dinner, and as homework allowed, Ginny would slip away with Hermione to her room and behind the drapes of her bed. There they would spend hours sewing the pieces of the dress robes onto the gown. It had taken both girls several tries on the voluminous skirt of the old robes to get the wand sewing techniques down to where they felt confident enough to use them on the new dress, but once Ginny mastered the spells, she felt a great sense of accomplishment.

When the gown was finished and assembled, Ginny slipped into the dress and was extremely pleased. The dress looked like it had been made by Madam Malkin herself and was a lovely gown. She turned and swirled, watching the full skirt and her reflection in Hermione's mirror, smiling, feeling pretty and beautiful at the same time. "Oh, won't everyone be surprised?" she asked. "It's perfect Hermione, thank you. It's... it's like being a princess!"

"Ginny, you'll be the belle of the Ball!" Hermione exclaimed as she sat crossed-legged on her bed watching her friend, laughing at her, equally as delighted. "I can't wait until Neville sees you... or your brothers, for that matter."

"I think it will knock off their socks! At least Fred and George's," Ginny replied, giggling. "Maybe even Ron might notice, and possibly Harry."

"I don't know, Gin, you are always telling me just how thick Ron is," Hermione said, unzipping the dress to hang it back up. "I don't think Harry is any less dense. ~~But~~ we will at least have a great time."

Ginny hugged Hermione. "We will. I get to go! I actually get to go!"

~~*~~*~~*~~

I owe so much to Elizabeth for reading through this and making it a better story. Thanks

In the Gryffindor Common Room

Chapter 5 of 8

Ginny's discovery about Harry and Ron's fiasco at finding dates puts a damper on Ginny's outlook on the dance.

Much of the conversation for Ginny, Hermione, Harry and Ron are quotes, copied from JK Rowling's book. (US GoF p 398-401 hardcover) I also used several pieces of JK Rowling's writing and some of her descriptions, and they are thus borrowed. But since this is about Ginny's experience, the events leading up to and including the Yule Ball itself are, however, looked at from Ginny's perspective, not Harry's. I felt compelled therefore to include what was given to us by JK Rowling to keep the story as close to canon as possible, especially regarding the 'scenes' in GoF where Harry is present. Since I don't know Mrs. Rowling to ask her permission, I hope she doesn't mind. Please forgive me.

Days and dates mentioned in the chapter are checked with the Harry Potter Lexicon. I appreciate all the information available through their site and use it frequently as another source to check canon facts.

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The day the Christmas decorations started to go up, Ginny found that the excitement she usually felt this time of year was heightened by the anticipation of attending the Yule Ball. This year Christmas decorations adorned the castle everywhere, including the corridors and staircases frequently used by the students and staff. Everlasting icicles were hung on the banisters of the marble staircase. Even the suits of armor were polished, yet again, and a few were given garland on their helms and new pennants on their lances. Flitwick charmed the suits of armor to sing Christmas carols as people passed, although several of them didn't quite know all the words and just hummed the tunes.

In Ginny's opinion Professor Flitwick outdid himself with the decorations on the twelve huge Christmas trees in the Great Hall. Ginny loved each one and was hard pressed to pick a favorite. Everywhere, everyone seemed excited about Christmas and especially the Yule Ball, and as the holiday approached the students had more trouble concentrating on lessons.

Only Professor Flitwick noticed the level of excitement with the anticipation of the ball making all the students distracted during lessons and finally gave in. During the last classes before the holiday break, he allowed his students to play games or to practice their favorite charms.

Professor Moody began warning them to maintain a 'constant vigilance' against any curses, hexes and jinxes that could be disguised as Christmas presents and spent several classes teaching simple detection spells. Professor McGonagall continued teaching the students how to transfigure rats into goblets and turtles into tea cups, but gave lots of extra points if the objects were decorated with festive patterns. Professor Snape, however, seemed to get even nastier as the holiday approached, docking

points from anyone who even mentioned Christmas or the Yule Ball in his presence. Professor Binns, since he rarely noticed the students anyway during his classes, was completely oblivious to the holiday excitement and carried on with classes as usual.

Ginny watched, amused, as the boys moved around the castle and the school grounds as usual. While the girls without partners to the Yule Ball were trying hard to be noticed and were preening at the boys so that they might know they were still available. However, the girls were still roaming through the corridors and courtyards in groups. Several times she overheard the boys in her year complain about the girls always 'hanging out' or 'moving around' in 'bunches' or 'packs,' which made Ginny laugh. Watching the students around her, she remembered what Fred and George had said to her when they set her up with Neville: that when girls are with their friends, it only made it harder on guys who weren't so self-assured to speak to them, let alone ask them to the Yule Ball. Even more amusing was Fred's comparison of the girls to geese when he was talking to Lee in the common room one morning and said that the "flocking habits of girls was only intimidating the very guys they wanted so desperately to ask them." *It is amazing,* Ginny thought, smiling, *that Fred and George are certainly self-assured enough to talk to a girl, even if she is surrounded by her friends. But Ron is so insecure he can't even ask a girl in Gryffindor let alone talk to her without stuttering or tripping on his shoelaces.*

The following Friday as Ginny was going down to dinner, she paused at the foot of the marble staircase and froze in her tracks. Fleur Delacour was talking to Cedric Diggory, blatantly flirting with him and leaning close, looking at him coquettishly. The scene was enough to make Ginny want to gag. Fleur even did that flip with her hair! Cedric had a glossy look to his eyes as he stared back at her. "You were zo brave ze way you 'andled that dragon," she purred at him.

"It wasn't all that big a deal. The dragon didn't really go for my Labrador as I planned," Cedric explained to her as she smiled brightly at him. Ginny laughed at just how stupid he looked.

At that moment Ron showed up. He turned his head to watch Fleur flirting with Cedric just outside the Great Hall doors as he headed down to dinner, and then suddenly he just stopped dead in his tracks. All at once he blurted out loudly to Fleur, "You wanna go to the Ball with me?" Fleur gave him a contemptuous look and turned her back on him, ignoring Ron completely.

Ron looked... well... stoned actually, and then seemed to snap out of a trance and turned beet red. Everyone in the hall had stopped to stare in disbelief, and a few people started laughing. Ron spun around quickly and fled up the stairs.

Ginny forgot all about dinner. *Oh, poor Ron, I can't believe he asked Fleur! Yelled at her actually... of all the girls in school why her? Why do guys get all glassy eyed around her and lose their common sense?* Ginny pondered, as she ran after him. When she caught up to him, a dazed and confused Ron stood staring at the Fat Lady outside the Gryffindor common room, unable to give her the password.

"Oh, go on dear it's an easy one!" the Fat Lady was saying encouragingly while making small flapping motions with her fingers.

"Fairy lights," Ginny said clearly and helped her brother through the portrait hole and into the best chair in the common room, near the fireplace. *What can I say to him..* "It will be alright, Ron, really," Ginny said in a soothing voice, sitting at his feet. *Everyone saw... everyone heard him...* "You wouldn't really have wanted to go with her... she is so full of herself, Ron." *In a way it was kind of funny...*

"What's up, Ron?" said Harry, suddenly standing by Ron's chair.

Ron looked up at Harry with a look of total disbelief and a sort of blind horror on his face. "Why did I do it?" he said wildly. "I don't know what made me do it!"

"What?" Harry asked, concerned.

"He... er... just asked Fleur Delacour to go to the Ball with him," Ginny said, fighting back a laugh at her brother's expense. She truly did feel sorry for him, so she tried to keep control of her face and maintain a look of concern for her brother. *He'd be devastated if I started laughing, but Ron doesn't need me to pity him right now either.*

"You *what?*" asked Harry, looking totally shocked at his best friend.

Ginny was so close to bursting out laughing at them. However, she kept patting Ron's arm reassuringly, like the good caring sister that she was.

"I don't know what made me do it!" Ron gasped again. "What was I playing at? There were people all around... I've gone mad everyone watching! I was just walking past her in the entrance hall... she was standing there talking to Diggory and it sort of came over me and I asked her!" Ron dropped his head into his hands in total dismay. He moaned and kept talking, although the words were barely distinguishable. "She looked at me like I was a sea slug or something. Didn't even answer. And then I dunno I just sort of came to my senses and I ran for it."

"She's part veela," said Harry. "You were right her grandmother was one. It wasn't your fault, I bet you just walked past when she was turning on the old charm for Diggory and got a blast of it but she was wasting her time. He's going with Cho Chang." Ron, blushing a deep red, lifted his head from his hands and looked up at Harry. "I asked her to go with me just now," Harry said. He looked disappointed, but was trying not to let it show. His voice sounded dull. "And she told me."

Ginny suddenly stopped smiling, stunned. Her heart skipped a beat. *Harry asked Cho? And she said no to him...*

"This is mad," said Ron. "We're the only ones left who haven't got anyone well, except Neville. Hey guess who he asked? *Hermione!*" Ron looked up, smirking, although his ears were still pink.

Harry didn't have a partner for the Ball yet! Ginny's mind was reeling, hardly listening what her brother was saying. *He could... still... maybe, ask me. I could... I might have been able to go with Harry! But he won't ask me, of course.*

"*What?*" Harry's exclamation brought Ginny back into the conversation abruptly.

"Yeah, I know!" Ron said. Some of the normal color was coming back into his face as he started to laugh. "He told me after Potions! Said she's always been really nice, helping him out with work and stuff but she told him she was already going with someone...."

"Ha! As if!" Ron exclaimed loudly. "She just didn't want to go with Neville... I mean, who would?" Ginny stared hard at Ron, felling miffed by his comment. He, however, was smiling like a clabbert, although Ginny didn't see what was so funny about it.

"Don't!" Ginny spit out at her brother, feeling slightly angry with him for mocking her partner. "Don't laugh... "

Just then Hermione came in through the portrait hole and approached them. "Why weren't you two at dinner?" she asked in a way that reminded Ginny of her mum.

Ginny, still fuming at her brother, looked up at Hermione. "Because oh shut up laughing, you two because they've both just been turned down by girls they asked to the Ball." *That'll shut Ron and Harry right up.*

"Thanks a bunch, Ginny," said Ron sourly, now looking at her, miffed.

"All the good-looking ones taken, Ron?" Hermione said loftily, "Eloise Midgen starting to look quite pretty now, is she? Well, I'm sure you'll find someone *somewhere*, who'll have you."

"Hermione, Neville's right you are a girl!" Ron gazed at Hermione like someone just lit his wick.

Ginny laughed quietly, *My brother is just that thick!*

"Oh, well spotted!" Hermione said acidly, her eyes looking rather dangerous at the moment.

Oh, Ron, you're such a dolt! Ginny couldn't help but be amused. *He doesn't even notice the warning in her eyes.*

"Well you can come with one of us!" Ron started, as if he just made a grand discovery.

Ron, don't... don't be such a Bludger. Ginny cringed as Ron persisted. *Get a clue...*

"No, I can't," Hermione snapped, with vindication.

Ginny felt like smiling again. *Blimey! This is just great. Ron is so bloody clueless, and it is being pointed out right to his face.*

"Oh come on," Ron said impatiently. "We need partners! We're going to look really stupid if we haven't got any. Everyone else has..." Ron looked up imploringly at Hermione, and her face softened.

"I can't come with you," Hermione said, now blushing, "because I'm already going with someone." She quickly glanced at Ginny, who smiled knowingly back.

"No, you're not!" Ron insisted. "You just said that to get rid of Neville!"

"Oh, *did* I?" Hermione's eyes flashed dangerously again.

"Okay, okay, we know you're a girl. That do? Will you come now?" Ron pleaded with her.

But Hermione straightened up, her body becoming rigid. "I've already told you!" she said very angrily. "I'm going with someone else!" Hermione turned abruptly and stormed off toward the girl's dormitories again.

"She's lying," Ron said flatly, watching her go, although he looked like he was going to sulk.

"She's not," Ginny said quietly, looking down to hide her smile. *You're too much. She's liked you for years and you've just caught on that she's even a girl. Well done...*

"Who is it then?" Ron demanded.

As if I would tell you now! "I'm not telling you, it's her business," Ginny said. *Ron if you'd only asked her before... but noooo, you wait until the very last minute, and then manage to insult her too... How can you be so...*

"Right." Ron said, cutting into her thoughts. Ginny looked up at him quickly, noticing that he looked extremely put out. "This is getting stupid. Ginny, ~~you~~ you can go with Harry, and I'll just..."

Ginny couldn't believe what she was hearing. *Ron is setting me up with Harry! Course, I'd finally get to go with him... even if it is a last resort... but still! I can't I said yes to Neville!* Her heart falling in her chest, she simply replied, "I can't." She looked up at Harry. *He's just sitting there, staring at me like I'm a git!* She couldn't believe this was happening! "I'm going with with Neville." Ginny could feel her cheeks burn. "He asked me when Hermione said no, and I thought... well... I'm not going to be able to go otherwise, I'm not in fourth year." *He isn't saying anything... say something anything!*

The lump in her chest felt like lead and her face felt hot. "I think I'll go and have dinner." She got up and walked away from them, her heart broken. *If I had just not listened to Fred and George I would be going with Harry, she thought. No, that's not fair... it's not their fault really. How could they have known that Harry hadn't gotten a partner? How could they have known that I really wanted to go to the Yule Ball with him? Besides... he's Harry Potter... he's a Hogwarts Champion... he's... Great!*

As Ginny stepped from the portrait hole, her head bowed and feeling utterly miserable, she ran right into Fred and George.

"What's wrong, sis?" George asked. "Why the long face?"

"Who'd we get to jinx for this look?" Fred said with a smirk.

"Harry," Ginny replied, heavily, not looking up.

"What did Harry say to you?" George asked a bit perplexed.

"No," Ginny said with a deep sigh. "Ron said it."

"Ron said what exactly?" Fred was now confused.

Ginny kept her head bowed. She wasn't making any sense at all, and she knew it. She just didn't want to say it.

"Okay, what did 'ickle Ronniekins say this time?" George asked. His tone said Ginny was acting like she did when she was just about to start crying.

"He said that I could have gone with Harry." Ginny looked up at her brothers, fighting back a mixture of emotions.

"This is about Harry? You could have gone with Harry? Where? I thought that you gave up on Harry?" George questioned her.

Ginny's look belied her. "I did, I mean..."

"You wanted to go to the Ball with Harry?" Fred cut her off, suddenly catching on.

Unable to answer without crying, Ginny simply nodded.

"Did he ask you?" George asked, lifting Ginny's head to look directly into her eyes.

"No... well... Ron did. He said I could go with Harry because he hasn't gotten anybody yet. He asked Cho Chang, but she said she couldn't go with him so he doesn't have anyone. But I can't go because I've already said yes to Neville," Ginny explained looking directly at George, since he still held her face in his hands. "So I can't go with Harry, even though Ron said I could have." George let go of her face, his eyes soft with compassion.

"So Harry never actually asked you?" Fred asked inquiringly. Ginny shook her head, not quite looking at him.

"What *did* he say actually?" asked George, his voice tender.

"Well, nothing. He just sat there, staring... listening to... Ron. Ron was talking to Hermione... he asked her, but she's already going with someone and said no to him. Then Ron came up with the brilliant idea that Harry should ask me... and..." Ginny suddenly stopped short.

"But what did Harry *say*?" George asked.

"He didn't *say* anything at all," Ginny replied.

Looking very serious, George asked, "Let's see this another way, shall we?"

"Harry asked Cho Chang?" asked Fred.

Ginny nodded. "Right."

"He never asked you?" inquired Fred, watching Ginny carefully.

Ginny shook her head. "No."

"Did he say anything after Ron suggested he take you to the Ball? Did he give any indication he might?" asked George.

"No, he just sat there watching. But I said that I couldn't go, I think, before he *could* say anything. I told Ron that I was already going with Neville. Then he and Harry were sort of staring at me, stunned," Ginny explained, "so I left."

"Ginny, go to the Ball, forget Harry," Fred said firmly. When she started to protest he shook his head. "No, Harry's a bit thick if you ask me. If he can't see what a great girl you are, well, then he's... a big git."

"Let him see you having a good time with Neville. Maybe he'll realize what he's missing!" George added, trying to make her feel better. "It will do you some good to go to the Ball, get all dressed up and fancy. Girls love doing that kind of thing." He gently moved a strand of hair that had fallen into her face, smiling reassuringly at her. "Have a good time. Try not to think about what could have been. That will only make you nuts!"

"It doesn't sound like he *had* considered asking you, well, before Ron mentioned it," Fred added. "And it won't do you any good wondering if he might have, even though Ron suggested it."

"Maybe next time something comes up, he *will* think about asking you. This might just put the idea in his head." George put his arm around his sister. "It will be alright trust us!" Ginny nodded. "So where are we off to then? Do you want to go back inside?"

"No, I thought I'd go to dinner..." Ginny said.

"Great! Let's go nick some food from the kitchen!" Fred perked up to his usually jovial self.

"Then we can find a nice warm place to have a picnic, just the three of us!" George said with his usual mischievous grin. "There is a passageway we just found. We're not sure where it goes yet..."

"Or the unused tower on the east side has a nice view, although it's a bit drafty up there. How about it? Would you like that?" Fred asked, his eyes lighting up.

Ginny smiled at them and gave first George and then Fred a hug, thinking...*You guys are so great!*"Thanks, yes. Sounds great," she said, feeling better, and then followed her brothers as they led her to the kitchens to nick food.

~~*~~*~~*~~

The dialog in quotations between Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley in the common room scene was copied from

J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire* (New York, U.S.A.: Scholastic Press, 2000), 398-401.

No plagiarism was intended.

Christmas at Hogwarts

Chapter 6 of 8

Sometimes looking forward to special events makes even special days more special. Especially when spent with those who matter the most...

In this chapter I used JK Rowling's brief descriptions of the Hogwarts grounds and of the events on Christmas day. (US GoF p 404, 410-411) I've also used two quotes from the snowball fight 'scenes' in GoF, and thus they are borrowed. However, this is about Ginny's experience and from her perspective of the events leading up to and including the Yule Ball itself, and not Harry's. Therefore, I felt compelled to include what was given to us by JK Rowling to keep the story as close to canon as possible. Since I don't know Mrs. Rowling to ask her permission, I hope she doesn't mind. Please forgive me.

~~*~~*~~*~~

Ginny awoke Christmas morning with a large pile of presents at the foot of her bed.

As usual, her mum had sent her a jumper along with several mince meat pies. This year her jumper was a nice blue one with a pattern of trees along the bottom. Her father also sent her a funny Muggle card with a handful of shiny Sickles to spend and a pair of beautiful narrow cards with tassels attached. *Bookmarkers, I suppose... Dad must have bought them from a Muggle store. He's so funny about Muggle things,* she thought as a warm smile spread across her face as she mentally thanked her parents.

Even before she opened the present from Hermione, she knew that she had given her a book *Quite a shocker*, Ginny thought, smiling as she looked at the first pages of *The Great Wizards of Muggle Fairy Tales* A large, bright fuchsia and chartreuse wrapped package from Fred and George contained boxes of chocolates and Chocolate Frogs. She eyed the box of assorted chocolates, wondering if she dare try them, remembering the Canary Creams and Ton-Tongue Toffees they had invented.

Percy had sent her a tablet of nice parchment sheets and a new rubber. His card contained a list of things she should do if she ever expected to be a prefect. First on the list was to not get too involved with Fred and George's antics. *He is such a stick in the mire. As if I want to be like him! Like my brothers I know where to draw the line*

Charlie sent her a very nice pair of new black mittens, something she had strongly hinted that she needed, along with a beautiful pair of dragon scale combs for her hair. More importantly he had actually written her a letter... *several long pages!* She set it aside to read later.

A small flat bundle was wrapped in a large cloth that she immediately recognized as Egyptian, and that she could wear as a scarf. Inside the soft silky fabric, Bill sent her some Egyptian beads and a picture of him standing next to a newly found chamber, according to his card. The picture waved at her, and patted the dust and dirt from his shirt and swept his arm indicating his find. The room behind the smiling image of her brother was full of ceramic jars and jugs, statues and stone... *they look like stone boxes*. He had also written her a long letter on several sheets of Egyptian parchment. She set his letter aside with Charlie's to read when she could curl up and really peruse them at leisure.

Ron's card said that the large box of assorted Honeydukes sweets were from him and Harry, which gave her a bit of surprise *Harry has never given me a present before!*

She opened the gifts from her dorm mates next. Tamara and Lisselle gave her some pretty white quills that she had admired once when they were in Hogsmeade together. Ginny laughed softly. *How sweet. They remembered!* Juliana gave her a glittery snowflake pin, and Brianna gave her a box of 'stationery note cards,' or so the label on the back of the box said. Jaclynn and Kimberly both gave her Chocolate Frogs and Peppermint Toads. *I'll have enough chocolate for months* she thought happily. *At least these will be safe to eat without having to test them first, unlike my brothers' sweets!* A nice drawstring bag contained a card from Luna, tied to some bath gels with a nice floral scent. She inhaled their scents, hoping that Luna liked the color-change ink she sent her.

Ginny found the last package hidden under all the others. It was a tiny box from her Great Aunt Muriel. She opened it apprehensively since Aunt Muriel still considered her a child, and her gifts usually reflected that. She was completely stunned to see a shimmering, opaline star pendant, suspended by a delicate gold chain, sparkling brightly in the box. The shaky writing on the note said that it was "for a lovely young lady for her first ball." Ginny stared at it, her eyes misting barely believing what she held in her hands. She carefully set the beautiful necklace in her trunk to keep it safe.

Ginny put on her new jumper and pin, pulled on her jeans, and then headed down to the common room.

Fred and George were already downstairs, standing over a chair by the fire, busily wrapping chocolate and vanilla custard creams and toffees in bright paper. Ginny was amused, watching them as she approached. *That's a fairly clever way to disguise their Canary Creams and Ton-Tongue Toffees for the holidays* Her brothers both had on new matching dark green Weasley jumpers, and it looked like her mum had tried to do a cable pattern on them this year.

"Good morning, George. Happy Christmas," Ginny called as she walked over to sit down next to him, eyeing the large 'F' on his chest *Mum must have tried the letters again this year*. She remembered watching her mum knit similar ones four years ago. She turned to greet Fred and smiled when she saw the 'G' on his chest *they've... those jokers they've switched sweaters again!* Ginny noted, which made her laugh at them. *Oh, how funny just to confuse everyone..* "Hi, Fred. I like your jumper this year!"

"He's not Fred; I am! See?" teased George, puffing up his chest to show her the large 'F.' *Honestly*, and you're our very own sister!"

"At least you should be able to tell your own brothers apart..." Fred shot George a wicked smile. "Right Forge?"

"Gred, she can't be expected to keep it straight if our own *mother* can't, can she?" George teased, shaking his head. "Mum's finally gone mental. She's back to labeling us just to keep us straight! I guess she never considered the fact that we share clothes?"

"It may make it easier for our dorm mates to keep it straight, though! Right, George?" Fred said. "All they have to do is read our chest. Unless, we go and wear the wrong one!"

"Right, Fred! It isn't that hard after all I mean, I don't have a problem knowing which you are ever!" George added. *But*, you'd think our *favorite* little sister could learn to tell the difference wouldn't you?"

Ginny was busting up, laughing at them. "I thought that I was your *only* sister!"

"That only makes it worse I'm hurt," Fred said dramatically and mimed fainting, smiling at her.

George quickly grabbed his arm as if to steady him, but pushed a little too hard, nearly toppling Fred into the first years. "Hey, Gred, watch it 'little firsties," he said, smiling at the first years, who went scrambling out of their way.

Regaining his balance, Fred shot a slight scowl at George. "Oi, thanks a bunch Forge!" he exclaimed, sarcastically.

"What Gred? Afraid to scrunch a few 'little firsties?" George said, laughing.

"Could be bad for business, Forge," Fred countered, collecting up all the wrapped candies into an empty box. "Potential customers, you know. If we 'scrunched' them too hard, they won't buy our chocolates and creams!"

Ginny laughed at his logic, watching George consider what Fred said. "You're right of course," he said, and turned to watch the first years huddle together on the opposite side of the room. "Maybe we should go and apologize... and see if anybody is up for some sweets?"

"Right behind you, bro," Fred said, and together they moved from the table to trying to sell their brightly wrapped trick creams and toffees. As they made their way around the common room, they kept calling each other either Gred and Forge or George and Fred, switching and swapping their names back and forth as the other housemates wished them a happy Christmas.

Those two nutters, Ginny thought, watching her twin brothers. *It's amazing, though! Even though everyone knows about those sweets of theirs, so many of our housemates still trust them enough to buy them! If Fred and George ever do get around to opening Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes, they just might be a smash.* Two third year boys bought handfuls of her brothers' creams, eagerly biting into one each and promptly bursting out in feathers and then laughing at each other.

Ron and Harry came down and wished Ginny a happy Christmas before plopping themselves in chairs next to hers. *Oh, so Mum made Harry another Weasley jumper, a green one with a Horntail dragon on the front, cool*, Ginny noticed. *He looks really good in it, actually. So why isn't Ron wearing a new one? He's wearing his old maroon jumper from last year. Between the maroon jumper and that new orange Chudley Cannons cap, he looks ridiculous really charming with his hair! He would have to pick a team whose colors looked dreadful on him*, she mused. *Why in the world doesn't he follow Ireland, like me?*

Hermione came down shortly sporting a jumper in Gryffindor gold with white snowflakes across her chest. "Happy Christmas," she said to the three of them. "So are we off to breakfast, then?"

"Okay, sure," Ron and Harry responded in chorus, getting up.

With a mischievous smile and a wink at Fred, George handed Hermione one of the newly wrapped Canary Creams. "Morning, Hermione, how about a..."

"Oh, no you don't! I am not eating one of those!" Hermione interrupted, holding up her hands and shooting George a scowl.

"Aww, it won't hurt you, Hermione. Where is your sense of fun?" George asked, mimicking her pose.

Fred came up holding a wrapped sweet. "Christmas special! Three Sickles, just for you."

Hermione rolled her eyes and turned to go. "I wish you'd stop trying to push that stuff off on the students."

"We can't help it if they *want* to buy them, can we?" George asked, following her through the portrait hole. All the way down to the Great Hall, George or Fred tried slipping Hermione a wrapped sweet, until finally Hermione took one with a simple, "Thank you." However, Ginny noticed with a quiet chuckle, she transfigured the sweet into a Christmas bobble and left it hanging on a suit of armor they passed.

In the Great Hall, Ginny sat down next to Hermione and across the table from Fred and George. Hermione looked more cheerful than the night before, although she was speaking more to Harry and Ginny than to Ron. As the food appeared before them, George tried to mix some canary cream into the porridge. "Hey, knock it off! Don't put that in the porridge!" Hermione admonished, grabbing the bowl from him.

"But Hermione..." Fred and George said simultaneously.

"I'll take ten points from Gryffindor if you do," she warned, shaking her finger at them. She promptly spooned out a large serving for her and Ginny before passing the porridge to Harry.

Fred and George tried to look incensed. "You wouldn't!" they exclaimed.

Hermione helped herself to the sausages. "Oh, just try it and see if I won't," she snapped, and took some eggs.

"Aww, come off it, Hermione!" Ron snapped. "It's just harmless fun, after all. We've all tried it and it only lasts a few seconds." Hermione glared at him, but kept her peace.

"So, how about it Hermione?" Fred asked, reaching for the bowl.

"No. No don't you..." Hermione started to admonish him, and then looked past Fred. "Oh! Hello, Professor..." she said, smiling. Both Fred and George turned around to see who she was addressing, then rounded on her with identical scowls. "We are in the Great Hall and *all* the professors are here... by all means you know Snape would *love* to..."

"*Fine*," Fred and George snapped, digging into their plates.

However, Ginny noticed that they weren't actually upset at Hermione, just amused that she outwitted them. *If I didn't know my brothers better well, I do, and I bet that Fred and George will be plotting to prank her all morning.* Thankfully the conversation stayed light and playful. A few bits of toast were flicked across the table at Hermione when she wasn't looking, and Ron found a sausage in his juice.

After breakfast they all returned to the common room. Fred and George managed to get a few people with their Canary Creams and Ton-Tongue Toffees, including Neville, who once again burst out in feathers. Harry, Ginny, Ron and Hermione sat together by the fireplace showing off their presents to each other. Harry was reading his new book *Quidditch Teams of Britain and Ireland*. Ron, who was playing Exploding Snap with Ginny, kept asking Hermione every few minutes, "Who are you going with?" as if Hermione would slip up and tell him!

Every time Ron asked her, Hermione swished her wand and hit Ron's jumper with the color-changing charm, changing his jumper to splotchy maroon-blue, to a reddish color, then a sick kind of plum and finally managed to turn it a dark burgundy. He was so distracted that Ginny won the game with the most points she'd ever achieved *ever!* "Okay!" he cried, holding up his hands in defense. "I won't ask you again! So can you leave off my jumper now?"

"Well, at least it looks better than it did maroon," Ginny said, picking up *The Great Wizards of Muggle Fairy Tales*, which she found pretty interesting and actually fun to read.

When the lunch toll sounded, they all went down to the Great Hall together. For the first time the Great Hall was crowded on Christmas, as everyone had stayed at Hogwarts this year rather than going home. Huge glistening snowflakes drifted from the ceiling and dissipated before ever touching anything. Thousands of silver and gold candles floated above the tables, and Professor Flitwick's Christmas trees glittered with thousands of fairy lights among the glowing ornaments on the branches.

The six of them sat together at the Gryffindor table with Fred and George on either side of Ginny. When the platters and bowls magically filled with food, she was momentarily surprised to see about a hundred turkeys appear on the tables, each with a different stuffing, and large bowls of *all* her favorite Christmas dishes. There were several dishes that Ginny suspected were traditional favorites made especially for the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students as well. Ginny sampled a few of them just out of curiosity and found that she liked quite a bit, although she wasn't exactly sure what they were.

Scattered all along the table were thousands of Cribbage's Wizarding Crackers. Ginny had fun popping them with Fred, George, and Hermione. Their crackers burst open with all sorts of crazy hats, whoopers, bangles, self-tying shoelaces, small birds, gobstones, non-explodable luminous balloons, and fake wands. Fred and George had a brief wand fight as Fred's wand erupted into a sparkling fountain of confetti and George's wand burst into a parrot and back. Ginny popped two crackers with Fred; his exploded with sparkling strings of crystal beads, which he promptly traded with Ginny for the comical jester's hat that had popped out of hers. She also got a set of wizard chess pieces that looked as if carved from white marble and a pair of miniature Abraxans.

Colin Creevey popped a cracker that made his brother Dennis fall off his seat when a sailboat burst out and almost landed on his head. Dennis immediately tried a cracker and a miniature hippogriff flew out at Ginny. She caught the little animal and handed it back to Dennis, who set it next to his plate, amazed as the toy figurine walked and flapped its wings.

Stuffed full from lunch, Ginny, her brothers, Hermione, and Harry all went back to the common room to grab coats, hats, and cravats and headed out to the grounds together. As they were heading down the staircase, George tried slipping Hermione a sweet. "Hey Hermione, would you like a toffee?" he offered, as casually as possible. Hermione took the toffee, looking at cautiously.

"I'd be careful; you never know what these two would do with toffees." Ron warned her as Fred shot him a scandalous look.

Harry paused momentarily on the step and looked back Fred and George. "That wouldn't be one like the toffees you slipped to my cousin Dudley, would it?" Harry asked.

"Nah, we've improved them!" Fred said proudly, "but yes, they have the same effect, only it doesn't last as long."

"Your tongue stays swollen for only ten minutes and then deflates," George added proudly.

"Just long enough to be sent to the hospital wing," Fred piped in.

Hermione handed back the toffee. "I think I'll pass. And quit trying these things on students!"

"Can I help it if they are *willing* participants?" Fred asked, trying and failing to look innocent.

"Besides, we do *pay* them for their input." George tried offering the toffee to her again. "Go on, it won't hurt you."

Harry was clearly interested in the toffee, although Ginny hoped that he wasn't going to actually eat one. "So how big does the tongue get with your new and improved version?" he asked.

"Oh, about the same size as it did with your cousin," Fred said, and winked.

"So that would be about four feet, then?" Harry asked, nodding.

"Something like that, yes!" George replied proudly. "So, Hermione, how about a go? Want a try?"

"No," she answered back. "I think I'll pass, thank you."

As they passed through the oak doors and out onto the grounds, Ginny's breath caught, astounded. The grounds looked picture-perfect with the snow lying over everything like glittering white frosting dusted with shimmering confectionary sugar. *It is breathtaking! I've never seen anywhere so beautiful... except in pictures!*

Everything was smooth and pearly white in the warm sunlight. All the trees were frosted, shimmering, and sparkling and looked like they were hung with thousands of icicles. The Beauxbatons carriage stood like a light blue frosted cake sitting next to Hagrid's hut, which resembled a frosted gingerbread house. Even the lake was trimmed in ice. The Durmstrang ship appeared as if the Durmstrang students had decorated it, as the ship was covered with frost and the rigging covered with icicles. The only thing that distracted from the beautiful scene were the two deep channels that had been made by the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang students as they came and went from the castle.

Fred and George were the first to run into the snow and fall over on their backs, making snow angels with their arms and legs. Ginny quickly ran down the stairs and copied them. When she stood back up to see her angel, George threw a snowball that missed her face by a finger length and exploded on Ron's chest instead.

"Hey!" he cried and quickly grabbed a fist full of snow in a pathetic attempt to hit him back. His aim was terrible, and Ron hit Harry instead. Harry grabbed a handful of snow and chucked it at Ron in friendly retaliation.

Fred packed a snowball that he threw at George, and within minutes, it was everyone for themselves. Hermione was the only one who managed to remain fairly unscathed as she chose to just sit on the sidelines and watch, laughing at their game.

At five o'clock Hermione waved Ginny over to her. "Ginny! We should head back up!"

"Yeah, sure." Ginny threw the snowball she had just finished at Harry. "See you all later! Don't get too wet!" Ginny called as she ran, dodging the snowball Harry threw at her, to catch up to Hermione.

"What? You need three hours?" Ron yelled after Hermione and was pelted by both Fred and George for not paying attention. "Who're you going with?" he called after her as the girls jogged back to the castle together to get ready for the Ball.

Hermione cast a disbelieving glare at Ron just before opening up the huge oak doors. "He just doesn't give up, does he?" she asked, smiling at Ginny.

Ginny passed through the door, taking one last look at the boys playing in the snow. "Nope, and he's a whiz at interrogation, too. He seems to think that you'll lose your senses and tell him if he just asks enough times."

"Well, you are always telling me how thick he is!" Hermione responded, laughing. Ginny was feeling a bit excited now and eager to get showered and dressed for the Ball. Together they practically ran up all the stairs to Gryffindor tower, through the portrait hole and into the common room. Ginny could hardly contain her excitement now.

She was going to the Ball!

The Yule Ball

Chapter 7 of 8

There is nothing quite like going to your first formal Ball. Getting all dressed up, those first looks of awe in your partner and brother's eyes, the extravagant hall, the music, the dancing, your brother being a twit and your best friend in tears... Well, it was almost perfect.

As in *In the Gryffindor Common Room*, some of the conversation for Ginny, Hermione, Harry and Ron are quotes, copied from JK Rowling's book for *The Yule Ball*. (US GoF p 403-432) I also used several pieces of JK Rowling's writing and some of her descriptions and they are thus borrowed. But since this is about Ginny's experience, the events leading up to and including the Yule Ball itself are however, looked at from Ginny's perspective, not Harry's. I felt compelled to include what was given to us by JK Rowling herself. Since I don't know her to ask her permission, I hope she doesn't mind. Please forgive me.

Ginny ran up the stairs of the girls' dormitory to her room and grabbed her bath things and headed to take a luxurious shower, eager to try some of the scented bath gel Luna had given her. Ginny and Hermione opted to change in Ginny's room, mostly because Lavender was still trying just as hard as Ron to find out with whom Hermione was going to the Ball. "It'll be quieter and we'll have more room to get ready with only the two of us," Hermione suggested.

Together they rolled up their hair in curlers, using liberal amounts of Sleekeasys' Hair Potion on each strand, and used their wands to set each roller. "Where are you going to meet Viktor?" Ginny asked as she worked.

"Just outside of the double oak front doors. I heard that Professor Flitwick and Professor McGonagall are going to decorate the space just outside the oak doors into an outside grotto in case people get too hot from dancing and want a bit of fresh air," Hermione stated as she took out her rollers.

Ginny set down her brush, then took several strands of her hair at her temple and made two very loose braids that she pulled together and fastened with her new pin, which Hermione had transfigured into a hairclip. She then slipped into her dress robes. "It will be fun to see what they do. I bet it's lovely. They've really tried to go all out this year with the decorations."

Meanwhile, Hermione had been working her hair into a knot on the back of her head with little curls accenting her temples and neck. "It's probably to impress the students from the visiting schools make a good impression, and show off a bit." Ginny gave her a hand with her hair by adding several pins with small rhinestones to give a bit of sparkle to the hairstyle. Hermione slipped into her dress robes, which were a soft blue with lots of light floaty layers of periwinkle blue. She looked stunning.

Ginny used a strand of the sparkling crystal beads as a bracelet and put on her star pendant from her great aunt. Under Hermione's instructions Ginny tried on a bit of Hermione's makeup, touching up her eyes, cheeks, and applying some lip-gloss. "Ginny you look wonderful; you'll surprise everyone at the Ball!" Hermione said as she looked at Ginny and finished her own makeup.

"So will you. I can't wait until the guys see you like this," said Ginny, smiling back. She took a step back to admire how Hermione looked. "You look amazing!" she exclaimed as Hermione turned, admiring how she looked in the mirror. "You look different with your hair like that and with makeup. I bet my dolt of a brother doesn't even recognize you!"

"Of course Ron won't even notice!" Hermione smiled as she checked her reflection. "But Viktor is going to be very surprised, isn't he?"

"He's going to love the way you look," Ginny replied. Finally ready to go, both girls were smiling as they headed into the common room. "I promised I'd meet Neville at the foot of the marble staircase, and we are supposed to be inside the Great Hall when the champions come in," Ginny said as they carefully walked down the stairs.

Hermione suddenly stopped on the second landing. "Go ahead, I'm feeling a bit nervous. I don't think I'm ready to go down yet," Hermione said, putting her hand on the wall.

Ginny looked at her, surprised. "Hermione, are you all right? You look beautiful! Why are you nervous?"

"Because... I'm going with Viktor. He's a champion and he's famous! The champions are supposed to enter into the Great Hall in a formal procession *and* in front of everyone," Hermione stated nervously. "I just hope I don't trip up or anything."

"You'll be fine, really," Ginny stated encouragingly. *Hermione's not used to being the center of attention unless it's answering a question in class* Ginny thought. "Hermione, you'll be fine. I'm sure Viktor has been to lots of these before... After all, he is famous. Just let him lead you through. I'm sure once the procession is over..."

"We open the dancing," Hermione said, slightly blanching. Ginny couldn't help the giggle that escaped her lips. "It's not funny, Ginny! He said that he doesn't go to many formal things."

"Hermione, many, or none at all? I am willing to guess that he has he was just being modest. *Or* he hasn't been to many in England." Ginny watched as her words sank in. "Besides, you know that he probably has a formal 'something' every time his Quidditch team wins a game. Look at how we celebrate when Gryffindor does!" Hermione nodded, looking calmer. "Just let him lead you, both in the procession and the dance, and you'll be fine really."

"Are you still glad that you are going with Neville? You're not too disappointed that you're not going with Harry?" Hermione asked her, obviously trying to change the subject.

"Nah, Fred and George are right; he's a bit thick. He really doesn't notice me at all. Besides, Neville's so happy that I am going with him, and his enthusiasm is a bit contagious actually. I know that I'll have fun, and we're actually becoming friends." Ginny laughed. "It's going to be an exciting night, isn't it? I'd better get going. Fred and George wanted to see me in my dress robes." She did another a spin, watching the skirt flare. "Do you think they will be surprised?"

"Surprised? They are going to be beside themselves tonight. I bet they'll be watching you all night!" Hermione was smiling at the thought. "Have they ever seen you all dolled up like this?"

"No, never! I've worn dress robes before, sure, but never did much with my hair or ever worn make-up. They even gave me a bit of a time about the 'old' dress robes, saying how it 'won't be all that bad' and all. Wait till they see what we've done to it!" Ginny laughed. "Well, I better not keep the guys waiting any longer. I'll see you in the Great Hall, okay?"

"Thanks for helping with my hair, Ginny. I'll see you at the Ball," Hermione said, giving her a quick hug, and then watched her as she headed down the stairs.

Fred and George were standing around in the common room, waiting for Angelina and Alicia to come down from the girls' dormitory. They both looked handsome, yet comical, as they fussed with their cuffs and collars of their second-hand dress robes. *They toned down the color by making them darker, I think... at least darker than I remember they were when Mum bought them.* It was obvious though, that they had someone iron and fix up their dress robes, because they looked pretty decent for an older style. *They've removed several of the rows of ruffles, all the lace, and... yes, they fixed theirs up, just as I did mine!*

As Ginny approached them Fred and George stared at her in surprise. Ginny gave a simple twirl to show off her dress robes and what she and Hermione had accomplished. Fred raised his eyebrows at the change to her appearance and her dress, and George's mouth actually dropped open. They both gave Ginny soft whistles that made her blush. "Wow! You look really good!" George finally said.

"Yeah, you look really pretty!" Fred said. "Hey, you're wearing makeup!"

"Just a bit." Ginny beamed at them, enjoying her brothers' astonished stares. *For once they aren't joking about my appearance and seem to really mean it* "Nothing's better for your self-esteem than your brothers being shocked at how nice you look."

George reached down and took her hand, then gently turned her around to look at her. When Ginny finished her spin he asked, "What did you do to your dress robes? They look different... it looks really good on you," he added quickly, so as not to offend her. "But this isn't how did you..."

"What's wrong with them?" Ginny asked, looking down at her dress.

"Much better than they did coming out of the box, I'd say," Fred said, grinning at her. "Not like I thought they would..."

"Yeah, I ironed them, and fixed them up a little." She turned, making the skirt swish. "Really, do I look okay?"

"Too good! Maybe I should've asked you to go with *me*?" George teased her.

"You're the ones that matched me up with Neville! Are we having second thoughts?" Ginny teased him right back.

"No, but here come our partners now!" Fred said to George as Alicia came down the stairs, followed closely by Angelina. Both girls looked very pretty in their dress robes. Alicia's were cut in an older style; the soft gold brocade and lace were really stunning on her. Angelina's had lots of deep soft flowing peach ruffles on her skirt and a thinner ruffle along the wide neckline. Both girls complimented Ginny on her dress, as Ginny admired the other girls' dress robes. Fred and George added a few of their own remarks, some they meant some joking, which pretty much made all three girls laugh.

"Are we ready, ladies?" George asked as he held up his arm to Alicia.

Fred presented Angelina his arm as well. "We're ready to show you off to the whole school now."

"Coming, little sis?" George said, smiling, as he held out his other arm to her. All the way down the corridors and stairs the conversation bounced between Quidditch and the latest articles in the *Daily Prophet*. Ginny was pleased that once they started talking, Angelina and Alicia included her in the conversation as if they all were good

friends.

As they walked down the marble staircase, Ginny could see Neville standing near the bottom waiting for her. Neville looked up at her, stunned, and smiled shyly as they approached. "You look amazing!" he said as Ginny came to a halt right in front of him.

He does seem really impressed "Thank you, Neville," Ginny said, actually blushing at Neville's stare. *He looks nice too, in his dark blue dress robes*

"Now you two be good," Fred said, "and have a good time."

"But not too much of a good time now we'll be watching you," George continued, trying to look stern but failing. Neville was starting to look nervous.

"Knock it off!" Ginny reprimanded them.

"Okay, okay, we're just looking out for our *only* sister," Fred teased her, and Neville seemed to relax.

Both Angelina and Alicia laughed and Angelina gave Ginny a little wink. "They'll be too busy dancing with us to be watching you all night," Angelina stated and then turned to Fred. "She's going to be just fine with Neville. He's a really nice guy, after all you said so yourself."

Alicia gave George a friendly poke in the side. "Besides, I was hoping that you'd spend all of your attention on me!"

From the corner of her eye, Ginny spied Hermione as she stopped at the last step next to her and Neville. She greeted both of them quietly, then quickly added, "See you later," to Ginny, as she slipped passed them and through the crowd to go out the oak doors to wait for Viktor Krum.

Alicia tilted her head and shot George an inquiring lift of her brow. "Of course I will," George promised Alicia, "but I've got to keep an eye out for my little sister too, don't I?"

"It's the brotherly thing to do, after all!" Fred added, with a shrug. Both girls laughed at them and took hold of their partner's arm, turning Fred and George away from Ginny and Neville.

Neither of my brothers even noticed her pass, which knowing them might be a good thing.. Ginny smiled as she watched more couples come down the stairs. The large front doors swung open to let Hermione out, and she caught a glimpse of lawn in front of the castle that had been transformed into a beautiful grotto.

The doors remained open, and Madame Maxime made a grand entrance followed by a few of her students; it seemed that many of the Beauxbatons were already in the hall, mingling with their partners or friends. The grotto outside the doors, complete with wandering paths, rose bushes, and fairy lights, that caught her brothers' attention also. "So... they have provided a place where we can go make out later," Fred suggested to Angelina, who gave him a playful smack.

George turned to Alicia, who cut him off saying, "Don't even suggest it."

George gave her a hurt look. "Would I presume?"

"Okay, okay, shall we go in then?" Fred asked, once again offering Angelina his arm, while George simply held Alicia's hand. Both Fred and George glanced back at Neville with an odd expression before they moved off to mingle with the rest of the students in the Entrance Hall.

Ginny watched Fred and George lead Alicia and Angelina into the Entrance Hall and made room for others to come down the stairs, although the marble staircase was still packed all the way to the top as far as Ginny could tell. By now most of the students and guests were trying to congregate in the Entrance Hall, looking for their friends and partners. She turned her attention back to Neville when he touched her arm. "You really do look pretty," he said with more confidence now that Fred and George were gone, which made Ginny smile even wider and blush slightly.

"Thank you, you look very nice too," Ginny stated happily. *Oh, this is promising to be a very good night*

The huge oak doors opened wide again and Karkaroff led in the Durmstrang students with their partners. Although Viktor Krum was walking right behind Karkaroff, his full attention was on Hermione as they entered together, talking to each other. Hermione was smiling and laughing at whatever Viktor was telling her. Karkaroff's face was a stern mask, although he kept gazing at Hermione with a barely concealed scowl.

Professor McGonagall stepped through the doors of the Great Hall into the Entrance Hall. She moved to the side of the Entrance Hall and called out loudly, "Champions over here, please!" over the excited buzz in the hall. Ginny thought that she looked very festive in her fancy tartan dress robes and the wreath of thistles she was wearing on her hat.

Just then Ginny felt a hand touch her arm. However, it took Neville several tries before she could hear him ask, "Are you ready to go inside?" due to the level of the noise.

Once inside, Ginny's breath caught. She was completely amazed at just how pretty the Great Hall looked. The walls of the Great Hall were covered in sparkling silver frost as if the entire hall had been carved from silver ice. At least a hundred garlands of pine, mistletoe, and ivy draped across the ceiling with thousands of tiny lights and icicles. The ceiling showed a clear, dark blue night sky full of shining stars, glittering like millions of diamonds that seemed so close you could stand on the tables and touch them.

Hundreds of small round tables were arranged with white tablecloths that glittered like fresh new snow, each with a single candle lantern sitting in a ring of holly. The berries on the holly sparkled like rubies as they reflected the light of the candles. Every table was set for formal dining; the usual gold plates and goblets were replaced with shiny silver plates, crystal goblets, ornate silver flatware, and napkins edged in fancy silver embroidery that had been folded magically into flowers and placed on each plate.

Each table was set with twelve places. Neville led Ginny across the room to join Seamus and Lavender, who stood next to a table where Dean sat with Aimee Fulton, a pretty girl from Hufflepuff. Ron was leading Padma over to the table also. However, Padma was looking around the room, unsure if she wanted to; until Mandy Brocklehurst and Michael Corner came to sit next to her, bringing with them Michael's friend, Terry Boot, and his partner, Su Li, all friends of Padma's from Ravenclaw.

The boys at her table immediately began to talk about Quidditch, while the girls leaned in to talk about who had come with whom and what everyone was wearing. Ginny would have been happier talking about Quidditch, but had to answer the direct questions asked by the girls to be polite. However, it was funny to be following both conversations at the same time.

Ginny glanced up at the High Table as the girls commented on the attire of their professors. "Madame Maxime is rather lovely in her lavender silk dress robes and all her opal jewelry," she remarked, watching the woman as she sat talking animatedly to Professor Dumbledore. He wore magnificent dress robes of midnight blue with silver embroidery and little stars.

Ginny was surprised to see Percy, who had taken Mr. Crouch's seat and was talking politely to Ludo Bagman. Mr. Bagman, in his bright purple dress robes bespeckled with yellow stars, was bouncing excitedly in his chair and waving animatedly with his hands. "Percy has obviously bought new navy blue dress robes for the occasion," Ginny said, pointing him out to Lavender. "I've never seen those robes before." *I wonder if Mr. Couch has finally stopped calling him Weatherby yet? He certainly wouldn't put up with that from anyone in the family.* She turned quickly to Seamus as he mentioned something about Troy and Moran, Chasers from the Ireland Quidditch team, but Aimee touched her arm and asked her something about Karkaroff's stuffy demeanor.

She looked over at Karkaroff, sitting next to Hagrid, in his silver trimmed, red dress robe uniform of Durmstrang. "I'm not sure if it is the uniform that makes him look so stiff, or having to sit between Hagrid and Professor Sinistra," she replied back to Aimee, amused.

"Yes, but doesn't Professor Sinistra look stunning in her emerald green robes?" Lavender asked. "Compared to Hagrid's... Wherever does he hunt for his clothes?" Ginny was a bit miffed at her comment. She thought Hagrid looked rather nice in his brown dress robes with the outlines of leaves stitched in purple and green on the collar and cuffs.

Professor Snape was sitting on his other side and had even dressed up too. *Well, his black frock coat has the sheen of velvet and his waistcoat is possibly a very dark green... it almost has a hint of green.* Snape looked up, and she quickly looked away, hoping that he hadn't noticed that she had been staring at him. She leaned back toward Neville and the conversation about the Falcons' Beaters, Kevin and Karl Broadmoor, and how they had clobbered half the new rookies during the autumn tryouts.

As soon as everyone was settled down inside the Great Hall, the doors opened and the champions paraded into the hall and took their seats at their tables. Fleur and Roger Davies came into the Great Hall first. Fleur reminded Ginny of a peacock as she glided down the aisle. "Oh, she looks amazing in her silver-grey satin dress robes," Lavender exclaimed, standing to get a better look at Fleur. Ginny reluctantly had to admit she was right. Hermione and Viktor were next. Hermione glowed radiantly as she walked next to him, and he held himself proudly as he guided her to their table.

Harry entered, looking really nervous, and Parvati looked like she was pulling him around as if leading him on a leash. Cedric and Cho Chang followed, both talking together and obviously commenting on the decorations as they entered. Ginny thought that they looked very good together. *She's a much better match with Cedric than if she'd been with Harry,* she thought with a twang of jealousy.

During the champions' procession, gilded menus appeared at each place setting. Ginny picked hers up and read the serving selections that had been written in beautiful calligraphy: pork chops, honey-glazed ham, roasted turkey, and prime rib. At first everyone just stared at the menus until Seamus told Lavender he wanted the ham and asked her which she was choosing. Lavender replied that she preferred turkey and immediately their plates filled. Delighted, Neville asked for prime rib, smiling as it magically appeared.

"Oh, I don't know," Ginny said quietly to Neville. "I can't decide between the ham or turkey..." and instantly her plate filled with slices of both.

Following dinner, the plates cleared themselves and a selection of small fancy pastries and creams appeared on each plate. As he wiped the last bit of cream from his lip, Neville whispered to Ginny that this was the best Christmas dinner he'd ever had.

Suddenly, in a puff of smoke and a flash of light, the Weird Sisters appeared on the stage to begin the dance. The Weird Sisters were extremely well known in the wizarding world, and the instant the lead guitarist said, "Hello, Hogwarts..." hundreds of girls immediately jumped to their feet. All around Ginny, girls were screaming, swooning and crying. Many of the boys stood whistling, cheering and clapping. The drummer started a percussion roll and the lead guitarist, a crescendoing riff that escalated the excitement in the room. Finally the lead singer held up his hand and announced that the champions should come out on the dance floor. Ginny had frequently listened to the Weird Sisters on the wireless and knew the lyrics to many of their songs. There were even a few posters of the band in her dormitory. However, she was very surprised when the rock band began to play a measured waltz.

The champions and their partners rose and gracefully walked out onto the dance floor. *Well, all except Harry,* Ginny thought, the corner of her mouth twitching as she tried to hide a scowl. *Parvati is still trying to lead him along like a prize show crap.* Even as the partners began to dance, Harry still looked really stiff and awkward.

Cedric Diggory and Cho Chang both glided to the music beautifully, while Viktor Krum and Hermione looked poised and formal as he led her around. Fleur and Roger Davies flowed around the dance floor in sweeping circles. *The better for everyone to see her,* Ginny thought scornfully.

Neville stood up and held his hand to Ginny to dance. They were almost the first couple to do so, and Ginny looked nervously around before Neville began to lead her. Fred and George were right; Neville was a good dancer. However, Ginny couldn't help looking at Harry every time they got close to him and Parvati, and in her distraction, she stepped on Neville's foot. Ginny winced and kept saying, "Sorry," whenever she did, embarrassed because not only was she losing step, but also because Harry seemed to notice as well.

"Relax... Just follow me and you'll be fine," Neville whispered to her.

"I'm not good at this," Ginny fibbed to cover the real reason, which was that she secretly wished she were dancing with Harry instead.

"You're doing fine, just follow me. Okay?" Neville coaxed her. As the dance floor filled with the teachers and guests, dancing with Neville got much easier and Ginny was able to relax and have fun.

Dumbledore was dancing a lively step with Madame Maxime, who stood quite taller than he did. Mad-Eye Moody was doing a weird two-step with Professor Sinistra, and Fred and Angelina were dancing rather exuberantly between everybody and simply having fun. George and Alicia were doing a strange fox-trot-tango combination, just so he could spin and dip her at random moments.

Every time Hermione and Krum were near them, she looked like she was having the time of her life. Viktor looked so proud and he was smiling as they danced. He looked almost handsome when he smiled. However, Ginny noted that Karkaroff glared at the pair whenever he passed them. Viktor wasn't paying any attention to Karkaroff as he spun Hermione and dipped her, which made her smile and laugh. Even Neville took a clue from Viktor and he twirled Ginny and tried a small dip. Ginny laughed as he did and Neville beamed at her.

Filch passed by doing a bouncy dance step, dancing with Madam Pince, the librarian. He had on very old dress robes in musty brown, and she wore very dark burgundy ones. They both looked absolutely comical: his bouncy trot and her stiff and proper movements; they hardly fit together at all. Mrs. Norris was nowhere to be seen, so Filch looked almost incomplete.

After a few rounds of various classical style pieces, the Weird Sisters' lead guitarist did a wild riff, and the drummer pounded out a solo roll. The lead singer yelled out, "Are you ready, Hogwarts?" and the band began one of their more popular songs. Many of the girls went wild, screaming. The guys were obviously much happier with the change, as it was much more their style of dancing. Krum and Hermione were moving to the music like everyone else, but he kept her hand so that he could turn her in a spin every once in a while to make her laugh. Seamus and Lavender were dancing next to Ginny and Neville, in a square, so to Ginny it was like dancing with Neville, Seamus and Lavender all at the same time.

Ginny saw Dumbledore dancing with Professor Sprout, and smiled at the sight of Lugo Bagman bouncing Professor McGonagall around. Madame Maxime and Hagrid were cutting a wide path through everyone as they waltzed and kept step to the fast-paced music. Hagrid was actually dancing very well, considering his size, although Ginny doubted that she could have kept up with his steps! Mandy and Michael came up to Ginny, Neville, Seamus and Lavender as the next song began, extending their square into a circle. At the end of the song, Michael asked Neville if he would like to dance with Mandy, so that he could dance with Ginny.

Two songs later, Dean asked Neville if he would like to exchange partners too. Ginny was starting to feel very popular, as Neville's dorm mates either exchanged with each other or danced in small groups together. After a while Ginny asked Neville for a break. "Sure. I could use a drink. Do you want one?" Neville offered.

"Yes, please," Ginny said gratefully. Neville nodded at her and waved at Dean as they headed toward the refreshment table. Ginny fanned herself with a menu that had been left on one of the tables.

Hermione and Viktor had left the dance floor, and Ginny spotted her talking to Ron and Harry, but Ron looked sullen and angry. Ginny had to laugh. *Well if he had just asked her first instead of as a last resort, he'd be here with her instead of sulking.*

She looked at Neville as he waited for the drinks and smiled as Viktor walked over and stood next to Neville. Neville was so stunned when he turned around and saw Viktor he nearly dropped their butterbeers. Neville blushed and nodded to Viktor then moved quickly away, but he looked back over his shoulder at Viktor, then toward Ginny with a look of pure amazement.

Fred and George were right; she was having a great time and she was glad she accepted Neville's invite.

When she turned again to watch Ron, he was talking to Viktor, who had a stunned and befuddled expression on his face. Ron looked surly and Krum walked away shaking his head, confused.

Neville touched Ginny's arm to get her attention, and she smiled at him and accepted her butterbeer. Moments later as they set their empty glasses of butterbeer down, Ginny noticed Hermione standing off to the side with Viktor, her back to Ginny. Krum looked confused and a bit put off, and had an angry scowl on his face momentarily, before Hermione laid her hand on his chest. He shrugged, then tenderly brushed a curl from her cheek, and then led her back to the dance floor. Ginny pointed them out to Neville and indicated for them to move in their direction. "I want to know what my dolt of a brother did to upset Hermione," she suggested.

Neville looked over at the couple dancing and for a brief moment he looked panicked. "You go. I'll catch up to you in a moment," Neville said and nervously walked away.

Ron and Harry were out of sight when Ginny approached Hermione and Viktor. Just as Ginny touched Hermione's arm, Neville walked up with four fresh drinks. "I thought you'd like another," he said as he handed one to Hermione and one to Viktor.

"Thank you," Viktor said with a click of his heels and a nod. "We haff not met. You are a friend of Herm-own-ninny?"

Neville shifted his feet as Viktor accepted the proffered beverage. "We are in the same year and house together... I'm Neville N-neville Longbottom," he replied nervously to Viktor.

Ginny forced back a giggle at how awed he was of Viktor. *Well, he is an international Quidditch star and Neville likes Quidditch. I remember him commenting to Seamus in the Great Hall that his gran hadn't taken him to see the World Cup. And he sounded so disappointed about it too.*

Viktor seemed used to this kind of nervousness in people and smiled at him to put him at ease, then offered his hand. "Please, you call me Viktor. I am honor to meet a friend of Herm-own-ninny. Do you haff good time so far dancing?" he asked.

Ginny leaned closer to Hermione and quietly asked her, "Is my brother being his usual prattiness? I could get Fred and George to do something *interesting* to him to get even... if you'd like?"

Hermione laughed. "He's jealous that I came with Viktor, I think. He had the talons to claim that I was 'fraternizing with the enemy' and that... He accused me of helping him with the egg clue."

"He didn't! And after all you have done to help Harry?" Ginny asked, shocked. "If you had been helping Viktor at all, you would have just told Harry what you'd found out from Viktor anyway to help him! Ron's so thick it's sickening!" Hermione smiled and Ginny knew that she was very glad for her support.

"Actually Viktor hasn't spoken about the tournament at all except when I complimented him on how he handled his dragon. We've not spoken about the egg at all," she explained. "Frankly, he was very modest about the first task. He's generally far more interested in all things British than pumping me for help on the egg. Although, when we are in the library, he often asks me the meaning of words he comes across in the books. It's annoying really, having to stop every few seconds to explain what words like knobby, cistern, lurgy, fug, tuffet, and draught... He once asked me what poo was!" Both girls had a good laugh at that.

"Vat is so funny?" Viktor asked, turning his attention from Neville when she and Hermione burst out laughing.

"Ginny was just cheering me up... said something funny," Hermione answered. "Do you remember my friend, Ginny?"

Viktor snapped his boots and bowed slightly in her direction. "Yes. I remember your pretty friend. She say hallo to me in the library at time. It is nice to see you again. Do you haff fun tonight?"

"Yes, I am having a very good time," Ginny answered. "Thank you." She saw Neville smile at her admission *I am having a very good night. I will have to remember to thank Neville for asking me and Fred and George for setting me up, too.*

All four of them moved back onto the dance floor and danced in a square. Ginny and Hermione exchanged partners for a few dances so that Hermione could dance with Neville and Ginny could dance with Viktor. However, being in a square it wasn't really all that different, except that Viktor faced her and Neville faced Hermione. In fact it was fun dancing in with Hermione and Viktor, because it was like dancing with Viktor and Neville at the same time. After several songs Hermione told Viktor that her feet hurt and she wanted to sit awhile. They waved good-bye as Viktor escorted Hermione from the hall. Ginny suspected that they were headed to the grotto outside the great doors.

"Do you want to go outside too? Or do you want to dance some more?" Neville asked.

"I'd like to see the grotto," Ginny admitted. "I am curious at what Professor Flitwick and McGonagall did." Neville looked carefully over her shoulder at the dance floor and took Ginny's hand, leading her outside. Ginny supposed he was worried about Fred and George seeing them leave. She was stunned and very impressed with the grotto. The roses filled the air with their fragrance and the fairy lights made the whole scene very romantic. Neville held her hand as they walked. In a turn of the path, he looked at her speculatively. She knew that he wanted to kiss her, but was too shy to ask. "Neville, it's okay," Ginny finally said, softly.

"I if you, that is... I didn't want to well..." he stammered. Ginny stood facing him, watching his discomfort. "I would like to... but I said friends and I... but if you don't want to I understand."

She stepped closer to him and looked him in the eye. "I've had a wonderful time, Neville, really. You've been fun, I've... I don't mind. You have been very sweet to me, and I'm very glad I came with you." Neville stared at her a long time, and then slowly and gently brushed his lips on hers. The kiss was soft and light. He brushed his lips to hers a second time as if savoring the contact, then pulled away, blushing. Ginny smiled at her first kiss, which although pleasant, still felt like she had just kissed one of her cousins. *No, a friend. I like him, I do but not like a boyfriend. It's too bad I didn't couldn't fall for him. He'd be a really nice guy to any girl he was with*

Reluctantly, Neville led Ginny back to the Great Hall and onto the dance floor. Ginny noticed that he scanned the people dancing, possibly looking for Fred and George. "Neville, don't worry about them. If my brothers give you a hard time I'll hex them. I'm really good at a rather nasty Bat-Bogey Hex, or the Furnunculus Curse. They will not bother you, I promise."

"I wasn't worried about that," he said all too quickly. "I was hoping to see... um... Hermione and Viktor again." Ginny nodded, smiling inwardly as they began to dance again.

When the Weird Sisters stopped playing at midnight, the room erupted in whistles, cheers, and loud applause of appreciation. Ginny and Neville made their way from the Great Hall into the Entrance Hall. Ginny could see Viktor as he kissed Hermione's hand at the foot of the marble staircase and watched her as she turned to go up. He looked very happy as he turned to go back outside to his ship. He waved to Ginny and Neville as he passed them, saying, "Good night," over the din in the room.

"Viktor Krum waved at us! I spoke to Viktor Krum!" Neville stated happily. "Wait until I tell Uncle Algie I was dancing with Viktor Krum!"

"You might want to say my name in that," Ginny giggled at Neville. "It may sound funny otherwise." Dean, Seamus, Lavender and Parvati all caught up on the stairs to the seventh floor, chatting about all the gossip from the dance as they headed back to Gryffindor tower.

The Fat Lady was apparently very drunk and her friend Vi was lounging heavily on the frame, laughing and just as snockered. It took several tries for her to acknowledge the password because she fell in fits of laughter every time one of them said, "Pine fresh." It was even harder to get the Fat Lady to open up the portrait hole because she was having a hard time managing her own frame to do so.

The boys finally had to help pry open the painting, making the Fat Lady complain drunkenly that they didn't need to be so rough with her and that they needn't shove her open at all. When the boys finally got the portrait to open wide enough so everyone could crawl in, Ginny had to suppress a laugh as the Fat Lady's friend tumbled out of the frame.

However, as Ginny climbed into the common room and was getting to her feet to say good night to Neville and the guys, Hermione raised her voice to a screech. "How dare you!" she yelled at Ron. "Well if you don't like it, you know what the solution is, don't you?" she shouted, frustration and anger in her voice.

"Oh yeah?" Ron yelled back, his face scarlet. Dean, Seamus, Lavender and Parvati all made for the opposite side of the common room to avoid Hermione and Ron. "What's that?" Ron snapped at Hermione.

"Next time there's a ball, ask me before someone else does, and not as a last resort!" Hermione yelled back, fuming mad. Her eyes were beginning to tear.

Ron just stood there, momentarily totally stunned as his mouth moved open and closed soundlessly like a fish. Hermione ran up the girls' staircase to bed. "Well..." Ginny heard Ron utter, gobsmacked. He then rounded on Harry. "Well that just proves doesn't it I mean..." he spluttered, utterly thunderstruck. Harry simply stood there completely mute, staring at Ron with a look of amusement. "Completely missed the point hasn't she?"

"Thank you, Neville. I had a really good time," Ginny said quickly, giving a stunned Neville a kiss on his cheek. "And I'm really glad you asked me to go with you but I have to go..." She turned and scooted across the room and up the stairs after Hermione.

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Author's Note:

Descriptions and the dialogue at the end between Ron and Hermione is quoted from:

J. K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, (New York, Scholastic Press, 2000), 403-432

No plagiarism was intended.

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Guys Can Be A Gits or They Can be Charming

Chapter 8 of 8

In the afterglow of her first formal dance, Ginny discovers a few things about guys. Guys can be a gits or they can be charming. Who knew that going to the Yule Ball would suddenly make her popular with the boys? Certainly not Ginny...

Ginny found Hermione sprawled across her bed crying as she entered the room. Ginny climbed up on her bed next to her and pulled the curtains closed with her wand. "What happened?" asked Ginny softly.

"Your foul git of a brother, that's what! Why does he have to go and ruin everything?" Hermione asked into her pillow.

"What did my stupid git of a brother do this time?" Ginny asked, rubbing her hand on Hermione's back reassuringly.

"He said I was fraternizing with the enemy! He said I was a traitor to Harry just because I went to the Yule Ball with Viktor," Hermione said, lifting her head to look at Ginny.

"He's jealous, Hermione! He's being a right awful prat saying these things to you because he doesn't have half the balls to admit that he likes you! I know he likes you! Even Fred and George know I think... but Ron is really a thick head at best." Ginny was actually rather upset at her brother for hurting her friend this way. *Maybe I WILL ask Fred and George to pull a good one on him. It would serve him right.*

"I don't even know why I let him bother me so much," Hermione groaned, rolling onto her side to see Ginny better.

"My brother is really dense when it comes to girls. I do honestly believe he is absolutely clueless," Ginny said empathically. Hermione finally smiled and wiped her eyes.

"You know I was hoping your brother *would* ask me. But he didn't... Well, not until he was desperate, that is." Hermione shook her head. "It was like he had just caught on I was even a girl! He had the audacity to say, 'Neville's right, you are a girl!' I wanted to..."

"I know! Right after Ron finally asked you to go with him, he had the nerve to suggest I go with Harry, so that they wouldn't look like stupid prats because they still didn't have partners!" Ginny stated angrily, and Hermione looked at her surprised. "You had just walked away from Ron to go up to your room right after he finally figured out that he *could* ask you... Ron suggested that I should go with Harry. But Harry never asked me to go with him. Ron suggested that I go ~~ab~~Harry's last resort... as a *consolation*. Made me upset too, because I had really wanted to go with Harry. But I got some really good advice from Fred and George."

"*What?*" Hermione asked in disbelief.

Ginny supposed that either Hermione had never considered that Ron would do that to her, or that Fred and George were actually capable of giving advice... Jokes, kidding and taunting definitely, but not serious brotherly advice. "If he can't see what a great girl you are, then he's a thick git. Have a good time with someone else. Try not to think about him. That will only make you nuts." Ginny tried to mimic her brother's voices, which made Hermione smile a little. "Let him see you having a good time with someone else. Maybe then he'll realize what he's missing. Maybe next time something comes up, he *will* think about asking you." Ginny mimicked Fred and George trying to sound serious.

Hermione laughed at Ginny's attempt to sound like her brothers. "Sounds like the advice I gave you your first year, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it is. Basically the very same, if I recall. So if you *and* my brothers are giving me the same advice, don't you think it must be pretty good advice?" Ginny asked.

"But has it worked for you?" Hermione asked with a big sigh.

"Not with Harry, no. He still doesn't notice me at all. But I did go and have fun at the ball with Neville. As soon as I forgot about Harry, I began to really enjoy myself. I did have a great time," Ginny said. "Your other options are to bury yourself in your books and school work or cry into your pillow," Ginny said, looking into Hermione's tear-filled eyes and smiled. "I tried both actually. It works, but you miss out on all the fun you could be having." Ginny got up to go. "Get some sleep if you can. Tomorrow, have breakfast with Fred, George and me. If my twin brothers can't cheer you up nothing will!"

"Thanks, Ginny," Ginny heard as she left.

~~oOo~~

The next morning Ginny sought out Fred and George before they headed down to breakfast, and right away George asked, "So, how was the Ball last night? Did you have a good time, sis?"

"I had a very good time, actually," Ginny admitted, smiling.

"We saw you dancing with everyone in the house," Fred said. "You were pretty popular last night."

"I mostly danced with the guys who were at my table. Neville, of course, and his dorm mates, and two guys from Ravenclaw," Ginny pointed out.

"We saw you dancing with Viktor Krum!" Fred stated.

"Neville and I met up with Hermione and Viktor at one point, yes." Ginny didn't want to say it was because Hermione looked upset over Ron, who had just been a prat to her. "Hermione wanted to dance with Neville, so Viktor asked me," Ginny said casually. She had to smother a giggle. *Boy, my brothers were keeping an eye on me then* "Besides, he is kind of nice when you get to know him, actually."

"So, our sister is now friends with an international Quidditch star, huh?" George asked. "Imagine that, Fred the possibilities!"

"I don't know about friends, but I have spoken to him a few times," Ginny stated. "Mostly, when he wanted to talk to Hermione. He was just being nice to me at the Ball when Hermione said she wanted to dance with Neville."

"So, you had a good time then?" George asked again.

"You're glad we set you up with Neville?" Fred asked, grinning at her, just as Hermione joined them.

"Yes, you were right. I had a good time going with Neville. Should I say thanks now, or do you want it mailed by owl?" Ginny teased her brothers.

"Embossed parchment by owl, would be fine..." Fred answered as George said, "Announcing your gratitude now, would be fine," at the same time. Ginny laughed at her brothers, shaking her head. Hermione laughed and Fred put his arm across her shoulders. "So Hermione, about Viktor... You're an item now or what?"

"*WE* just went to the Ball together, that's all," she exclaimed, a little too firmly. Both Fred and George smirked at her.

"He always seems so dower," George stated.

"Not at all!" Hermione exclaimed. "Viktor isn't actually very extroverted or gregarious; he's reticent, circumspect around people he doesn't know."

"C'mon, Hermione, use words we all know," Fred teased her. "He was very attentive to you last night. You're telling me you didn't even..."

"No! He was a perfect gentleman last night," Hermione snapped, playfully slapping Fred on the arm. "True, Viktor isn't very loquacious or mawkish, but he is very respectful and yes, attentive. He's a nice guy."

"But you'd have preferred going with 'ickle Ronniekins," Fred teased as he and George followed Ginny through the portrait hole. "I heard he was a right 'ole prat to you last night."

"He..." Hermione straightened up as she entered in the corridor and turned to watch Fred emerge. "He..."

"Yes, he was. The whole house heard you two last night," Fred interrupted her.

"Thought that you were going to give him a good hex or something," George added.

"Kind of disappointed that you didn't," Fred stated, grinning.

"Took care of it for you," George stated proudly.

Hermione stared at him, gobsmacked. "What did you do?"

Fred smiled mischievously. "Swelling Solution in his shampoo, Babbling draught in a butterbeer we gave him last night..."

"Black beetle exoskeletons in his bed, cockroaches in his slippers, nettle leaves in his pajamas... We didn't do all that much to him," George said.

"Yet," Fred added. Hermione looked from Fred to George with her mouth open in shock. "Dean and Neville did kind of suggest that we do something."

"Well, they actually said that he should be taught some manners," George interjected, grinning.

Fred's brow wrinkled as he looked at George. "I believe Neville said that he shouldn't have said those things to her and pissed her off and ruined your night," he said turning back to Hermione. "Well, something like that. Anyway we agreed."

George cocked his head and grinned wickedly. "It was the best we could do on such short notice."

"You didn't!" Hermione gasped. Ginny was grinning as she listened to Fred and George describe their pranks, but also with a twinge of pride because Neville thought they should stand up for Hermione

"Oh, yes, we did," Fred said, puffing out his chest, "and proud of it!"

"No need to thank us," George said, with a mock sweep of his arm and a slight bow, "proud to be of service. Of course, knowing my brother, I doubt he got the message properly."

"May have to do some more 'teaching' today," Fred added, "to properly defend your honor."

Ginny snickered softly as Hermione stared at Fred and George, and then shook her head with a big smile. "I think you've already done enough to defend my honor."

"Are you sure?" Fred asked. "We still have a few pouches of old urtica leaves, bubotuber powder, and... I think I still have some wild sumac and possibly poison ivy..."

"Not to mention some Shrinking Solution and Aging Potion left. We could see how well Ronniekins' beard would grow?" George asked, looking at her with a smirk. Hermione's eyes widened alarmingly. Ginny stifled a laugh. "No?" he asked.

"I really do think you've done enough," Hermione stated. "Besides, I'd hate for you to get in trouble with Professor McGonagall on my account. But thanks anyway."

All the way down to the Great Hall, Fred and George teased Hermione with several more suggestions, each one turned down politely or laughed off entirely by Hermione. By the time they sat down for breakfast, Fred and George had Hermione and Ginny laughing hysterically with their usual charm and antics.

~~oOo~~

The next day after lunch, Ginny was leaving the Great Hall, heading to the library before her next class, when Michael Corner caught up to her. "Hey, Ginny, how's it going?" he asked. "I, um... So, where are you headed?"

"The library to finish my essay before class," Ginny replied.

"Me too the library." He shuffled his feet and then looked down the corridor. "I could go with you," he said in an obvious attempt to have an excuse to talk with her.

"Sure, if you like," Ginny said as she started walking again.

He was silent for a few steps before asking, "I can carry your books, if you like?"

"I only have the two with me. I think I can manage." Ginny had to laugh, unsure of what he wanted.

"Hey, the Ball was something, wasn't it?" he asked, keeping pace with her down the corridor. "You and Neville have a good time?"

"We did, thank you," Ginny replied. "Did you?"

"Yeah... How'd you like the Weird Sisters? They're cool, aren't they?" Michael looked at her, then quickly looked down at his hands.

"Yes, I like them," Ginny answered, smiling at his attempt at a casual conversation.

"And the dinner it was different," he said, finally stuffing his hands into his pockets.

"Yes, it was very fancy," Ginny replied, wondering why he mentioned it.

Michael began to ask her about each detail of the dance he could think of. Ginny politely answered each question, until they got to the library door. "Right then, I guess I'll see you around then," Michael finally said as he opened the door for her.

Ginny had to laugh. "Yeah. Sure. I'll see you around."

"Bye!" he called out from the library doorway, and Madam Pince immediately shushed him. He stood there a moment longer watching Ginny before he let the door close. *Well, no doubt about it, I will be seeing plenty more of Michael Corner* Ginny thought assuredly. She walked over to the Charms section to find a book for her essay.

"Hey, Ginny," Dean Thomas said as he walked up to stand by her in the aisle. "What are ya doing?"

"My Charms essay. I need another book on Severing and Cutting Charms," she said, scanning the books before her.

Dean shifted his feet. "I could teach you how to do the Severing Charm if you like," he said hopefully.

Ginny suppressed a smile. "Hermione showed me one a few weeks ago." She pulled down two books and scanned the table of contents, discarding one and setting the second aside. "Is there more than one?"

Dean smiled. "There are three we learn in school, and Fred showed me a really strong one nearly severed a tree trunk."

Ginny turned, her finger hooked on another book she had been about to pull down, stunned. "He cut a tree in half?"

"No, but he severed a thick branch off," he said. He reached for a book over her head. "Here, this one is pretty good and..." He moved down the aisle a bit and pulled down two more. "I think these will help... and..." He pointed his wand at the top shelf, bringing down a very old tome. "I used this book I think... Yeah, this one has some old references in it."

Ginny stifled a laugh. "I only needed three examples of Severing and Cutting Charms, in order to describe and make comparisons of their effects. You'll have me writing an essay like Hermione does, if I use *all* these books." She stacked the first three books to carry them to the tables.

"I got them," Dean said as he quickly grabbed the other two, stacking them on the four books he was holding. "Where do you want to sit?"

"I was thinking I'd join Luna," Ginny said, pointing at the table across the library. Luna was sitting by herself, reading a book intently with her wand tucked behind her ear. "You could join us," she said as she led the way to Luna's table.

"Looney Love..." he started to say and stopped when he saw Ginny's smile fade. "I'll just carry these for you," Dean said nervously. "If you had plans with your friend... I don't want to impose on you your girl talk or anything, you know."

"She's really a nice girl, and smart. I'm sure it will be okay." Luna looked up as they approached. "Hi, Luna. May we?" Ginny asked, indicating the empty chairs.

"Sure," Luna replied. "Careful of that book," she said, pointing at the tome on bottom of Dean's pile. "It may have been infested with nargles. Jamie had it just before Christmas and Harold dropped some mistletoe on it."

"Oh, what nargles? Ah, yeah, sure," Dean stuttered as Ginny sat down. She received many inquisitive looks from the other girls in her class at the other tables. "I, ah, Ginny I, um... it's good to see you." He set the books he'd carried for her down on the table.

"It's good to see you too," Ginny said, trying to suppress a giggle.

"So, I'll see you around then," he said as he turned to go.

"Yeah, sure," she answered, watching him go.

"I hope he wasn't infested by the nargles," Luna said, watching Dean walk over to join Neville and Sean at their table. "How are you?"

"I'm fine," Ginny replied. "Sorry about him. I think he was simply struck by the be-an-idiot hex or something. Hey, have you started your essay for Charms?"

Luna merely shrugged. "No, not yet," she said, then turned her gaze back to Ginny. "I think he likes you. He just didn't want to sit with me." Ginny looked at Luna, surprised. "Did you have a good time at the Ball? I saw you dancing with Viktor Krum."

"Yes, I did," Ginny answered with a smile as she pulled her essay from her bag. "I had a very good time, Luna, thanks. I'm sorry I didn't see you at the Ball. Did you have a good time?"

"Yes. It was very pretty." She looked up, smiling dreamily. "I danced with Professor Dumbledore and Professor Flitwick. Professor Flitwick assured me that he checked the mistletoe for nargles before hanging it in the Great Hall. But I thought I saw some ice-pixies on the decorations and in the grotto, though."

"I'm sorry I didn't notice them," Ginny said, smiling. "What do they do?"

"They make the ice sparkle," Luna stated. "And make the boys act weird."

Ginny looked over her shoulder at the table where Dean, Sean and Neville all sat, chucking balls of parchment at each other. "The Great Hall must have been full of them, then," she said, turning around, amused.

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Author's Notes:

I owe a big debt of gratitude to Phoenix and Notsosaintly for all their hard work and time in cleaning this story up and making it presentable. Thank you both. I appreciate it more than either of you can know.