

Bedknobs and Broomsticks

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Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 7

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Harry Potter had certainly lived an interesting life thus far, but he had not found his summer holiday to be one of his more thrilling experiences. In truth, time seemed to have stood still for the majority of the summer holidays thus far. The most interesting thing that had occurred was when his cousin had accidentally set fire to the small semi-detached garage while filling the lawnmower with petrol. Harry very much suspected that Dudley had done so on purpose in an attempt to get out of having to mow the small garden. Surprisingly, Dudley did not get his way and was required to finish the task after the flames had been quenched. It was a pretty sad state of affairs when the best moment of Harry's summer involved choking on acrid smoke as he laughed. The holidays here were finally waning though, and Harry sat in his small bedroom at number four, Privet Drive, scribbling on a piece of parchment. Perhaps it had been through Hermione's influence in getting him to think more before he acted, but he paused to consider his previous words before he continued on.

Downstairs, the sounds from the house could be heard. His uncle was going on about some political situation and, although Harry was barely paying attention, he overheard as his Uncle Vernon confused facts over and over again until they lost all meaning. His Aunt Petunia could be heard agreeing with her husband no matter how ludicrous his statements were. The lack of Dudley's whining made it seem that he was not present, and all Harry could hope was that whatever resident of the neighbourhood Dudley was targeting today would emerge relatively unscathed. This was how his summers usually were: stuck inside the stuffy house with his Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon while his cousin Dudley ran about doing whatever he liked nearly all of the time. Though the past years had been tough on Harry, it seemed that his relatives were being less cruel this year, or perhaps they had at least realised that there was an undeniable wisdom in treating him fairly well. Dudley seemed to struggle the most with this change. Used to being the darling of the household, he had been unable to comprehend why it was that his orphaned, freakish cousin was allowed to skip chores that had once been his responsibility. But of course, that may have been due to the threats that had been stated quite firmly by Harry's friends. In fact, there was no question about it. The Dursleys had never been kind to him before, and it was obvious that their only motivation now was fear. They were still as strict as ever with him, but refrained from making their usual comments towards him and his kind.

It was getting close to the middle of the summer, and Harry was waiting anxiously for someone to arrive to retrieve him from Privet Drive. It was the only time during the summer that he looked forward to. Dumbledore had written to him to let him know that someone would be arriving that evening to take him for the rest of the summer. He secretly hoped that it would be the Weasleys, so he could return to The Burrow and play a game or two of pick-up Quidditch with the Weasley boys. Though they did hang around number twelve, Grimmauld Place when Harry went to the Order's Headquarters, there just wasn't any suitable place to play Quidditch there, and they were still having trouble getting the portrait of Mrs. Black off the wall. Harry didn't particularly like going there for those reasons, and because the place always reminded him of his late godfather, Sirius Black.

Harry looked up from the letter he was writing to Ron, his best friend, and stared out at the blackened sky. The sky seemed devoid of all stars with even the moon seeming

to have disappeared under the veil of black. His thin t-shirt was not proving to be adequately warm as the room had an unseasonable chill in it. It had after all been a summer of a nearly constant downpour. The result being that Harry had to rub his arms to try and rid them of gooseflesh. Though that kept him warm enough for a few minutes, he decided that it would be best to put on a long-sleeved shirt to shield his skin from the cold. He walked slowly towards his wardrobe and pulled the door open. Inside rested the items he most cared about; the things that reminded him of the only real home he had ever known, Hogwarts. Thinking of Hogwarts immediately brought thoughts of his two best friends in the world, Ron and Hermione. He didn't have a single happy memory that didn't include them in some way.

Harry turned away from the wardrobe as he pulled on the shirt he had selected and started to button it up as he walked back towards his small desk. Harry sighed softly before his eyes drifted to a photograph of his parents, Lily and James Potter. They looked so happy together, like they didn't have a care in the world. Picking up the picture frame, he stared longingly at the photograph. He wished that he could have had the chance to be with them, as they were, and have memories of it all. He always hated never knowing his parents. He would grasp at any piece of information people would give him about them. They were Head Boy and Girl at Hogwarts, they loved each other dearly, they had been happy together, and most of all, they had loved their son, Harry, very much.

Harry was suddenly brought out of his reverie by a loud bang and shouting coming from downstairs. Normally, Harry wouldn't have even bothered to go look, but he was sure that he heard a pop: the sound of someone Apparating. He set the picture frame down on the empty bedside table and set out to investigate, trying to make his way through the messy room. He took the stairs two by two with his wand in his hand, anxious to find out who it was that had arrived. The first glimpse he caught was of Dudley trying to hide behind his mother, which was quite the challenge, seeing as Dudley was almost four times the size of Petunia. It was apparent that he still had not got over the incident with Hagrid on Harry's eleventh birthday. Next, he saw a white faced Petunia, standing behind a very purple Vernon, who was sputtering incoherently at the arrival of a stranger in his home. When Harry turned the corner into the living room, he was met with the sight of a ragged-looking Remus Lupin trying to apologize to the Dursleys for his sudden appearance. Harry noticed as he watched the small group that Remus looked much thinner and more tired since the last time Harry had seen him.

"I apologize if I frightened any of you... Ah, Harry. There you are." Remus smiled softly when he spotted Harry standing just to the side of his relatives. "Professor Dumbledore's sent me to pick you up so hurry and get your things packed up. Oh, and I'm supposed to tell you that sherbet lemons are excellent."

Harry didn't need to be told twice. He smiled and immediately turned around to run back up the stairs. Once in his room, he pulled his trunk out of the closet and started throwing his things into it. Clothes, books, robes, his invisibility cloak, Firebolt, quills, parchment, potion supplies, and everything else he could carry. He grabbed the photograph from the bedside table and set it on top of everything. He made sure the trunk was closed and grabbed Hedwig's cage. She shrieked loudly when Harry almost knocked her cage into the doorframe. He apologised before he bounded down the stairs with his things, his large trunk thudding down each stair behind him. He knew he should have already been packed and ready to leave, but he didn't want to get his hopes up in the event that plans had to change at the last minute.

The Dursleys stood in silence as Remus smiled again at Harry before he waved his wand at Harry's belongings. The spot where his trunk and Hedwig in her cage had once stood was now empty. "I've sent them along ahead of us. We'll be travelling by Side-Along Apparation. I don't have the Advance Guard with me, so flying is not an option this time." Remus then pulled out his pocket watch to check the time. He seemed to be awaiting something but Harry couldn't figure out just what it could possibly be. "So, Harry, how has your summer been?"

"All right, I suppose. Not much to talk about really." Harry felt a bit awkward talking about his summer in front of the Dursleys. He never really enjoyed their company, and he didn't really want them to know he had been doing magical homework under their roof.

"Ah, yes, I understand. Did you get all of your coursework done?" Harry suppressed a laugh at Remus' question. Trust a former teacher to ask about assignments.

"Nearly all of it." Harry glanced back at the Dursleys and saw Petunia's face twitch slightly. It couldn't make her feel comfortable to know he'd been working on magical homework. "That Euphoria Charm of Professor Flitwick's is difficult though. I think I've got the hang of the wand motion now."

"Ah, yes." Remus remembered with a smile. "The motion is difficult to master."

"Well that and the pronunciation," Harry answered, thinking of how ill tempered Hedwig had been after his first failed attempt. It wasn't Harry's fault though. She was the only thing he had to practice upon.

"Indeed." Remus grimaced slightly. "Had a bit of trouble with it myself, made James sick as a dog the first time I tried it."

"Really?" Harry tried not to laugh.

Remus nodded as he recalled the misfired charm. It had been the very devil to clean up too. Remus checked his watch again as he continued on with conversation. "You've certainly grown since I saw you last." Harry shifted uncomfortably under Remus' penetrating gaze. "Have you started shaving?"

Harry was saved from having to answer when Remus' pocket watch chimed once. "Time to go. Take hold of my arm and hold on tightly." Remus held out his arm for Harry. He took Remus' arm without hesitation, knowing full well that the other inhabitants of Privet Drive would be unnerved by their sudden disappearance. However, Harry was used to seeing witches and wizards popping about randomly after staying with the Weasleys the summer after Percy had received his Apparation license. As Remus raised his wand, he and Harry turned on the spot, and suddenly, Harry felt as if there was something pressing at him from all directions, and he was unable to see a thing. It was a very unpleasant feeling, and he found that he could not breathe. The last thing he heard was the high pitched scream of his Aunt Petunia.

Almost as quickly as it had started, the feeling was gone, and Harry could feel the cool wind penetrating through the long-sleeved shirt he was wearing. The chill of the night seemed to sweep through him as he looked around at his surroundings. It appeared as though they were standing in the middle of a vast, empty field. Confusion and concern was etched into Harry's face as he glanced around.

"Harry, you need to look a little closer to see it." Remus guided Harry down a rock path before he stopped suddenly and smiled. "Right there... Wandsworth Manor..."

As the name of the place entered into his ear, a large and beautiful house appeared only metres away. The building was truly a sight to behold and nearly took Harry's breath away. From what Harry could tell, it was a redbrick structure with corners and window frames in a golden brick. Off to the right-hand side was a conservatory that was dark at that time of night. The roof was a slate grey colour with trimmings and overhangs in white, and he could make out three separate chimneys. Remus guided Harry to the front porch and opened the front door to let him in.

Harry noticed that the front hall was sparsely decorated with a picture or two here and there, but nothing specific, and one small table off to the side for setting things down when someone came in the door. The walls and ceiling were white and there was a large chandelier hanging above them. A grand staircase led up to the second floor with a beige coloured carpet. The place looked as though it was a museum rather than a house. The homes he had been used to were nothing like the one he was standing in that very moment. The Dursleys' place was small and had photographs of Dudley all over the place, the Weasleys' house was rather small and cosy with the aroma of Mrs. Weasley's cooking wafting from the kitchen, and Grimmauld Place was large, dark, and very dirty. Remus moved towards the staircase, beckoning Harry to follow him. As they walked along the hallways, Harry noticed they didn't look much different from the front hall: plain, boring, and sterile.

"Ah, here we are," Remus' voice suddenly sounded as he came to a halt in front of a door halfway along the hallway. Harry nearly ran straight into Remus when he had stopped. "This is your room, Harry." The door was pushed open to reveal another disappointingly plain room, but at least this one had colour. Instead of the white walls and beige carpet, it had light brown walls with a dark green carpet. The bed had sheets that matched the walls in colour and were plain and striped. It looked almost similar to the room he had used during his stay at the Leaky Cauldron just before his third year. Glancing to the end of the bed, Harry spotted his trunk, upon which Hedwig's cage was perched. She gave a welcoming hoot before she took off out of the window on her nightly hunt, obviously waiting to make sure Harry had arrived all right.

"Ron and Hermione have rooms just down the hall, and Mr. and Mrs. Weasley are in the hallway perpendicular to this one, as are Tonks and myself. I'm sure Ron will be up to get you shortly so I shall leave you to unpack some of your things. We will be going to Diagon Alley to get your school supplies as soon as the letters arrive." Remus smiled before he left the room. Harry sighed softly before he sat himself down beside his trunk. This wasn't exactly what he had been hoping for this summer. He had desperately wanted to go to the Weasleys' so that they could play a couple games of Quidditch, and even de-gnome the garden.

It wasn't long before Harry heard the running footsteps of someone coming up the stairs, followed by a pair of lighter footsteps, which Harry assumed to be Hermione. The

bedroom door flew open to reveal Ron's bright, smiling face. "Harry!"

Hermione joined them quickly afterwards, scolding Ron a bit for being so loud. "Your sister is across the hallway, and you know she isn't feeling all that well."

"Rubbish. She's just been hiding in there, writing letters to Dean all summer. It's rather sick-making." Ron scrunched up his nose, showing obvious dislike that his sister was dating one of his mates from school.

Hermione sniffed a bit. "Well, actually, Ronald, Ginny told me that she and Dean are going through a rough patch at the moment. Something about his behaviour regarding her getting into danger all of the time with the three of us... Now, enough about your sister's love life... How has your summer been, Harry?"

"Err... It's been all right, I guess." Harry had been caught a bit off guard at the mention that Ginny's room was right across the hallway. It wasn't that it really mattered. He just hadn't thought, for some reason or another, that Ginny would be there. It wasn't as if she had anywhere else to go while her family was here, but to be right across the hall... It seemed odd to him somehow.

"So, mate, feeling up for a game of Quidditch tomorrow? There's a Quidditch pitch out back, and this place is far enough away from Muggles for us to play without being caught." As soon as Ron mentioned the word Quidditch, Harry immediately felt better about staying at a place he had never been before. For the rest of the night, Harry, Ron, and Hermione stayed up and talked about Harry's favourite subject: Quidditch. Mostly it was Ron and Harry talking while Hermione flipped through one of Harry's old textbooks, interjecting occasionally with a question or a comment. It was close to eleven when Hermione left the two boys and headed off to bed.

Early the next morning, there was a loud knock on Harry's bedroom door. He and Ron had fallen asleep while talking. Harry pulled himself off the bed and wandered over to the door. He was still drowsy from sleep with his glasses slightly askew as he pulled the door open. Standing there in a pair of red shorts and a white t-shirt was Ron's youngest and only sister, Ginny. She smiled brightly at him.

"Hello, Harry. Glad to see you made it here all right last night. Up for a game of Quidditch? Fred and George are already at the pitch batting around a Bludger. Charlie just arrived this morning, and I know he'd love to play as Seeker against you. Ron wasn't in his room so I figured he'd be in here. We thought that a good game of Quidditch would work up an appetite for breakfast. You know how much Mum always cooks." It was then that Harry noticed she had a broom in her hand.

He smiled a bit before he nodded. It would be best to get out and play at least one good round of Quidditch. He was sure that it would take his mind off things he had been dwelling on all summer. Harry glanced over at Ron once Ginny had left, then walked over to his trunk. He rummaged through the quickly and poorly packed items held within it before he found his broom and pulled it out. Once he had woken Ron up and changed, Harry went bounding down the stairs, heading for the back of the large manor. It felt good to look forward to something positive for once that summer. He really hadn't been looking forward to school, though it was the only thing that would get him away from the Dursleys. He was sure that everyone had heard of his adventures the previous year, and he didn't want to face the questions that might come his way once people learned of the events that happened. Harry immediately shook off the negative thoughts when Ginny came into view. She had waited for him, knowing how long it took Ron to get up and out of the door in the mornings. They walked silently together until the pitch came into view.

"Oy! Harry! Good to see you," Fred shouted as he hit the Bludger with a solid blow.

"Have a good summer?" George asked as he dived to avoid the Bludger that headed towards him.

Harry didn't get the chance to answer as he heard Ron and Hermione jogging towards them, followed by Bill and Charlie. Ron, Hermione, Bill and Charlie all had broomsticks in their hands. Hermione was the only one who looked a bit unsure about playing anything on a broom. Flying was one of the very few things she never seemed to excel at.

"Glad to see you're up for a game, Harry. I hear you're quite the Seeker for Gryffindor. I was once a good Seeker myself." Charlie beamed proudly. He had been the best Seeker that Gryffindor had ever had, until Harry arrived that is.

Once everyone had arrived, they split off into teams. Fred, Bill, Harry, and Ron played on one team; Charlie, Hermione, Ginny, and George played on the other. Since they were short of players, Ron and Ginny both acted as Chasers and Keepers for their teams. Though Ron tried his best, Ginny was just much better as a Chaser and easily kept her team in the lead, even with Hermione's horrible attempts at playing the game. If Harry's team were to win, he knew he'd have to catch the Snitch.

Suddenly, he spotted it and started into a steep dive. The wind rushed past Harry's ears as he sped towards the ground, realising he'd spotted the Snitch before Charlie. This was where he felt most at home: soaring and diving through the air on his Firebolt. Harry reached forward and felt his hand grasp around the tiny metal ball before he pulled up on his broom. The other players clapped from their brooms as they landed. Charlie was especially impressed with Harry's skills. Quidditch was a great release, and Harry was thankful for the distraction.

"Well done. I see exactly why McGonagall put you on the team in your first year," Charlie commended him. "I think I'm getting a bit too old to do those dives anymore."

"No, it's probably just because you spend all your time with dragons rather than on a broomstick, Charlie." Ginny grinned softly as she looked up at her brother. Charlie ruffled Ginny's hair as she made a face at him, showing that she was annoyed with the sign of brotherly affection.

"So, Gin Gin, how are things? Mum told me you've been ill, but Ronniekins seems to think you're up to something." Charlie wrapped one of his arms around Ginny's shoulder and pulled her to him as she started to turn a bit pink with embarrassment.

"Well, Ron also seems to think that I'm still eleven years old, and even if I was up to something, you know I wouldn't tell." Ginny laughed as Charlie let her go, trying to act offended that his own sister wouldn't trust him with information.

Harry glanced around while Charlie continued to pretend to be hurt and noticed that Hermione and Ron had disappeared somewhere. "Umm... where are Ron and Hermione?"

"Oh. Darned if I know. Those two have been sneaking off together since we all arrived here... and Ron wonders why I stick to myself. I really don't want to end up walking in on them snogging, or something equally as gross." Ginny made a disgusted face at the thought of her brother snogging... well, anyone. Charlie made his way over to the eldest Weasley brother, Bill, as Ginny spoke with Harry.

"Snogging? Ron and Hermione?" The thought had never crossed Harry's mind. Could it be possible that his two best friends had become an item while he had been stuck at Privet Drive? He wasn't sure why, but he found the idea slightly unsettling. He had never really thought of Hermione in that way and had been pretty sure Ron hadn't either. She was their friend. It left an odd feeling in the pit of his stomach to think of them being even slightly more than friends. He couldn't quite put his finger on what it was he was feeling, but he wondered for a moment if it was jealousy.

"I wouldn't be too surprised if they were. Ron was going on about her all summer before she arrived. Only after I threatened to mention his constant blather to Hermione herself did he shut up. Why don't we head in? I'm sure Mum's already got breakfast on the table. It's possible Ron and Hermione just went on ahead of us." Ginny smiled slightly.

Harry nodded in response and led the way back towards the manor. He still couldn't get the unsettling feeling out of the pit of his stomach. He couldn't really understand why he felt the way he did, and he tried to think of every option. The only conclusion he could come up with was that he was jealous, but of what, he wasn't sure. He wondered to himself if he was jealous that Ron and Hermione had become a couple while he was away, or whether it was because it was Ron who was with Hermione rather than himself.

The moment Harry stepped into the kitchen of Wandsworth Manor, he could smell the aroma of a freshly cooked breakfast of crumpets, bacon, eggs, toast, hash browns, and sausages. The scent brought a welcome smile to his lips. Mrs. Weasley always outdid herself, preparing breakfast for her large family. Every morning, without fail, Mrs. Weasley would be in the kitchen, cooking up a feast to feed her seven children, her husband, any guests, and herself. It was one of the many things Harry always looked forward to when he stayed with the Weasleys. Having grown up in a not so loving household, Harry had never had the chance to experience a pleasant family meal.

Harry barely noticed when Ginny brushed past him to get into the kitchen. He stood silently as he watched her set her broom by the door and wash up so she could help Mrs. Weasley with breakfast. Mrs. Weasley placed dish after dish on the large dining table, each overflowing with delectable home cooking. Ginny was busy adding the cutlery to the plates already set on the table. Harry came to the assumption that Ginny often helped her mother in the kitchen, as they never managed to bump into each other even once while setting the table.

"Ginny, dear, go call your brothers for breakfast." Molly chimed as Arthur walked slowly into the kitchen, yawning in response to the early hour. When Ginny had called him for Quidditch, he hadn't even looked at a clock, but now realized that it must have been quite early as he noticed the clock now read nine o'clock in the morning. Ginny disappeared out of the kitchen door just as Ron and Hermione walked in through the back. Harry glanced at them for a moment before he sat down at the table in an empty seat. Hermione and Ron quickly moved and sat across from him at the table. They didn't seem to be acting strangely, but Harry knew that didn't mean they weren't up to something.

Harry was interrupted from his thoughts as Charlie and Ginny arrived in the kitchen, followed by Bill, Fred and George. When Remus finally joined the table, they were allowed to start their meal. "So sorry for being late, Molly. Tonks wanted me to tell you that she wouldn't be down for breakfast. Dumbledore needed her early, and she didn't have time to stay." Remus spoke as he passed the crumpets to Arthur.

"Err... what did he need Tonks for?" Harry stared at Remus, awaiting an answer, but Remus simply smiled at him.

"Just a little something that the Ministry is planning that Dumbledore is a part of. Don't worry about it. You'll find out soon enough." Harry's eyes fell on Charlie as he spoke with a knowing grin. It was slightly irritating and reminded him a bit of his fourth year when the Triwizard Tournament had happened. The tournament had been rather secretive too.

From that moment on, breakfast returned to its normal course of events with the twins teasing Ron about something ridiculous and Molly fussing over how thin Harry was while trying to serve him up a third helping of eggs. This was what Harry had missed most in the world while he was staying at Privet Drive. He never got to experience a loving family environment like he did with the Weasleys, and he was glad to be a part of it, even if it was only unofficially. Whenever he was around the Weasleys, he always felt like he was at home. Harry loved watching the Weasleys interact with each other. It was not hard to tell how much they cared for each other, even when they were teasing or yelling.

As Harry looked over each of the Weasleys, his eyes fell on Hermione and Ginny. They had their heads together and were whispering in hushed, quick words. His thoughts immediately returned to their earlier reflections. He was now sure that something was going on. He hadn't even known Hermione and Ginny to be close before. He watched silently with a calculating gaze as the two girls continued to whisper to each other. Suddenly, Hermione looked up at Harry and smiled slightly before she turned back to Ginny. Their conversation ended only seconds later. He wasn't sure if he was being paranoid, or if they really were up to something.

Breakfast finished up quickly, owing to the fact that many of the Weasley men had jobs to attend to and Mrs. Weasley wanted to get a head start on the daily chores. While Mrs. Weasley collected the breakfast dishes from the table with the help of Ron and Ginny, Hermione took Harry by the arm and led him outside to the back porch. They sat down on the lounge chairs while they waited for Ron and Ginny to finish up. Harry glanced over at Hermione as he contemplated asking her what was going on. It didn't take him long to decide what to do.

"Hermione, what is going on around here? You and Ron are always disappearing together, and then at breakfast, you and Ginny were whispering to each other." Hermione looked at Harry, surprised. He tried to decipher whether she was surprised that he asked, or surprised at the question itself.

"Well, Harry, Ron and I are simply getting along for once and spending time together... You only just got here last night so it's not like we've been disappearing together all the time. We went to this spot in the woods we found after Quidditch and that was it. We were planning to take you there later today. And as for whispering with Ginny, we've become friends, and well... that's what girls do." Hermione didn't sound very convincing, and Harry wasn't entirely sure he believed her. "I didn't realize it all seemed odd to you. I suppose being cooped up in here while you've been with your family... Well, with Ginny being the only girl here... we just sort of bonded, and Ron's been the only other person to hang around with... You know that I don't really get on well with the twins and their constant need to bend and break rules... Everyone else is really a bit too old..."

Harry smiled gently and nodded. He wasn't sure if it explained everything, but he wasn't sure he really wanted to know why Ron and Hermione had snuck off together that morning. There were just some things that were better left unknown. He glanced over at Hermione for a moment and watched her as she gazed out at the field behind the manor. He had to admit to himself that she really was rather pretty. He wondered silently why he had never noticed before.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 7

In order to help take the edge off the current state of things, the Ministry of Magic has prepared a special surprise for the students at Hogwarts. However, they soon come to realize that the past may repeat itself, especially now that Voldemort is gaining power and not everything is as it seems.

It had been a week since Harry had arrived at Wandsworth Manor. He had seen Order members come and go and watched as Hermione, Ron, and Ginny would disappear at times in a pair, leaving one behind to keep Harry company. If he was honest, it was starting to grate on his nerves, but instead he pretended not to notice. It was more than obvious to him now that they were up to something that they didn't want Harry included in. He started a gradual withdrawal from his friends that lasted until the day of his birthday. He and Ron were sitting in the living room, playing a game of wizard chess when Hermione and Ginny walked into the room with identical smiles on their faces. It was that very moment that confirmed it for Harry they had been up to something! Hermione took the seat next to Harry and faced him as she spoke.

"I know we haven't been around too much lately, and I know you would have had to have noticed by now that something is going on..." Hermione stopped speaking as she, Ron, and Ginny stood up. She grabbed Harry's hands and tugged him up out of the chair, leading him towards the kitchen. "We just wanted you to know that, well... we weren't trying to exclude you from anything... Not really... It's just that " As Hermione spoke, she pushed the kitchen door open.

"SURPRISE!" The shout came as soon as Harry caught a glimpse of the room. It was decorated with streamers, balloons and a large banner that sparkled, spelling out the words 'Happy Birthday Harry'. Harry glanced around at everyone standing in the kitchen. Among those who were staying at the manor, he saw many faces he recognised including Mad-Eye Moody, Neville Longbottom, Luna Lovegood, and Professor McGonagall.

"Surprise, Harry," Hermione said as she smiled at him coyly. "We've been planning your birthday party. We figured you probably had never really had one before, and we wanted to arrange a really good one for you. We even got special permission to invite the Gryffindors from our year, and Luna."

"It was Ginny's idea." Harry glanced back at Ron's words and smiled at Ginny as Luna Lovegood was pulling her away. Hermione and Ron led Harry into the room as a chorus of 'Happy Birthday' sprung up around him, being led by Mrs. Weasley. Harry was speechless and slightly dumbfounded. He certainly hadn't been expecting this. He

was so touched that his friends would do something like this for him. There was a small pile of presents stacked on a dresser off to the side of the room and a large birthday cake was situated in the centre of the kitchen table. Mrs. Weasley had cooked many delicious dishes, which had been placed on the table around the delicious-looking cake.

"Excuse me, Harry, may I have a word with you?" Harry looked up to see Dumbledore standing beside him. He nodded slowly and followed the Headmaster into the sitting room. They sat down on two of the couches before Dumbledore spoke again.

"Marvellous place, isn't it? Emmeline Vance has been gracious enough to lend us her home until we have sorted out Grimmauld Place. As you may know, Harry, Sirius has left his fortune and Grimmauld Place to you. We did not ask you this past year if we could use it for the Order because I knew how deeply Sirius's death had affected you. I did not want to put you into a position to make such a decision until I was sure that you were ready. Since that time, so much has happened that I haven't yet had the opportunity to speak with you about it."

"Professor, I... You can keep using it as Headquarters," said Harry. "It's what Sirius would have wanted. I don't... I don't care." Harry's last statement didn't sound very convincing to anyone. Professor Dumbledore just smiled at him and patted his knee.

"Well, now that that matter is out of the way, I think it is time to return to your splendid party."

Harry and Dumbledore walked back towards the kitchen to re-join the guests accumulated there. Mrs. Weasley immediately carted Harry off towards the kitchen table, where the candles on the birthday cake seemed to light of their own accord as she sat him down at the table.

"Make a wish, Harry." Hermione smiled at him as he half stood a bit in order to reach all the candles. He took a deep breath and blew out as many of them as he could after wishing for the one thing he wasn't sure he could ever have: a normal life.

Near the end of the party, Harry felt like he had talked to everyone in attendance, and it was more than likely that he had. His most interesting conversation, not surprisingly, had to have been with Luna. She was always full of interesting tales about imaginary creatures and events. She had described her latest trip with her father in search of something called a Chubbewump. It was good to know that some things just didn't change while he was away at his Aunt and Uncle's.

"Oh dear... It looks like Ginny and Dean are at it again..." Luna's misty voice interrupted Harry's thoughts, and he glanced over to where Ginny and Dean were standing. Sure enough, it looked as though they were in the middle of a row. In hopes of breaking it up, Harry stepped closer until he could hear the words coming from each of them. He paused once he heard his name, curious as to what they were arguing about.

"Honestly! Have you no consideration? This is Harry's birthday, and here you are, starting up again about all that nonsense. I am not incapable of taking care of myself, and you'd do well to remember that," Ginny argued as quietly as she could while still getting her point across.

"I know you can take care of yourself, but I'm not going to let you go off and do something dangerous again." Dean didn't look as though he was going to back off any time soon.

"Not going to let me!" It was at this point that Harry knew Dean was in trouble. He had seen that look in Ginny's eyes before, and if it weren't for the fact that they were not allowed to do magic outside of school, Dean may very well have ended up on the receiving end of Ginny's famous Bat-Bogie Hex. Though, in all honesty, Harry wasn't sure Ginny wouldn't do it anyway. "Dean, if you don't stop trying to control me, I will take measures into my own hands."

"And do what? Run off with Harry again? Try to get yourself killed?"

"Maybe I will." There was a dangerous flash in Ginny's eyes that was daring Dean to say something in return. It was obvious he was on the verge of crossing the line. And that line was getting thinner and finer every time Dean opened his mouth.

"Something you always like doing, isn't it? Run off with Harry."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that every time I turn around, you're running off with him somewhere."

"I am not. Don't exaggerate. He's my brother's best friend." Ginny let out a frustrated huff. "You know what, perhaps after you wish Harry a 'Happy Birthday', you'd better leave. I don't like these accusations you're throwing about. If there's anyone who should be throwing accusations around, it should be me. Don't think I haven't noticed the way Parvati's been hanging around you this whole time. There is nothing going on between Harry and myself. In case you haven't noticed, he's not interested in me in that way, so knock it off."

This time, Ginny didn't bother waiting for an answer before she stormed out of the room. Harry hadn't realised things were so bad between the couple. In fact, he wasn't really aware they had been dating until the end of his fifth year on the train ride home, though he was surprised they'd lasted as long as they had. He'd heard rumours circulating the Gryffindor common room all through the previous year of their on-off tumultuous relationship. He had even been witness to one of their rows just before the summer break.

Harry was just about to go after Ginny when Hermione came up and looped her arm with his, directing him towards Ron, Lavender, and Seamus. As he was pulled into their conversation, he slowly forgot about the seething Ginny sitting up in her room.

"We're really glad to see you, Harry. I mean, outside of school. We just don't get a chance to get together. It's always you, Ron and Hermione." Lavender batted her eyelashes at Ron as she continued. "We should get together more often if we can."

It was obvious to Harry that Lavender was talking to Ron, rather than everyone at that moment. Harry's sideways glance saw Hermione scowling slightly at Lavender. He felt Hermione's arm tighten slightly around his as Lavender continued her blatant flirting with an oblivious Ron.

"Harry, Parvati and I need to be going." Harry glanced back once he heard his name and saw Dean and Parvati standing off to the side. Parvati was smiling at Harry, while Dean still looked a bit put out as he wished him "Happy Birthday".

"Happy Birthday, Harry," Parvati exclaimed as she waved on her way out of the door; however, she looked as though she really didn't want to leave.

The party finally started winding down after all of Harry's friends had gone home, leaving a few mingling adults, including a couple who had engaged an unwilling Ron. Ginny had come back and was helping her mother clean up the kitchen, so Hermione and Harry decided to take a walk out into the garden. They continued their walk in virtual silence until they came to the edge of the woods, where they stopped. Hermione turned to Harry.

"It doesn't get any easier, does it? Every year, more bad things happen. I'm scared for you, Harry. I'm scared for all of us, but especially you. I have this horrible feeling that not all of us are going to make it through. I don't even want to think of who it will be. I don't want it to happen, of course, but the war is coming. I guess what I'm trying to say is, I care about you, Harry. You're one of my best friends and I love you." Hermione threw her arms around Harry's neck and hugged him tightly. As they pulled away, a rather pink-cheeked Hermione said rather quietly, "I don't want you to ever forget that," before placing a kiss on Harry's cheek.

"I won't. I promise." Harry wasn't sure what made him do it, but in the next moment, he had pressed his lips to Hermione's. He found that the kiss was rather nice, and vastly different from the one with Cho, though it did help that Hermione wasn't crying.

The kiss broke off only a moment later when the sound of a twig snapping brought them both back to reality. Harry glanced at Hermione's face and noticed that she was looking rather distressed, but she wasn't looking at him. Harry turned towards the direction of her gaze and immediately knew what was wrong. Ron was standing only yards away with a dark expression on his face before he turned around and headed back to the house. Unsure of what to do, Harry looked to Hermione for guidance. They

locked eyes for a moment, then Hermione went running after Ron, leaving Harry to stare after the both of them. He watched silently as they argued before Ron continued to storm off, leaving Hermione behind. Harry slowly walked to Hermione. He could see tears glistening in her eyes.

"He... he's angry with us. Of course, being Ron, he won't say why..." Hermione blinked away the tears before they fell.

"He'll get over it. You know he will."

"I know..." sighed Hermione as they walked back towards the house. "I just hate the three of us being torn apart by stupid little things or misunderstandings. We should be sticking together. A war is starting. We need each other."

"Hermione, I promise it will be fine. We just need to give Ron a couple of days." Harry hoped that he was right because if he was completely honest, he had no idea why Ron was so upset.

When they arrived back inside, Harry looked over at Ron, who was talking quietly to his sister. She glanced over Ron's shoulder at them with an unreadable expression on her face. Ron glanced back at them as well before whispering to Ginny again. With a nod, the two of them walked out of the kitchen and disappeared somewhere else in the house. Harry got the sudden feeling that it was going to be a long summer.

The weeks following the kiss seemed to drag on for a lifetime, and there wasn't a single moment that passed that didn't include either Ron and Hermione bickering, or complete silence between the young quartet. Ever since his birthday party, Ron had been acting oddly, and Harry had hardly seen Ginny or Ron at all. They always seemed to disappear together, and neither Harry nor Hermione could explain their odd behaviour. Hermione was almost certain that it was to do with the fact that she and Harry had become a couple, but Harry couldn't see why that would bother Ron in the least.

On the day Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had taken the four to Diagon Alley, Hermione had brought up the subject once again after Ginny and Ron had gone off with Mr. Weasley in tow.

"Hermione, I just don't understand why it would upset Ron if we were together. I would have thought he would be happy for us. It's not as if we would abandon him as a friend."

"Well, Harry, maybe that is what he thinks. He sort of became the third wheel without wanting to. We really didn't even ask him how he'd feel about it, not that we really had to... We didn't consider his feelings about this before we jumped right in," Hermione sighed softly as they walked towards Flourish and Blotts to purchase their schoolbooks.

"What about Ginny? She's not really, you know, part of our group. Why would she be angry with us about it?"

"Harry," Hermione interrupted. "It's sibling loyalty. I'm sure if we had any siblings, they would do the same for us."

Harry hadn't thought about it that way. He didn't have any siblings, and Dudley had always treated him more like the gum stuck to the bottom of his shoe rather than a brother. In fact, Harry had always been Dudley's favourite punching bag. Harry had no idea what it was like to have someone like a brother or sister, and he realized that as much as he could try, he would never truly understand the bond between Ron and Ginny. The Weasleys were the closest thing he had ever had to a real family, and Ron was almost like a brother. It was as close as he would ever get.

"Oy! Harry!" Harry turned at the sound of his name and saw Seamus and Dean waving and walking towards him.

"Sorry I couldn't stay long at your party," said Dean. "Ginny was in a right foul mood, and I didn't want to end up on the receiving end of one of her curses. I think she was already angry with me for... well, I'm not sure what, but when I left with Parvati, it looked as if she was ready to spit fire."

"I honestly don't know how you two are going to manage to stay together if you keep that up," Hermione interjected.

"Actually, we split up just a few minutes ago. I kept getting the feeling from her that she would rather be unattached. That, and we were fighting like cats and dogs near the end." Dean admitted, shrugging his shoulders.

"She's one gorgeous lass, if I do say so myself," Seamus remarked. "Been thinking about asking her to Hogsmeade when we get back to school. From the looks of it though, there's going to be lots of competition." Seamus nodded towards the front of Quality Quidditch Supplies, where Ginny was standing outside talking to a small handful of boys, one of whom Harry recognized as Zacharias Smith. He didn't really know Smith all that well and barely remembered him from Dumbledore's Army.

"I didn't realise she was so popular..."

"Blimey Harry, where have you been? Surely you've noticed. You practically spend the entire summer with her and her family every year." Seamus was looking at Harry with wide eyes.

Harry looked to Hermione for help, but it was apparent that he wasn't going to get any. "She's just Ron's little sister..." When it looked as if Dean and Seamus were about to argue with his statement, Harry cut them off before they said a word. "Hermione and I had better get going. We still have loads of supplies to get. We'll see you on the train."

Harry and Hermione turned away as Dean and Seamus headed towards Quality Quidditch Supplies, whilst they walked into Flourish and Blotts. Once they had purchased their textbooks, Mrs. Weasley ushered them back out into the street again to finish up their lists. A tense silence had developed between Harry and Hermione, and Harry had no idea where it had come from. As he was trying to figure out what could be wrong, Mrs. Weasley guided the pair into another store. It took a moment for Harry to figure out where he was when he looked around at the brightly coloured shop he had never seen.

"Harry!" The sound of two almost identical voices shouted over the rather large crowd that had accumulated in the small store. Harry looked over the heads of the other patrons to see Fred and George Weasley heading straight for him.

"Harry, so glad you could make it." Fred, or perhaps it was George, shook Harry's hand rather enthusiastically before he wrapped an arm around his shoulder and started to lead him towards the back of the store. "Since you are the very reason we are here today, besides George and my incredibly brilliant ideas of course, we figured that you should be the first to see some of our brand new products. They really are quite brilliant. Of course, you're free to have anything you fancy, since it was your winnings that helped us open our store."

Harry glanced back to discover that Hermione had somehow managed to find Ron in the dense crowd and was now bickering with him once again. Harry sighed as he was led away. He wasn't sure he'd be able to take any more of it. Ron and Hermione were his best friends, and he hated how they were fighting with no end in sight. As the twins showed him product after product, Harry's mind was going over everything that could possibly be done or said to make things go back to how they were before, without having to give up what he had with Hermione. It wasn't an easy task and Harry wasn't sure there was a solution.

"Oy! Ginny, get away from there. No sister of mine is going to buy that stuff." George (or was it Fred's voice) cut through Harry's thoughts.

"Knock it off, George. I was only looking. I don't need this stuff to get a date, unlike, perhaps, you." Ginny stuck out her tongue at her brothers before she flounced away with a couple of Gryffindor girls in her year.

"Uhh... what just happened?" Harry looked confused by the scene.

"Oh, they're one of our latest projects. Love potions. They're a bit on the weak side, but we figured we may get into a lot of hot water with anything stronger, not that we haven't tried it... but you never know. We're waiting to see how well these ones sell." Harry now understood what the big deal was. He supposed that any older brother didn't want their little sister getting involved with anyone. It made a bit of sense in a way. By the time Harry had shaken himself out of his own thoughts and looked up, the

twins were gone.

"Ron! Ginny! Harry! It's time to go." Mrs. Weasley called over the crowd as she tried to drag Mr. Weasley away from the display of Muggle magic tricks. Hermione was already waiting at the door when Harry caught up to her.

"He is utterly impossible," Hermione muttered darkly. "He just won't give it up, and he can't be bothered to tell me what's wrong. All he says is 'you know bloody well what'. It's infuriating."

Harry glanced back at Ron, and he couldn't help agreeing with Hermione. Ron did have the tendency not to tell anyone what was wrong; making everyone assume what was bothering him, which sometimes wasn't even close to the real reason he was upset. Harry sighed a bit as he and Hermione stepped out of the shop. If things were going to keep up the way they were, this would be one of the worst years at Hogwarts yet.

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 7

In order to help take the edge off the current state of things, the Ministry of Magic has prepared a special surprise for the students at Hogwarts. However, they soon come to realize that the past may repeat itself, especially now that Voldemort is gaining power and not everything is as it seems.

The train whistle blew as the Weasleys, Harry, and Hermione stepped through the barrier to platform nine and three-quarters in pairs. Ron and Ginny walked off towards a group of other students as Harry and Hermione dragged their trunks towards the train. The four of them still weren't speaking and had spent half of the rest of their summer in silence. It had been deathly quiet since Harry and Ron's falling out, and the four of them had seemed to be on short fuses for the rest of the summer. It wasn't hard to pick a fight with the two youngest Weasley siblings. Harry pushed his trunk onto the train with Hermione's help then helped with hers as well. They travelled down the cars, looking for an open compartment that would be close to the Prefect car.

Finally passing an empty compartment, Harry motioned for Hermione to follow him inside. She stood by the door as Harry pushed his trunk into the luggage storage space. Just as he placed Hedwig's cage next to his trunk, he heard someone behind them clear their throat.

"Um... Hi Harry, Hermione." Harry turned to see Neville smiling a little nervously, a slight pink tinge shading his cheeks. "Do you mind if Luna and I join you?"

"All right. I'm just going to go to the Prefect car to help Hermione with her trunk." Harry smiled a bit as Neville sat down. Luna quickly followed him in and took out the latest copy of *The Quibbler*.

Harry turned from them and walked with Hermione to the Prefect car. They found a compartment that included Padma and a sixth year Hufflepuff Prefect. After Hermione stored her trunk, they headed back towards Harry's compartment. He couldn't help wondering how Hermione would get along in the Prefect car now that she and Ron weren't speaking. He couldn't imagine that it would make their rounds very easy once they were back at school. Harry wished there was something he could do, but not knowing what he and Hermione had done made that task very difficult.

"I'd love to go with you to Hogsmeade. I'm rather flattered that you asked me." Harry glanced around at the sound of Ginny's voice until he spotted her speaking with Zacharias Smith again.

"Well, I had to do it while the dream team was off somewhere else. They're really rather annoying, especially that big oaf with the red hair." The words were out of his mouth before he realised who he was saying them to, and the next thing Smith knew, he had been hit with a hex that had caused bogies to sprout wings and attack him.

"That 'oaf' just happens to be my brother, you git. You can forget Hogsmeade." Ginny stood over him with a fierce look in her eye. It was the kind of look that made Harry hope he would never end up on the receiving end of it.

There was a chuckle that resounded throughout the car. "Excellent, young lady. Quite the powerful curse."

Harry noticed a short, enormously fat man standing behind Ginny. He had a shiny, bald head with prominent eyes and an enormous silvery walrus-like moustache. He was dressed in an old-fashioned waistcoat with gold buttons and a pair of striped trousers. Harry couldn't help but wonder who this new person was and why they were riding on the train.

"Horace Slughorn's the name, but of course, you can address me as Professor." Ginny's face suddenly blanched at the statement, turning her almost as white as a sheet.

"Ah, no need to worry about this," Slughorn said with a little chuckle at Ginny's expression. "I'm sure he had it coming. Why don't you join me in my compartment later on? I am meeting with some of your fellow students for a late lunch."

Harry watched as Ginny just nodded in disbelief and shock. He could hear Hermione's disapproving tut as Slughorn walked away from the scene.

"Honestly, professors should not be encouraging that sort of behaviour, and Ginny should know better than to attack another student." Harry glanced back at Hermione's disapproving expression before he walked into his compartment. He knew better than to argue a point with Hermione. He agreed somewhat, but sometimes it didn't hurt to bend and break rules every now and then. He, Ron, and Hermione had done so on many occasions, but he felt that it might be a bad idea to point this out to her at the moment. He took a seat next to the window. "Harry, I'll see you later. I need to start my rounds."

Harry stared after Hermione before he turned to look out of the window as the train started to move. He was thankful to be getting back to Hogwarts. He wasn't sure he could take another minute of uncomfortable silence, nor did he want to deal with his nasty relatives. Harry soon heard the compartment door slide open and shut, but he didn't look away from the window.

"Hello, Neville. Hello, Luna." Ginny's voice seemed to echo in Harry's ears. "I hope you don't mind me joining you. I'd rather not sit with Seamus and Dean at the moment. They're only talking about Quidditch and the female population of Hogwarts. Not exactly topics of conversation I feel like discussing at the moment, especially with them."

The rest of the train ride was, for the most part, rather uneventful, albeit rather frosty from Ginny's quarter. Hermione had stopped by a few times and Ginny continued to ignore them both. Eventually, Ginny left for the lunch with Professor Slughorn. Only a moment after she left, a young student stopped by the compartment and dropped off a letter for Harry and Neville, which turned out to be an invitation to the very same lunch as Ginny's. Even the lunch seemed to pass without anything unusual happening. Ginny, had of course been there, as had Romilda Vane, a Ravenclaw named Marcus Belby, and Malfoy's friend Blaise Zabini. Professor Slughorn talked to them all about some of his favourite past students and asked them questions about themselves and the relatives he knew. Harry hadn't really been interested in what was happening and

had almost dozed off twice. Harry secretly hoped that the year would go by much in the same way. All he really wanted was to have one peaceful year at Hogwarts.

"Welcome, everyone, to another year at Hogwarts. This year, the Ministry has decided to open a new wizarding tournament. A word of caution, however, though this year may be filled with fun and games, I hope that none of you forget the state of the world. It is important that we do not forget what is happening beyond the borders of Hogwarts. This tournament may provide a temporary distraction, but we must remember that there is a war starting and even the Ministry cannot cover that up with games. Now, on with our announcement. Hogwarts has been chosen to be the host of the very first Junior Quidditch World Cup." Dumbledore paused in his speech as the Great Hall started to fill with murmurs and cheers of delight.

"Over the course of the summer, the other professors and I have had lengthy conversations and furious debates over who should be the one to help represent our school as the team captain. After much deliberation, we came to a decision. The Hogwarts team captain is..." Dumbledore smiled as he paused his speech for dramatic effect, a twinkle in his eye. "Miss Ginevra Weasley."

Harry looked down the table at a very shocked looking Ginny. Another Gryffindor he didn't recognize was patting her on the back, congratulating her while almost everyone else in the hall (excluding the Slytherins) was applauding. Ginny looked around at everyone, still in shock. It wasn't until Ron gave her a soft punch on the arm that she cracked a small smile.

"If Miss Weasley is prepared," said Dumbledore once it had quietened down, "tryouts will begin next week. The exact dates will be posted on the notice boards in your common rooms." Dumbledore carried on with the annual announcements and rule reminders before everyone was sent off to their dorms.

"Way to go, Ginny. I know a lass like you will do a great job." Seamus's Irish brogue carried over the crowd. Ginny was still sitting in her seat as the rest of the students started to filter out of the Great Hall to head to their dorms for a good night's sleep.

"Thank you, Seamus. I'll see you in the common room." Ginny waved him off with a small smile as Seamus joined the leaving group.

Harry hung back as the students left, hoping for a chance to speak with Ginny about her and Ron. As Harry was waiting, he noticed Malfoy heading towards Ginny, but his two cronies were absent from his side. Harry crept a little closer in hopes of hearing their conversation. However, Harry was unable to get close enough without being spotted. He watched as they spoke for a moment, seemingly without any harsh words being exchanged, then Malfoy joined the rest of the Slytherins that were leaving.

"Uh, Ginny?" Harry stepped towards her as he spoke once everyone was gone. He could have sworn he saw a flicker of annoyance in her eyes before her expression turned to indifference.

"Is there something I can help you with, Harry?" Ginny asked in a business-like tone.

"Actually, I was hoping I could have a word with you about Ron "

"Sorry, but I don't really have time for that conversation. I have work to do," Ginny immediately cut him off before he could say another word. She stood up from her seat at the table and strode towards the door without a backwards glance. It became clear to Harry that this would not be an easy task. If he wanted to know what was wrong, he'd have to figure it out on his own. He joined the rest of the students leaving the Great Hall and headed up to Gryffindor Tower.

When Harry arrived in the common room, he took a seat at the table where Hermione was already getting a head start on the year's studies. It never amazed Harry how dedicated Hermione was to school. He stared at the fire for a moment, mulling over the events since his birthday party. He thought over everything that had happened between himself, Ron, and Hermione. He just couldn't comprehend why Ron and Ginny were so angry with them. After a while, Harry looked up at the wall clock and saw that it was nearing midnight. He hadn't realised he had been sitting there so long. He glanced over at Hermione and saw that she was halfway through her book. He was about to get up from his spot when he heard the portrait open. Curious as to who would be coming in at that time on the first night, Harry kept his eyes fixed towards the entrance.

A flushed Ginny Weasley appeared from the entrance way and made her way quickly through the common room, avoiding everyone's gaze. He glanced over to Hermione again and met her curious expression. Harry shrugged, just as confused as Hermione. He couldn't help wondering where Ginny had been. She had left the Great Hall before he had so she should have beaten him to Gryffindor Tower. It was just another question to add to the growing list, none of which he seemed to be getting any answers to.

"Did you get a chance to talk to her?" Hermione reluctantly set down her book as she looked at Harry expectantly.

"Er, no. She said she was busy and left before I had a chance to say anything. Neither one of them is going to talk to us."

"We'll just have to keep trying. There's no sense in giving up. Eventually, one of them will let us know. Of course, it will probably be Ginny. You know how stubborn Ron can be."

"I'm not so sure about that. Ginny's pretty stubborn when she wants to be. I can't figure out any possible reason. The only thing that's changed is that you and I are together. I don't think they'd be angry about that. They would be happy for us, right? It must be something else. Maybe we just need to sleep on it. We might come up with something tomorrow. I'm going to bed. I feel exhausted. Have a good night, Hermione." Harry smiled and kissed Hermione on the cheek before he started up to his dorm room. When he arrived, all the candles had been put out and everyone else's curtains were drawn. Harry hoped with all his might that the rift in their friendships would be over as soon as possible. He hated not speaking to Ron. He was starting to have a horrible flashback to their fourth year, when Ron had been angry with him after his name had been drawn from the Goblet of Fire as a fourth contestant. Harry sighed quietly as he pulled on his pyjamas and crawled into bed. He sincerely hoped that the problem would be resolved as soon as possible. He didn't want another year like his fourth. If it wasn't him and Ron fighting, it was Ron and Hermione. Except for the occasional moment, that year hadn't been anything close to fun.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 7

In order to help take the edge off the current state of things, the Ministry of Magic has prepared a special surprise for the students at Hogwarts. However, they soon come to realize that the past may repeat itself, especially now that Voldemort is gaining power and not everything is as it seems.

Saturday turned out to be one of the nicest days of the autumn season, perfect for Quidditch. The sun was hidden behind white fluffy clouds, allowing for excellent vision on the field. Students from every house had gathered on the pitch after reading the announcement that the first of the trials would be held that very day and, with any luck, they would have a team before dinner that evening. Hermione had escorted Harry as far as the entrance to the pitch before she headed back up to the castle to work on

her Arithmancy essay. Harry never expected her to stay. He knew she wasn't a big fan of Quidditch and when she had work that needed to be done, she did it as soon as possible. It was just the way Hermione was. Harry glanced around at the large crowd as he stepped onto the pitch. A lot of people were looking rather anxious at having to try out against some of the best Quidditch players in the school, and one girl, upon spotting Harry, actually grabbed her broom and ran off the pitch.

"All right everyone! Listen up!" Ginny's booming voice sounded over the crowd as she stood up in the first row of the stands. Harry watched her for a moment as she spoke, taking in the blazing look in her eyes that showed just how much passion she had for the sport. Her hair was whipping softly in the slight breeze as she spoke to everyone with a commanding presence. Everyone had questioned the decision at first, but Harry could see why the professors had chosen her as the captain to represent Hogwarts. "We're going to start with the Beaters first, then Keepers, Seekers, and Chasers will be last. If you are trying out for more than one position, stick around afterwards. Those of you not trying out for a Beater position, make yourselves comfortable in the stands and wait your turn."

Harry took a seat down the bench from Ginny and tried to look interested in the tryouts for Beaters, but his head was swimming with questions at the sight of the fiery redhead. He still hadn't figured out any reason as to why Ron and Ginny were acting so oddly towards him and Hermione. Hermione hadn't been any help either. When she wasn't busy studying, she insisted that the two would eventually get over whatever it was that was bugging them. Harry wasn't so sure. He had never seen Ron as angry as he was with him, not even during his fourth year when Ron had thought Harry had put his name into the Goblet of Fire. That didn't even begin to explain why Ginny was angry with them as well. Harry continued to mull over his thoughts until something caught his eye. Approaching Ginny was the arrogant Zacharias Smith, who was waiting for his turn to try out as one of the Beaters. Harry glared at the back of Smith's head and wondered if that guy would ever learn. He watched silently as they exchanged heated words.

Suddenly, Ginny stood up and glared straight into Smith's eyes, daring him to say something stupid. "Sit your bloody arse down and wait your turn. Everyone will be getting a fair chance, and I do mean everyone. I will not be giving anyone any preference, no matter what you think, so sit down and stop bothering me while I'm trying to choose my Beaters fairly and based on talent! If you bother me again, you won't get a chance to try out."

Harry snickered quietly while he watched Smith slink away, red-faced. He couldn't help but be amused by the display, especially after hearing what Smith had said about Ron on the train. Harry looked back at Ginny only to find her glaring at him. His amused smile quickly faded as he turned his attention back to the pitch, trying to avoid any confrontation with Ginny. He felt like anything he said or did around Ginny was wrong somehow. When he tried to be friendly and companionable, all he earned was scathing glares. It was as if he could do nothing right.

After the Beater positions had been filled by Marcus Belby of Ravenclaw and, unfortunately, Zacharias Smith, Hermione joined Harry while he waited for the Seeker tryouts. They had all been sitting for a while, and they were starting to get a bit restless. Harry couldn't help but be thankful that the number trying out for Keeper was smaller than the number for Beaters. The string of people trying out didn't do as well as Harry had thought, with most only saving two or three penalties shot by five of the top chasers in the school. Soon, it was down to the two remaining Keepers, Malcolm Baddock from Slytherin and Ron Weasley. Each had saved five and were now to face off with another five penalties as the tie breaker. Baddock was up first, and Harry couldn't help noticing that Ron looked a little green.

"All right, Baddock. You know the drill. Five penalty shots will be taken against each of you, and the person to save the most will be the Keeper for the team." Ginny glared back at Baddock, obviously hoping he would miss them all, but knowing that it wasn't likely. The crowd watched as Malcolm flew up and managed to save four out of five penalties. On the last one, however, he flew completely in the wrong direction, causing Ginny to smirk slightly. Harry thought it was a bit odd, as it almost looked as if he had been Confunded.

Finally, it was Ron's turn. He was still looking a bit peaky when he mounted his Cleansweep Eleven, but it turned out that there really was nothing to worry about. At first, Ron had flitted about as he waited for the Chasers to be ready. He looked extremely nervous, and Harry thought for a moment that he might even lose his nerve. However, Ron pulled himself together and managed to save all of the penalties without too much trouble.

When Ron was finished saving the last penalty, he glided down with a large grin on his face and met Ginny with a crushing hug. Harry couldn't have been happier for his best friend. He knew how much Ron loved Quidditch and was sure that he had desperately wanted to be part of the Hogwarts team.

"Ron, I'll need you to stay and help with the Chaser tryouts. I knew you could do it." Ginny smiled at Ron before she turned to his competition. "Well, Baddock, looks like you're out." Ginny smirked triumphantly as Baddock glared down at her.

"Give me another go."

"No. You've had your turn. You saved four and Ron saved five. He won Keeper fair and square. Now, get out of my way."

Harry had to admit that he was impressed by Ginny's strength and character when faced with someone like Baddock. He looked almost twice the size of Ginny, yet she had no problem standing up to him. Even from his position in the stands, he could see the fire in her eyes, challenging Baddock to question her authority. It was no surprise to him that Ginny had been sorted into Gryffindor when he saw this side of her. He kept his eyes on Baddock as he stormed off in a huff, nearly knocking down a small first-year on his way off the pitch.

"Seekers, up next. Harper and Davis. You two are up first."

After a long and grueling tryout, it was down to Harry and Malfoy for the position of Seeker. Ginny had done each in pairs with a total of sixteen people trying out. The winner of each pair would face off against the winner of another pair until it was finally down to two people. They had been up in the air for what seemed like hours, but was actually only twenty minutes. Finally, after searching the pitch over and over again, Harry spotted the Snitch near the goal hoops on the other side of the pitch. A bright, tiny flash of gold was hovering near the left hoop, and Malfoy had yet to spot it. Keeping his eye on the spot, without drawing too much attention to the fact that he'd found it, Harry slowly flew closer and closer. Suddenly, Harry leaned down flat against his broom and took off, following the Snitch as it started to dart away. Malfoy finally caught on to the fact that Harry had spotted the tiny ball and was right on his tail. As Harry got closer, he reached his hand out, trying to keep his balance while Malfoy was trying his best to knock him off his broom. He curled his fingers around the elusive prize, and the tryout was over. He had caught the Snitch.

Harry landed with a large grin, just as Ron had earlier that day. Hermione ran down onto the pitch, heading towards him. His hand was still clutching the ball when he threw his arms around her. He couldn't help himself. He was so ecstatic that he had made it onto the team. He hadn't really believed Hermione at breakfast when she said he wouldn't have any problem getting the Seeker's position, and now it had come true. He pulled back slightly and pressed his lips to Hermione's in celebration.

Someone clearing their throat tore Harry's attention from Hermione, and when he looked up, he saw Ginny looking slightly annoyed. "Congratulations, Potter. The schedule will be posted tomorrow along with the final roster, complete with reserves. Be sure to try to make every practice, or I may have to replace you." Once Ginny was finished speaking, she turned and strode away, only to be accosted by a very upset Draco Malfoy.

Not wanting to stick around any longer than he had to, Harry gathered his gear and headed back to the castle with Hermione at his side. He really didn't feel like facing Ginny after she had been talking with Malfoy, especially with the mood she had been in earlier with Baddock and Smith.

The next morning when Harry entered the common room, he was met with the sight of about a dozen Gryffindors all standing around the notice board, trying to catch a glimpse as to who had made the team and who ended up as reserves. There seemed to be a lot of talk and whispers over some of the choices. With curiosity getting the better of him, Harry wandered over and tried to squeeze his way through the small crowd. He glanced up at the sheet, written in Ginny's delicate handwriting.

Hogwarts Junior Quidditch World Cup Team

Final Roster

Seeker: Harry Potter

Reserve: Draco Malfoy

Keeper: Ronald Weasley

Reserve: Malcolm Baddock

Beaters: Marcus Belby, Zacharias Smith

Reserves: Theodore Nott, Wayne Hopkins

Chasers: Ginevra Weasley, Demelza Robins, Draco Malfoy

Reserves: Blaise Zabini, Anthony Goldstein, Terry Boot

First team meeting will take place next week on Friday at 3 p.m. For those who have classes, I have already spoken with your professors. Thank you to everyone who tried out.

Harry suddenly understood what all the whispering had been about when his eyes landed on Draco Malfoy's name beside the position of Chaser. His first thought was that it had been a mistake. He had never known Draco to ever play any position besides Seeker. He couldn't help but assume it was a mistake. He really didn't want Malfoy on the same team as him. They had never got along and Ginny knew this. In fact, Malfoy had never been nice to even her, except when she was announced as the team captain, and only then to hopefully secure a spot on the team. His eyes glanced towards the staircase that led to the girls' dormitories, hoping that there would be an answer soon. He didn't have to wait very long. Ginny stepped into the common room only a moment later and was immediately swarmed by a group of people, asking her question upon question about her selection of the players. She was starting to get agitated when they wouldn't quieten down in order for her to answer.

"All right. Shut up! Bloody hell, if you're going to ask questions, let me answer them. I chose fairly. I chose the best in the school, and if you don't like it, maybe you should practice a little harder. Maybe, if you're good enough, you'll make the Gryffindor team next year. There are no mistakes on that list, and YES, that includes Malfoy as a Chaser." Ginny glared at anyone who dared to try and argue with her.

"Are you really sure about that?" Harry glanced over to see an irritated Seamus Finnigan who had tried out, but hadn't even managed to make the reserves list.

"Yes, I am sure. He tried out and he was one of the best. End of story. No more arguing or questioning my judgement. Don't you all have a breakfast to get to?" Ginny crossed her arms over her chest as she watched everyone leave the common room. She glanced at Harry for a moment before she followed everyone else out of the tower.

During breakfast, Harry took his usual seat beside Hermione while Ron and Ginny sat with Lavender, Dean, Seamus, and Parvati further up the table. Harry still hadn't got used to not having Ron around, and he hated it. Harry pushed the food around on his plate, not all that interested in eating.

"Harry, you really should eat something," Hermione spoke quietly.

"I'm not hungry."

"Look, I know how much you miss Ron, and I do too, but there's nothing we can do about it if we don't know what's wrong." Hermione was always trying to be the voice of reason, and Harry hated to admit that she was right.

"Well, why aren't we trying harder to figure it out? I'm so tired of the three of us fighting all the time. If it's not one thing, it's something else." Harry huffed, throwing down his fork.

"Well, I'm sorry for that. It's not like we plan it or anything. It just happens."

Harry sighed and glanced down the table at Ron and Ginny. It seemed that Lavender Brown had taken quite an interest in Ron lately and was trying to keep his attention on her. It wasn't easy with Seamus, who appeared to be over not being chosen for the Hogwarts team, and some sixth year Harry didn't know flirting with Ginny on the other side of the table. Ron looked a bit torn between Lavender's attentions and trying to keep an eye on his little sister. Harry frowned and turned back to his plate, pushing around the cold eggs with his fork. He didn't look up again until Dumbledore's voice echoed through the Great Hall.

"I trust that you are all well fed by now and are interested in just who shall be the referees for the tournament. Our very own Madam Hooch will be assisting Hassan Mostafa of the International Association of Quidditch to ensure that our guest referees are fair in their judgements. We are very lucky to have procured three very special referees. The first is Mister Charles Weasley, who was one of the finest Seekers Hogwarts has ever seen. The second is Mister Oliver Wood, who plays Keeper for Puddlemere United. And finally, Mister Viktor Krum, the Seeker for the Bulgarian Quidditch team."

The whole Great Hall was in an uproar of cheers at Dumbledore's news. Even the Slytherins seemed almost satisfied with the choices. Harry glanced up from his plate, noticing for the first time that the three referees were sitting at the head table with the professors and Hassan Mostafa. The four guests were standing, accepting the applause the students were giving them. As the applause faded, Dumbledore dismissed the student body for the morning. Ginny was the first one up from her seat, but instead of leaving the Great Hall, she ran up to the front.

"Charlie!" Ginny flung herself at her older brother and wrapped her arms around him as he picked her small frame up. A few students looked on while others continued out the doors. Harry stood up and started walking towards the front, thinking that he should at least say hello to the three familiar visitors. Hermione followed closely behind, looking a little nervous.

"Good to see you, Harry." Oliver walked over to Harry and shook his hand. "Can I assume that you are the captain?"

"Err... actually, Ginny Weasley is."

"Well, I suppose that's not much of a surprise. She comes from a Quidditch family and is a Gryffindor as well. I heard the great success the Gryffindor Quidditch team has had. Two Cup wins since I've left. Excellent job. Your friend Ron has been doing an excellent job in my old position on the team." Oliver smiled proudly.

"Oliver." Harry glanced to where the sound came from and saw Charlie waving Oliver over. "I'd like you to meet my sister, Ginny."

Oliver nodded a goodbye to Harry before he walked over to the Weasleys. Harry walked slightly behind, a bit curious, though unaware as to why.

"Ah, Ginny. I was just talking to Potter about you. I hear you're the lucky one who's been named Quidditch captain. Congratulations." Oliver smiled at her and shook her hand.

"Thank you. I look forward to fulfilling my duties. I've already got my team assembled with the best players in the school. I tried to be as fair as possible of course, but Gryffindor has the top players for most positions. Can't help that, can we?" Ginny flashed Oliver a smile as she spoke. Oliver smiled back at her and picked up her hand, giving it a small kiss as she blushed.

"Looks like a possible loff match."

Harry's attention snapped to Viktor Krum at his words. A love match between Ginny and Oliver? That couldn't be possible. He was the same age as Ginny's brother, Percy. Harry was sure that Ron would never allow that to happen, but when Harry looked back over, Ron appeared to be too busy talking with Charlie to notice the flirting going on between his sister and former housemate.

Harry decided he had seen enough for the evening and took a hold of Hermione's hand. She looked a bit surprised when he started to walk away, still holding her hand. She said a quick goodbye to Viktor as she was dragged out of the Great Hall.

"Harry, are you all right?" Hermione looked at him with concern as they headed back to Gryffindor Tower.

"I'm fine... Do you really think Ginny and Wood...? I mean, he's five years older than her. I'm surprised Ron wasn't showing any concern for that. It's a bit pervy, don't you think? He's the same age as Percy."

Hermione stopped walking and stared at him, confusion etched across her features. "Would that be a problem, if they became involved? Other than the fact that it could possibly be against the rules of the tournament, I don't see a problem with it."

"Well, you wouldn't, would you?" Harry hadn't meant to say what he did. It just sort of slipped out.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Hermione asked, a look of hurt shadowing her face.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. It's just that, you know. You and Viktor... He's a bit older than you. I really didn't mean anything by it. I guess Wood just got to me a bit, assuming that I was the captain when I wasn't, then talking about Ron... I... Sorry..."

Hermione nodded softly, seeming to understand what he was trying to say. After a moment, they continued to walk back to the common room in silence.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 7

In order to help take the edge off the current state of things, the Ministry of Magic has prepared a special surprise for the students at Hogwarts. However, they soon come to realize that the past may repeat itself, especially now that Voldemort is gaining power and not everything is as it seems.

Later in the day, most of the students found themselves outside, taking advantage of the weather while they still could, and Harry was no exception. He had found a relaxing spot in the grass near the lake. The students had been given five hours in which they could spend their time any way they wished before their guests were scheduled to arrive. Harry had considered taking his Firebolt for a fly, but decided against it when he saw Ron with Dean and Seamus heading towards the pitch. He didn't want to incite another argument or feel like he was intruding, so he settled on sitting by the lake. It was a sunny day and he wanted to be outside. He wasn't like Hermione, who could spend all her time in a library, reading, which was what she happened to be doing at that moment. Harry glanced at his wristwatch, wondering how much longer they had and sighing slightly when it appeared that time seemed to have slowed down. He supposed it always seemed like that when one was waiting for something to happen, with nothing else to do. He glanced up when he heard footsteps heading his way. He was surprised to find Ginny slowly making her way towards him with an unreadable, but neutral, expression on her face. It wasn't until she sat down beside him that he realized she had sought him out. He opened his mouth to speak, but she spoke before he had a chance to say even a syllable.

"I'm not really supposed to be talking to you, so in the off chance that anyone asks, we were discussing Quidditch tactics." Ginny paused for a moment before she continued. "It occurred to me very recently that you really may have no clue why Ron's so angry with you. I think it's something you need to figure out for yourself, so I'm not going to tell you. You obviously need help though. It sort of reminds me of when Ron and Hermione were fighting in your fourth year after the Yule Ball. She just didn't seem to understand why Ron was giving her such a hard time about Viktor. I want to believe that it was obvious he was jealous, but I guess not. I suppose it comes from living with him for sixteen years and being so close in age. I just sort of know when he's hurting... I'll see you later."

Without saying another word, Ginny stood up and walked back towards the castle. Harry stared after her, trying to understand what had just happened. He was sure that Ginny had been trying to give him a clue, but he wasn't completely sure what it was. He continued to watch her until she finally disappeared through the doors, trying to decipher what she had said and how it related to the rift in his friendship with Ron. She had mentioned that Ron was hurting, but he couldn't quite comprehend what it was he was hurting about. He knew the answer was right in front of him, but he was having a hard time grasping it. Whenever he seemed to get close, the answer slipped through his fingers.

Harry ended up spending the rest of his time outside until he looked up into the sky as it was nearing the hour of five. Harry smiled softly as he saw the large, powder blue carriage that housed the Beauxbatons students nearing. The carriage hadn't changed at all over the years. It was still pulled by the same dozen winged palomino horses the size of elephants. The large carriage landed with a loud crash as students scrambled to get back to the castle to be ready for dinner. As Harry stood, watching as Hagrid appeared from his hut to greet Madame Maxime, he heard the slightly familiar sound of muffled rumbling and sucking coming from the lake. He watched as the mast of the Durmstrang ship started to appear out of the water. Having seen this production before, Harry headed back to the castle, not particularly interested in seeing how the Salem Institute for Girls team was going to arrive. He had no doubt that it would be something as spectacular as the rest, so he really didn't care to see it at all. He knew it was just a way for the other schools to show off. He did, however, wonder how Hogwarts would travel if they were to visit other schools.

As soon as his foot hit the Entrance Hall floor, he was swooped upon by Professor McGonagall. "There you are, Potter. Hurry up. Hurry up. Your team is waiting for you in the Great Hall. Miss Weasley has your Quidditch uniform with her, so hurry and get changed." Professor McGonagall pushed Harry gently towards the Great Hall before exiting out the door, presumably to get the rest of the students indoors.

"Where the bloody hell have you been?" Ginny's eyes were narrowed as she shoved a set of golden yellow and black Quidditch robes into his arms. "Hurry up and change. We need to be ready to accept our guests in the Great Hall. GO!"

Harry didn't need to be told twice, so he hurried to the anteroom off the Great Hall to quickly change. He took a moment to look at himself in a mirror once he was dressed in the chosen Hogwarts colours. He hadn't really had a good look at them when they had been shoved into his arms, but now that he had a chance, he looked at them carefully. They weren't much different in colour from their regular school robes, with only a few exceptions. The robe-jacket was plain black with a golden clasp, golden lining, and the sleeves had two golden stripes down each arm. On the left sleeve was a Hogwarts crest just below the shoulder and on his right, he noticed with a smile, that the Gryffindor shield had been added to his uniform. On the back, 'Potter' was emblazoned across the shoulder blades in a slight arch with the number seven underneath in gold. The sweater underneath was much like the Hufflepuff Quidditch sweater, with the exception that it appeared to be more golden than yellow. The trousers were black as well, with two golden stripes down each leg.

"POTTER!"

Ginny's voice made Harry realise he had been standing there longer than he intended, and Ginny had little patience with him as he had already been late in arriving. He shoved his clothes in an out of the way spot, intending to retrieve them later, and quickly moved back into the Great Hall, which was nearly full of Hogwarts students already. His team had gathered near the Gryffindor table, and he walked over to join them.

"Look, Malfoy, I am not in the mood to deal with you right now. We are sitting with Gryffindor house; Durmstrang is sitting with Slytherin; Beauxbatons is with Ravenclaw, and Salem is with Hufflepuff. Deal with it. You'll live. You can go back to sitting with your normal house tomorrow. Now, sit down and shut up about it."

Harry admired Ginny's natural leadership and authority under the situation. He wasn't sure he could be as commanding if he were in her position, having to deal with Malfoy as civilly as possible. She was a true natural, and he smiled slightly as they all sat down at the table. Harry couldn't help noticing at that moment that even when they had to sit together, Ginny and Ron sat as far away from him as possible. He couldn't help thinking it was going to be a long season if the problem didn't get resolved soon.

The Great Hall was full of talk about the visitors, the new Quidditch uniforms, Quidditch in general, and the tournament. Everyone seemed excited by the new visitors to the school as well. Some hadn't been around when the Triwizard Tournament had happened, so this would be the first time for many of the students to see students from other schools. The houses didn't quieten down until Dumbledore stood up to the podium that had been set up and raised both his hands for silence.

"I would like everyone to join me in welcoming our most esteemed visitors. Firstly, the lovely ladies and charming gentlemen of Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and their headmistress, Madame Maxime."

As if on cue, the doors to the Great Hall opened as a small group of students consisting of seven boys and four girls dressed in light blue robes waltzed into the room. The girls skipped up the aisle and twirled while the boys followed behind with their heads held high. Following behind them was a very large woman. Harry smiled as he remembered Madame Olympe Maxime from previous years at the school. She didn't look as though she had changed one bit. As Dumbledore lightly kissed Madame Maxime's hand, Harry chanced a glance at Hagrid, who seemed to be beaming with delight at the appearance of the tall woman. As soon as the Beauxbatons visitors had taken their places, Dumbledore turned his attention to the room once again.

"And now our friends from the North, the proud sons of Durmstrang and their high master, Ivan Polikov."

Everyone's attention was once again drawn to the Great Hall entrance as a large group of young men, dressed in dark red robes stepped into the room. Six of the boys stood off to the side with staves, sounding a low chant as seven other boys made their way down the aisle in pairs, save for the last. He was followed by a tall, skinny man dressed in an ivory cloak lined with wool, who was also carrying a staff. Harry kept his eyes on the lone boy near the end, trying to figure out a feeling he had in his gut. There was something different and off about him, but Harry couldn't seem to place it. Once they had taken their seats after the headmaster shared a slight bow with Dumbledore, Albus motioned to the door once again.

"And finally, join me in welcoming our guests from the West, the charming daughters of The Salem Witches' Institute and their principal, Carol Mathers."

The seven girls of Salem's Quidditch team swept into the room with grace, in robes of pale violet, with their heads held high, in a sort of superiority Harry had never seen from anyone besides the Malfoys and the relatives he lived with. They barely looked at anyone who attended their host school until they turned around at the front of the room and bowed before taking their seats at the Hufflepuff table. Dumbledore smiled at everyone before he continued on.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, ghosts and - most particularly - guests. I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to Hogwarts. I hope and trust that your stay here will be both comfortable and enjoyable. The tournament will officially open at the end of the feast. I now invite you all to eat, drink, and make yourselves at home!"

Harry couldn't help chuckling at the fact that it had been the very same speech Dumbledore had given during the Triwizard Tournament. Soon, the plates in front of them were filled with all sorts of food, half of which Harry was sure he had never tasted in his life. He recognised some of the food from his fourth year as dishes from the other countries, but he couldn't remember what they were. He glanced down at Ron, who was helping himself to black pudding as Ginny snuck a piece of some sort of pie on his plate while he wasn't looking. Harry smiled a bit to himself, not wanting to attract Ginny or Ron's attention. It was just one of those things he knew would anger one of them at the moment. He glanced down the table at Hermione, who was looking a bit out of place by herself, without him. He never really realised how isolated they had made themselves from the rest of the house. It had always been the three of them, sometimes with Ginny, but that had always been it. Since he hadn't put anything on his plate yet, Harry stood from his spot, barely being noticed by anyone, and sat down beside Hermione. When she glanced up at him, she looked almost grateful.

Following the arrival of their guests, the feast passed off uneventfully. When most were finished their dinner and starting on dessert, Harry watched as Ginny walked up to the front of the hall where three others, one from each school, had already gathered. Harry recognised the one boy as being from Durmstrang and watched him carefully as he interacted with the others. There was still something Harry couldn't place about him. It was just something Harry sensed was not right about the boy.

A smiling Dumbledore stood up and cleared his throat, gathering the attention of everyone in the hall. "Excuse the interruption, but seeing as everyone has nearly finished their meal, I believe it would be proper for the captains from each school to introduce their Quidditch teams. When the captain calls out the names of each player, they will stand for a moment to be recognised. We shall start first with Miss Cece Washington from Salem."

An attractive, tall brunette standing with the others stepped forward with a smile as she introduced her team. Each of the girls stood up when their names were announced, but it wasn't hard to distinguish the team, as Salem had only brought the seven girls. Harry thought they all looked the same, with the only discerning feature being different colours of hair. Each had a different style, and one even had her hair streaked with the colour of a toffee apple. The American girls seemed different from European girls. There was something in their air that seemed to denote a kind of superiority and arrogance.

Next, an average boy was introduced as Remy Bouchard from Beauxbatons. He stepped forward and glanced at the Ravenclaw table. He introduced each member of his team, starting with the three other males on the team, two girls Harry didn't recognise, and finally, the one girl he did: Gabrielle Delacour.

"Gabrielle? I didn't think she was old enough just yet. Wasn't she only about seven or eight during the tournament?" Hermione glanced at Harry, who was staring openly at Gabrielle as she sat down with a neutral expression.

"I guess not. We never really did learn her age. All I knew was that she was Fleur's sister. She could have easily been in first year during the tournament." Harry shrugged as he turned his attention to Hermione with a smile.

"Mister Mark Ferrars of Durmstrang." Harry immediately turned his attention back to the introductions, but mainly to the Durmstrang team captain. Ferrars didn't appear to be much taller than Harry and appeared to be of the same build, but it was hard to tell with the Durmstrang uniform. He was a handsome man, according to Lavender who was sitting two seats away from Harry, with short brunette hair. He didn't look like the rest of his classmates in regards to geographic origin, and Harry found out exactly why the moment he spoke. Harry barely heard what was being said. He was concentrating on Ferrars because he was rather surprised to hear a British accent from a student from Durmstrang. All of his encounters with students from that school had made him assume that their students were from Eastern Europe. It was then that something Malfoy had said to him before first year came to mind. Malfoy had wanted to go to Durmstrang himself. It really didn't say much for Ferrars if he was from England and was attending Durmstrang. He couldn't help thinking that perhaps Ferrars was very much like Malfoy and his father.

"Ron Weasley, Marcus Belby, Zacharias Smith, Harry Potter, Demelza Robins, and Draco Malfoy." Harry was pulled out of his thoughts when he heard his name and stood up slowly. He had been so engrossed that he hadn't heard Dumbledore introducing Ginny. Ginny snickered slightly as she walked towards the table to rejoin her team. Before she got too far, however, Ferrars stopped her with a hand on her shoulder. Harry watched as they exchanged words for a moment before Ginny nodded at him with a smile. She took her seat beside Ron and reached for a dessert on the serving dish in front of her.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 7

In order to help take the edge off the current state of things, the Ministry of Magic has prepared a special surprise for the students at Hogwarts. However, they soon come to realize that the past may repeat itself, especially now that Voldemort is gaining power and not everything is as it seems.

Harry sat down on the steps leading up to the front door of the castle. He had endured the long day of formalities, and he just needed some time to think. He hadn't had a chance to fully contemplate the meaning of Ginny's words the day before. He hadn't come up with any solution when he had been waiting for the other schools to arrive, and afterwards, he had been too consumed by the festivities and other distractions provided by strangers to think of anything at all. He knew there was something she was trying to tell him. It would be only a matter of time before he figured it out. He felt stupid and inept. He could usually read into things better, and it seemed like she had tried to make it as obvious as possible. He figured it had something to do with the Yule Ball in their fourth year, but he was at a loss to think of what it was exactly, and the fact that he couldn't recall Ginny's exact words wasn't helping the matter.

He glanced up from the ground to look out onto the field. His eyes gazed over the students relaxing before dinner and stopped when he noticed Ginny and Ron walking across the lawn towards the lake. They seemed to be deep in conversation, but about what, Harry couldn't tell. Whatever it was they were discussing didn't seem to be going well for either of them, and it became apparent that they were arguing with each other over something. Harry watched as Ginny started to walk away from Ron before he turned her back towards him to have the last word. Ginny walked off in a huff after pushing her brother away, heading towards Harry, but he barely noticed when she finally passed him because, in the distance, Hermione was tentatively approaching Ron. He watched as Ron turned towards her and she backed away slightly. Harry stared as they exchanged words and would have given anything to be able to overhear what was being said.

"It's going to take a lot for him to forgive you, you know..."

Harry looked up to find Ginny standing just to his left, watching the same scene unfold.

"You both really hurt him and betrayed his trust. I hate to see him in so much pain. You two don't even realise what you did. You just don't know, but I wish you did. It would make fixing all of this so much easier."

"Why don't you just tell me what we did wrong?" Harry asked as Ginny sat herself down beside him on the step.

"Harry, you need to figure it out for yourself. I can't help you with this. I can't tell you, and I don't want to be dragged any further into it than I already am." Ginny looked at Harry sadly before turning her attention back to her lonesome brother. He had pushed Hermione away again and was walking towards the pier. "He's really hurt, and both you and Hermione need to fix it. You two are the ones who really need to think this over and figure out what's wrong. No one else can really give you any answers. I think the best thing you can do is look and listen for any clues that might help you figure it out. Just think about everything that's happened so far... When... Why... I know you'll figure it out, Harry. You have to."

Harry watched as Ginny stood up and walked away, heading through the castle doors. He turned away and stared out to where Ron was standing. Ginny was right. He did have a lot of thinking to do. Nothing was going to change unless he figured out what had gone wrong and when. Nothing really seemed to add up just yet. After a few minutes of thought, Harry got up and followed Ginny inside, hoping to get some more information. He would take any clue she was willing to give. He wanted his best friend back.

As Harry headed towards the Gryffindor common room, he heard someone down the hall, giggling. Curious, he turned and started walking towards the empty classroom. The sound seemed to echo through the hallway, beckoning him closer. He peered through a crack between the door and the frame, squinting slightly in an effort to see into the room better. He could make out two silhouettes in the dim light of the early evening. He was about to turn away and head back to the dormitories when a flash of ginger hair caught his eye. Taking a better look, Harry made out the figures of Ginny Weasley and a male student, the shadows of the room concealing his identity. He watched as the guy leaned forward and whispered in her ear, causing a faint blush to appear on her cheeks. Harry turned away as their lips met, not wanting to see any more. He felt a rumble in the pit of his stomach as he made his way to the entrance to Gryffindor Tower. It was sort of a sickly feeling, and he wasn't sure where it came from. He decided to head up to his room to lie down, thinking it would help. He needed some time to think over his situation again anyway, and lying down would possibly help.

Once in his dormitory room, Harry took a seat on his bed and tried his best to think over his problem with Ron. As soon as he started to formulate any sort of solution, his mind drifted back to the image of Ginny and the mysterious person with her in the classroom. A growl erupted in the pit of his stomach, and he glanced at his wristwatch. It wasn't nearly time for dinner, and he didn't particularly feel hungry. Harry lay down on his bed and stared up at the canopy over his bed in thought. So much was running through his brain, and it seemed to all jumble together. There was just so much going on, and he couldn't concentrate on just one thing at the moment. Harry pulled his curtains closed and shut his eyes, hoping that a short nap would clear his head.

"Bloody Hermione!" The door to the room slammed against the wall as Ron stormed in.

Harry opened his eyes at the noise and peered through a crack between the curtains. He could see a very angry Ron kicking the trunk at the end of his bed. It wasn't long before he heard footsteps following Ron into the room. Ron growled at the person Harry wasn't able to see.

"Oh, knock it off, Ron. It's your own bloody fault, and I am tired of listening to you bitch and complain about your two best friends. You, Harry and Hermione have me stuck in the middle of all this, and I'm bloody sick of it. Maybe if you had just plucked up the courage to tell Hermione that you fancied her in the beginning, none of this bloody mess would have ever happened." Ginny's shrill and frustrated tone echoed through the room.

"I don't fancy Hermione," Ron protested.

"Oh really? Then what's got your knickers in a twist? Honestly, I'm sick of the whole lot of you and your drama. Just bloody well tell Harry what's wrong and work things out. I want things back to the way they were, before all of this. I want all of you at peace so we can win the tournament and blast Voldemort into a million pieces!"

Harry could see Ron wince at Ginny's use of the name Voldemort. He smirked a bit until the weight of everything he had heard hit him. Ginny thought Ron fancied Hermione. Ron had argued, but the pink tinge of his ears gave away his true feelings. He was embarrassed, and knowing Ron, if he was telling the truth about his feelings for Hermione, he wouldn't be feeling embarrassed by the statement.

"Ron, I just can't do this anymore. I hate all of the turmoil. I can't be on your side anymore. I miss talking to Harry and Hermione. I love you, Ron. You're my big brother, but I don't want to give up my friends. I realise this situation sucks, but do you really want to lose your two best friends over it? You need them, and they need you. Please just forgive them. You know they have no clue what's wrong, because if they did, surely they would have apologised by now." Ginny's voice softened as her speech came to an end.

Harry quietly peered through the crack between his bed curtains to see Ginny giving Ron a hug and whispering something in his ear. He nodded with a slight smile and walked out of view. Harry waited a few moments, expecting Ginny to follow him out, but she stayed put.

"So, how much of that did you catch?" Her eyes rested on him and he knew he had been caught. Harry poked his head out between the curtains and looked at her.

"All of it, I suppose... So, is that what this is all about? Hermione? Ron fancies Hermione?" Harry got up off the bed and walked towards Ginny.

Ginny nodded in response. "Of course, he won't admit it. Probably never will... He was so angry when he told me, and so was I. It wasn't until I realised that the two of you really had no idea how he felt that I stopped being angry with you. I couldn't be angry with you if you didn't know. I wish there was an easy way out of this, but I don't think there is. I mean, I'm sure you really like Hermione, and it wouldn't be fair to either of you to separate just for my brother's sake. He's a stubborn git, and there's no sense in throwing away a relationship over him. You can't choose who you love, and no one should stop you from being with that person when they feel the same way, and you shouldn't have to hide it. It's not fair to either of you..."

"Ginny?" Harry looked oddly at her as she turned to him. She seemed to have completely lost her train of thought, no longer referring to his situation.

"Oh, sorry..." Ginny blushed softly. "I got a bit carried away. Just, don't do anything stupid. If you keep trying, I'm sure Ron will come around. I know he misses the two of you." She smiled softly before she turned towards the door. After a moment of hesitation, she went back down the stairs to the common room, leaving Harry to his thoughts.

It wasn't until the next day that Harry finally got a chance to talk with Hermione. They had just been let out of Charms for the day and headed to the library for their break. It was what they mostly did since Ron stopped speaking with them. Harry had been distracted most of the day with the thoughts of the evening before. So much had happened, and he wasn't really sure how he felt about anything anymore. Ginny had what seemed to be a secret boyfriend, and Ron fancied Hermione. The strangest thing to him was that he seemed to care more about Ginny's secret than the fact that Ron fancied his girlfriend. The label suddenly felt wrong for Hermione. All of his new knowledge twisted his world, and now nothing seemed right. He couldn't help wondering if he truly cared about Hermione as more than a friend. When he had first kissed her, everything had seemed like it fitted, but now it only seemed odd. He wasn't entirely sure why he felt the way he did, and he wondered if the new perspective offered by Ginny had changed everything. Harry took a seat at a table with Hermione as she started pulling her Potions book out.

"Harry, are you all right? You've been distracted all day," Hermione asked as she sat down.

"I've just had a lot on my mind, I suppose. I had a talk with Ginny last night and found out why Ron's been so angry with us. Really, all we need to do is wait for him to come around. We just have to keep trying to get through to him, that's all. He'll get over it eventually." Harry stared down at his hands, debating on whether to tell Hermione how Ron felt about her. It felt like something he needed to tell her himself, but he knew she would want to know what was wrong.

"Well? What's the problem?" Hermione asked.

"It doesn't really matter. Listen, Hermione... I'm not so sure about this anymore." Harry looked up to see the confusion in her eyes. "It's not that I don't love you, because I do... It's just that... I think it's more of a friendship sort of love. Maybe we both rushed into something we weren't one hundred percent sure on."

Hermione looked down at the table, her face showing no hint of emotion. Harry watched her nervously for a moment, trying to gauge her feelings on the situation, but having no luck. She was simply unreadable. It took a few moments before she finally looked up at him.

"Perhaps... perhaps you're right, Harry. I have to admit, things have felt odd to me. I thought maybe it was just getting used to you being a boyfriend instead of a friend, but I think it's more than that."

Harry couldn't have felt any more relieved than he was at that very moment. Hermione smiled at him softly before turning back to her Potions essay. It had gone much easier than Harry had anticipated, and for that he was grateful. He knew it could have gone a lot worse, and he could have lost one more friend. Now all that was left was to gain Ron's friendship back once again. The only problem was he had no idea where to even start. It wasn't as if he could just go up to Ron and tell him. He knew that wouldn't be the best way to approach it. He considered telling Ginny and letting her pass along the information to Ron, but then the question was how to tell Ginny. There never seemed to be an easy answer to anything. Everything was getting more and more complicated. Harry glanced over at Hermione as she wrote on the long sheet of parchment. He couldn't help wondering how the year would have started out if they hadn't got together at Wandsworth Manor. Deciding he wasn't going to get much of anything done just sitting in the library, he left Hermione to finish her essay while he headed outside to the Quidditch pitch.

As Harry walked towards the pitch, he could hear voices, which got louder as he approached. Before checking it out, Harry ducked into the Gryffindor changing room, retrieved his Firebolt from the locked broom closet and deposited his belongings into his Quidditch locker. When he finally reached the pitch, he saw two figures flying around. One was dressed in blue robes by the goal posts, and the other was in scarlet red robes, flying towards the other. Harry squinted into the sun, trying to make out who it was that was flying. The best he could tell was that neither one of them was from the visiting schools. When the pair met up, they started flying quickly around the pitch, soaring, diving, and swerving around each other as if it were a synchronised dance. Once they had flown out of the sun, Harry could make out the long ginger hair of Ginny Weasley. He still wasn't quite sure who the other one was, but he knew it wouldn't take long to find out. Ginny broke off from her companion and flew up higher, soaring into the sun until she made a sharp turn and started heading towards the ground. Harry watched as she laid flat along her broomstick, sending it and herself hurtling towards the ground, spiralling in a corkscrew motion until she finally pulled up from the dive, just inches from the ground. Ginny was certainly an impressive flyer, and he could easily see why she had been chosen as the captain. Just as suddenly as before, the pair started racing around the pitch once again. Deciding that they weren't planning on stopping anytime soon, Harry finally took a step out onto the green grass, making his presence known. He got onto his broom and kicked off from the ground. It was only then that the pair stopped racing and came to a stop before flying toward Harry. Harry finally could see who it was that was flying in the blue robes.

"Wood, it's good to see you out here again." Harry smiled at his former captain as he shook his hand.

"Aye, it's good to be back. I was just out here giving Ginny some pointers," Oliver explained.

Harry glanced at Ginny, who looked slightly annoyed, but with whom, he couldn't tell.

"She's quite the flyer, and with her skills, I don't see why she couldn't make it onto a professional team if she wanted."

"Could you please stop talking about me as if I wasn't here." Ginny rolled her eyes before she turned on her broom and took off flying again.

Oliver laughed as he watched her fly off. "That Weasley temper... Definitely runs in the family... So, Harry, what are you doing out here? I was told you were in class."

"Actually, we've got a free period. I thought I'd come out here and get some air." Harry glanced up at Ginny flying overhead, practising a handful of manoeuvres.

"I see. Where's your girlfriend? I would have thought she'd be out here with you. Hermione, wasn't it?"

"She's uh... in the library... We're... umm... actually not..." Harry started awkwardly, not really wanting to explain much of anything.

"Ah, I understand. Say no more. Well, why don't you do a lap or two while I finish up with Ginny? She needs to be getting back to lessons soon. I can only keep her for so long." Oliver waved at Ginny to come back over.

Harry decided not to wait for her as he took off towards the end of the pitch to start a few laps as Oliver suggested.

Harry watched as Ginny flew over to Oliver, and the pair started talking. He was too far away to hear what their conversation was about. Ginny glanced up at Harry for a moment before she turned back to Oliver. They exchanged a few words again before she finally flew down and landed, heading towards the changing room.

After Harry and Oliver had spent some time flying around the pitch for a bit, the two of them landed and headed to the locker room to get changed for the rest of the day.

Harry was glad for the chance to catch up with an old friend and the first person to truly introduce him to the game of Quidditch, his favourite sport. They headed out on a walk around the grounds, biding their time until Harry had to head to his next class. They caught up on all the events that had happened over the past years, including events during the Triwizard Tournament. Anything that had been published in the Daily Prophet was decidedly not discussed. It wouldn't have made sense for them to talk about what was already known. As the free period started to wear down to the end, Harry turned to Oliver and asked him something that had been bothering him since he watched Oliver and Ginny flying around the pitch.

"Oliver, I was wondering, won't you get into trouble for helping Ginny? You're a referee, so isn't that a conflict of interest?"

"Actually, Harry, I've stepped down from the referee job. I had spoken to Professor Dumbledore about it, and he agreed it would be for the best. I am simply here as a guest and spectator. Oh, look at the time. You'd best be getting to class. Wouldn't want to get a detention and miss a game," Oliver smiled before they headed off towards the castle.

Harry couldn't help wondering what exactly had made Oliver step down from his position. A few possibilities ran through his head, but nothing seemed to be plausible enough to constitute his actions. Harry knew it he shouldn't dwell on something that was not of great importance, but that had never stopped him before. He also wondered why it was he was working solely with Ginny. Sure, she was the captain of the Hogwarts team, but everyone on the team could benefit from his knowledge. He wondered if Oliver was just trying to make sure he wasn't stepping on Ginny's toes when it came to the team. None of it really made a whole lot of sense.

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7 of 7

In order to help take the edge off the current state of things, the Ministry of Magic has prepared a special surprise for the students at Hogwarts. However, they soon come to realize that the past may repeat itself, especially now that Voldemort is gaining power and not everything is as it seems.

The opening game of the Junior Quidditch World Cup finally arrived at the end of the week. After countless hours of practice, Harry felt the team was ready. Most of the team had gathered in the locker room, ready for the game. Ginny was the only one who seemed particularly anxious and with good reason. As Harry glanced around the locker room, he noticed that one of their team members was missing. Draco Malfoy was nowhere to be seen. Ginny was pacing near the chalkboard when Harry approached her. It was getting close to game time, and they needed to make a decision soon as to whether or not they were going to go on without him. After another moment of indecision, Ginny grabbed Marcus Belby's arm and pulled him aside while Harry listened.

"Marcus, please go retrieve Zabini from the stands. We can't wait for Malfoy any longer."

Harry noted that Ginny looked particularly stressed by this decision. As Malfoy had been at all the team practices, she hadn't trained with any of the alternates.

Marcus wasted little time heading out of the locker room to fetch Blaise Zabini to take Malfoy's place for the game. Ginny continued to pace as they waited for Zabini to join them. Once he was in full gear and everyone was seated, Ginny stood in front of them all.

"This is it. This is what we've all been waiting for. This tournament will determine the best school team. *know* that it is us. We just have to go out there and prove it. The seven of us in this room are the best in the school, and we are going to go out there and show that other team why. Now, let's go out there and win this thing." The team cheered as Ginny finished up her speech. They stood up and headed out of the room toward the pitch. Ginny grabbed Zabini's arm to hold him back for a moment. Harry decided to wait for Ginny and stood where he would be able to overhear their conversation.

"Do you've any idea where Malfoy is?" Ginny did not look pleased.

"No, I don't. I haven't seen him all morning."

"Alright. I hope you're familiar with all of the plays. I want to decimate this team. Also, be at the next practice. You'll be replacing Malfoy until he decides to smarten up, if at all." Zabini nodded to Ginny and left to join the rest of the team waiting to start. Ginny nodded at Harry as they joined up with the team as well. Once everyone was ready, the players mounted their brooms and waited to be introduced.

"Welcome, everyone, to the first Junior Quidditch World Cup," the familiar voice of Oliver Wood announced. "The first match up is between Hogwarts and Salem. Without further ado, please kindly welcome the Salem ladies - Washington! Willows! Carr! Evans! Kennedy! Jones! aaannd ANDERSON!"

Harry could barely see, but he caught a glimpse of a few players on the other team flying around the pitch with pale violet Quidditch robes on. Knowing they were next, Harry prepared himself to fly out onto the field. A rush of excitement surged through him as Oliver spoke.

"And now, welcome the Hogwarts team - Weasley! Weasley! Smith! Belby! Robins! Zabini! aaannd POTTER!"

Harry kicked off from the ground and took off onto the pitch as his name was announced. The crowd cheered loudly before everyone took their places. Harry watched as Viktor Krum carried the chest of equipment to the centre of the field.

"And, as special referee to the opening game, please welcome Bulgarian Seeker, Viktor Krum!"

The cheers started up again as Krum set the chest down in the middle of the field. Both Ginny and the captain of the Salem team moved towards each other and shook hands before taking their rightful places on the field. Once Krum was sure everyone was ready, he went over the game rules quickly before releasing the Bludgers and Snitch. He then picked up the Quaffle and threw it into the air to start the game. Harry immediately started searching for the Snitch, mostly ignoring the rest of the players. Now that he no longer had to worry about captain duties, he concentrated fully on finding the ball that would win them the game.

"And it's Weasley with the Quaffle, darting quickly between the Salem Chasers to pass to Robins. Robins passes to Zabini. Zabini passes to Weasley, and Weasley scores the first goal of the game for the Hogwarts team. Washington passes to Willows who flies quickly towards the Hogwarts hoops. Willows passes to Carr. Carr passes to Willows. Willows passes to Kenne - NO! The Quaffle is intercepted by Robins."

Harry glanced over at the Chasers for a moment before turning back to his search for the Snitch. He was rather impressed with Ginny's eye for talent. She, Demelza, and Zabini were working well together. The crowd was cheering loudly for the Hogwarts team as they scored a second goal. Harry was momentarily distracted as he watched his team's Chasers zooming around the other players on the field. He could see the determination in Ginny's eyes as she snatched the Quaffle from one of the other team's Chasers. She passed the Quaffle to Zabini, who then performed a flawless Porskoff Ploy, passing the Quaffle back to Ginny. She rocketed towards the goal with the Quaffle tucked securely under her arm. Harry shook his head as he realised he should have been searching for the Snitch. His eyes went back to scanning the pitch.

"Weasley shoots, but it's saved by Washington. Washington passes to Kennedy. Kennedy passes to Willows - Carr - Willows - Kennedy - scores! Ten points to Salem."

A flash of gold caught Harry's eye as he floated above the game. He focused on the quickly moving object and smiled as he turned and sped towards it. He could hear the wind whistling past his ears. Suddenly, he felt someone at his side and glanced over to see the Anderson girl right next to him. He elbowed her away but she hit him back. They continued to push at each other until both of them had lost sight of the Snitch.

"Weasley passes to Weasley - Robins - Weasley - Zabini - Weasley - Zabini! Zabini scores! The score is now Thirty - Ten for Hogwarts. The Salem team is really trying their best to stop Hogwarts from scoring, but the Hogwarts Chasers are just too much for the Salem girls. Carr with the Quaffle passes to Kennedy - Willows. Nice save by Weasley! Excellent execution of the Starfish and Stick move."

It didn't take much longer for Hogwarts to score two more goals while Salem scored only one. Harry searched for the Snitch the entire time, but still hadn't spotted it again. Anderson had given up looking herself in order to mark Harry. The Snitch seemed to be particularly elusive in the match today. Harry was thankful that at least the Chasers seemed to be having fairly good luck. All of a sudden, Harry saw it, just out of the corner of his eye. He continued to fly around, keeping the Snitch in his sights as he pretended to be looking for it. As soon as the Snitch started to move quickly towards the ground, Harry broke into a dive and headed towards it. It took a moment for Anderson to realise what was happening. She quickly turned into the dive and started to catch up with Harry. He reached out as he started to get closer to the Snitch. He then felt someone slam into him hard, and he realised that Anderson had caught up to him and was right at his side. They both dove down towards the Snitch. Harry's broom was a little faster, but the ground was quickly approaching. Anderson looked at Harry with a bit of worry. The Snitch kept flying down. Suddenly, Anderson pulled up out of the dive, not wanting to crash into the ground. It wasn't long before Harry pulled out of the dive himself, nearly level with the ground as he sped towards the elusive Snitch. Harry reached out, urging his broom to go a little faster as he leaned against the handle. As soon as he felt the cold metal, he clasped his hand around it and slipped off his broom onto the ground below. He grinned as he held the Snitch in his hand.

"Potter has caught the Snitch! One hundred and fifty points to Hogwarts! Hogwarts wins!"

The crowd cheered loudly and started heading out onto the pitch to celebrate. The rest of his team landed and Ginny, Demelza and Ron ran towards him and hoisted him up into the air. Harry continued to hold the Snitch high in the air as the team celebrated. They had won the first game and were well on their way to winning the entire tournament. In a show of respect, Harry watched as Ginny slipped away from the crowd to shake the other team's captain's hand. He smiled at her proudly when she wasn't looking. Harry was finally let down as the crowd started to disperse, no doubt going to celebrate in their own common rooms. Harry continued to watch Ginny through the crowd. She smiled into the warm sunlight with a gleam of satisfaction. He realised that she had proven herself to anyone who doubted she could do the job she was given. She had pulled together the best team possible. No one would question her now. He watched as a Gryffindor girl in Ginny's year took her hand and started leading her towards the changing rooms, talking to her about something. The girl pushed Ginny into the changing room, sending a clear message to hurry up. Deciding that it was best, Harry called for the rest of the team to change and head back to the dormitories for continuing celebration.

By the time Harry had finally gotten a chance to shower and change, the rest of the team had already left back to their common rooms to continue celebrating the win. He fixed his tie before he headed back up to the castle. As he walked towards the front doors, he happened to glance over towards the Forbidden Forest. Standing at the very edge of the forest was none other than the missing Quidditch player himself, Draco Malfoy. However, he wasn't alone. Harry squinted his eyes as he tried to make out who was with Malfoy. As the other boy turned towards the castle, Harry immediately recognized him as Durmstrang captain, Mark Ferrars. The two of them were speaking to each other, and even from where he stood, Harry could tell the conversation was not meant to be overheard. Not wanting to be spotted, Harry headed inside the castle and tried to see if they could be watched from inside. Unfortunately, they just happened to be in the right spot as any view from the Entrance Hall made it impossible to see them both. The only thing that made Harry leave from his spot was the knowledge that everyone was waiting for him in the Gryffindor common room.

Harry walked into the common room to the sight of a few students with instruments including spoons, bagpipes, and a fiddle. He wasn't sure where they had gotten them, but decided not to question it. There was a party going on. There were students dancing in the middle of the common room, furniture having been banished, perhaps even shrunk to make room. Among those dancing was Ginny Weasley, being held closely by Seamus Finnigan as they danced to the upbeat Celtic music being played. No one seemed to know any proper steps to the dance and were just dancing and hopping around in circles, however, it seemed to fit. Harry spied Oliver and Charlie sitting in a corner, laughing and watching the couples dance around the floor. He managed to sneak by the dancers without getting in the way and took a seat with them at the table.

"Your sister sure has that Weasley spirit!" Oliver laughed as he watched Ginny and Seamus dancing around. "That one is surely going to be a handful for anyone."

Harry turned his gaze back to Ginny who had linked arms with Seamus and spun around in a circle before he pulled her close again. They danced around, seeming to have more knowledge of the dance, but Harry assumed that was Seamus's doing, having an Irish background. As the song ended, the pair parted ways and Ginny started towards Harry's table. She grabbed Oliver's hand and pulled him up onto the dance floor. She smiled at him as she pulled him close, and they spoke for a moment before they started dancing to the song that was playing. Harry turned his eyes away until they landed on Ron across the room. He saw Lavender Brown perched on his lap, leaning back against him with a wicked smile. He seemed too engrossed in the girl to notice that his younger sister was being passed around by the men at the party as a dance partner. She didn't seem to mind so Harry couldn't figure out why it bothered him so much. Ginny was laughing along with Oliver as they hopped, skipped and danced around the floor with the other pairs.

A butterbeer appeared in front of Harry, and when he looked up, he saw Hermione smiling at him sweetly. She took a seat in Oliver's vacated chair to watch the festivities. Harry took a swig of the drink as he eyed Ginny as she was being spun around the makeshift dance floor by Oliver Wood. Though no one had a clue what they were doing, they all looked like they did. Perhaps it was the spirit of the festivities that brought out the cheerfulness in them all. They had won a major Quidditch game and were well on their way to proving that Hogwarts had the best Quidditch players in the world. There seemed to be nothing to bring down any of their moods that night, Ginny in particular. She again switched partners as Oliver went off to dance with Parvati Patil, ending up with Seamus again. She squealed a little bit as Seamus swung her around sharply for a moment, and they danced towards the other side of the room, out of Harry's sight.

The party lasted late into the night, until finally Professor McGonagall had to step in and break it up. None of them had classes the next day, but according to Professor McGonagall, that was no reason not to get a good night's sleep. Charlie had slipped away earlier, but Oliver was still around. He had taken up in Charlie's chair when he had left. Slowly, Gryffindors headed to their dorm rooms, the younger students leaving first. Once most of Gryffindor had filtered up to their rooms, Oliver said goodnight to Harry before he slipped out of the common room to head to his accommodations in the castle. Dean, Seamus, and Ginny were the last to leave after they had put all of the furniture right again. Harry watched as they too left to their dormitory rooms for the night, but he stayed seated at the table. Once he was sure no one would be returning Harry moved to the couch by the fireplace. He needed time to think in peace. There was so much going on at the moment and he needed time to figure it all out. First, there was Ginny and her secret boyfriend. There were so many people it could have been. The only people Harry could think to rule out were Dean Thomas and Ron, for obvious reasons. He assumed it was a Gryffindor, given the location of their secret tryst he had stumbled upon. Not many students outside of Gryffindor came up to the seventh floor. But then, there was the mysterious circumstances surrounding Malfoy. He hadn't shown up to the Quidditch game that day, and Harry had never known him to miss playing a Quidditch game. Also, he spotted Malfoy talking to Ferrars later on just outside of the Forbidden Forest, and he had a feeling they were up to something.

On top of all this, he and Ron still hadn't made up. When Harry had gone to tell Ron about his break up with Hermione, he had walked in on Ron having a good snog with Lavender. He knew better than to interrupt and had simply walked away without sharing any news with Ron. He still hadn't had the chance to talk to Ron since then. He was his best friend and he wanted to make amends as soon as he could.

Harry could hear the sound of someone's bare feet against the floor, and his eyes glanced over towards the two sets of stairs. Through the dim light of the fading fire, Harry could make out a feminine silhouette coming down from the staircase leading to the girls' dormitories. He watched silently as she walked over to a table across the room and picked something out. He smiled softly as the dying flames caused the red strands of the girl's hair to seemingly glow warmly. She turned around to head back upstairs until her eyes caught sight of Harry still sitting where he had been all night.

"Harry! What are you doing down here? You should be in bed," Ginny whispered loudly. Instead of going back upstairs, she walked slowly over to him. "We have practice in the morning. You should get some sleep."

"I can't... sleep... There's just so much..."

Ginny nodded softly as she took a seat beside him. "Yeah. I couldn't sleep either. As much as I am enjoying all this, it really is a pathetic waste of time. I mean, he's out

there, just waiting for the right opportunity, and still, the Ministry ignores all the warning signs and creates this bloody farce to distract us all. I don't think this tournament is going to have a winner. Something's going to happen. I can feel it. He's out there, biding his time."

Harry simply nodded before pulling Ginny close, giving her an affectionate, reassuring hug. He wasn't sure what to say to her to ease the weariness he could read in her expression. He wasn't even sure how to ease his own weariness. They sat there, holding each other in silence for what seemed like hours, but could have been only a few seconds.

"Hermione and I; we broke up." Harry wasn't sure what made him say it. It was a random thing to say in a conversation that had nothing to do with his relationship Hermione, but he felt he had to tell Ginny.

"I know. Oliver told me." Ginny paused for a moment before continuing. "You didn't do it for my stupid brother, did you?"

"Err, no. I just realised... she wasn't the one I truly wanted."

"And who is it that you want?" Ginny looked up at Harry with a bit of wonder and mischievousness as she pulled away. Harry took a moment to take her in while trying to decide how to answer her question. He wasn't sure there was a 'one' yet, but a fluttering feeling in his stomach as he looked at her made him wonder.

"I don't know quite yet. I'm sure she's out there. I'm just not sure who she is yet."

Ginny seemed fairly satisfied with his answer as she smiled at him. "Well, I've no doubt that you'll find her. Who knows? Maybe she's right under your nose, and you just don't know it yet." Ginny got up from the couch and walked over to the stairs. "Goodnight, Harry."