

Changes

by del

Harry defeats Voldemort and Ginny pays him a visit.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 1

Harry defeats Voldemort and Ginny pays him a visit.

Harry made a strangled noise as his back slammed into the rough bark of a towering oak tree. Those vicious, flaming red eyes were inches from his, boring into him like they could see straight into his soul. A mixture of sweat, dirt, and blood covered his face, which was pinched up in effort and concentration. His palms were pushed hard into the bony chest of Voldemort and he was shoving, but it wasn't doing any good.

There was screaming all around him, screams that he would never forget as long he lived, screams that wrenched his heart. Lightning lit up the sky, illuminating everything, and for a moment he caught a glimpse of Hermione rushing toward him. Her obvious hysteria was tainted with a fierce protectiveness. Before Harry could shout at her to get away, she was on them, shouting curses at Voldemort in a shrill, panicked voice.

A cold ripple of fear raced down his spine and he dropped to the ground, hands scrambling over the muddy surface for his wand, but the rain and wind made it almost impossible to see through his fogged up glasses. The gash down his cheek pulsating strangely warm blood down his neck and chest didn't help matters too much.

Finally, his fingers coiled around his wand and he swiveled back around, but all that greeted him was a bloodcurdling shriek and the sight of Hermione's body crumpling to the ground.

Harry sat straight up in bed, gasping frantically for air and gripping the starch sheets between his fingers tightly. Hermione. Hermione was dead. She was dead and he was having severe nightmares about it. He squeezed his eyes shut and fell back against the hospital bed.

It took him a moment to realize that there were people in the room and that their gazes were all firmly fixed on him. Everyone seemed hesitant to speak, and he couldn't blame the lot of them. His face was cold and wet; and, when he reached up to wipe his visage, he realized he was sweating.

"Go away," he croaked, rolling over onto his side away from them. He heard uncomfortable shifting and then a heavy, tired sigh.

The voice that spoke startled him thoroughly, "Harry."

"Ron. Where is Ron? Is Ron all right?" he asked quickly, but he didn't roll over to face them.

The Weasleys the remaining Weasleys were gathered around his bed. Harry's injuries had been far worse than any of them had endured, except those who were killed. They slipped into his room as they were healed. So far, they had waited days, and there hadn't been any sign of a recovery. Only a weak pulse and sleep, in which Harry twitched and screamed randomly. The staff of talented Healers was working on him diligently.

Harry looked so much smaller and insignificant now. The full weight of his burden was palpable for all to see. A boy had been chosen to do something that was seemingly impossible. It had damned all of the people he learned to call *family* in the process.

"Ron is..."

Harry curled his body into the fetal position and buried his face in his arms. His lips moved, but no words came out, merely a garble of choked noises. Hot tears rolled down his face, streaking the cold sweat and making him shiver violently.

"We're here, Harry."

Another week passed before Harry would actually speak to anyone. Even then he would only speak to Mrs. Weasley, and he would only do that in private. She cooed to him and stroked his hair as he sobbed into her shoulder. She rocked him and held him tightly when he got hysterical and had to be sedated.

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Harry shared a flat with Ron and Hermione, but they weren't ever coming home again. This hit him square in the chest when he was finally released from St. Mungo's, when he was finally stable enough to be left alone, when he was stable enough to take care of himself again.

There were still lingering effects, but all of them were controllable, and he could feel them coming. The seizures didn't hurt very badly, and the migraines would always haunt him.

The familiar scent of Hermione's horrible cooking and Ron's dirty laundry washed over him when he opened the door and stepped inside. Instantly, tears sprang to his eyes and he released a long and shaky breath.

It had been exactly two weeks to the day since he had killed Voldemort. Two weeks, he reasoned, wasn't nearly enough time to get over the most severe emotional blow he had ever felt.

The Weasleys all tried to escort him home, but he wouldn't allow it. He didn't want them to see that Ron and Hermione had been sharing a room, or that Ron didn't clean up after himself, or that Hermione left parchment and quills all over the living room. It was silly, but Harry didn't want them to know because Ron and Hermione never wanted them to know. They had been so paranoid about living on their own for the first time.

Blinking tears back furiously, Harry looked around the living room and adjoined kitchen. Not a thing had changed since the last time they had all three been there.

Harry didn't feel as confident or as strong as he once had, not now that Ron and Hermione were gone. They had always been there; always backed him up, always supported him. Nothing felt the same now, and it never would again. It was a bleak outlook, but Harry couldn't shake it. He felt as if his life had been stolen right out from under him, more so now that Ron and Hermione had been killed.

He reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to stop the oncoming headache. He bent down and grabbed the King off of Ron's chessboard. An unfinished game was still plotted, and Harry didn't notice the annoyed looking chessmen. Hermione's favorite novel was haphazardly placed on the coffee table, and he grabbed that up, too.

Holding both items in one hand, he went into the kitchen and rifled through the cabinets until he found a tumbler and Ron's firewhiskey. He was going to drown his sorrows out.

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"Harry, open this door!"

Harry stared up at his white ceiling, trying to ignore the loud, persistent banging on his door.

"Harry Potter, open this door right this second!"

This wasn't the first time Harry had ignored someone knocking on his door. He knew it was selfish, but he didn't feel like visiting with any of the Weasleys. Or Tonks. Not that he had to worry about Remus stopping by, not since Fenrir murdered him. This thought made Harry groan and roll over onto his side.

"Harry bloody Potter! I'm not afraid to blast this door down!"

A loud shout and an even louder crash later, and Harry kicked the blankets away from him with bodily force, rocking the entire bed. He listened to the footsteps and sighed irritably when he heard them getting closer.

Harry's flat was a wreck. There were newspapers strewn all over the living room and the floor of the hallway. All of which had been torn apart page by page. That wasn't even the worst of it. The stench was foul and brought tears to her eyes. She covered her nose and mouth with her hand.

She drew her wand and cast a few cleaning spells, righting the place as went to the best of her ability given the fact that she wasn't going to spend a lot of time on it. Not right now, anyway.

"Harry," she said quietly, poking her head into his bedroom. Her tone didn't at all suggest that she had just been pounding on his door and threatening him. "Harry, are you quite all right?"

His dry laughter made her cringe.

"At least you're alive."

"Yes, because this life is worth living."

"Don't be melodramatic," she said, pointing her wand around the room as she attempted to charm it clean.

"Ginny," he said tiredly. "Get out."

Ginny licked her lips, biting down on the bottom one. She was worried about him. They had suffered a terrible loss, but slowly they were mending, moving on with their lives. Harry was the only one stuck, unable to stop himself from the downward spiral. "Ok, I'll get out. Come with me for a walk."

"No."

"Flying. Let's go flying, Harry," she tried, sounding only a fraction of the desperation that she felt. "It's a beautiful day outside. The sun is shining and the clouds are beautiful. You should see th..."

"I told you to ge...CLOSE THAT!" He brought his hands up to shield his eyes from the sunlight that Ginny let in when she flung back the dark curtains.

"See the clouds," she continued as if he hadn't interrupted. "They're fluffy. We can go to the park and watch the kids play. You know, get some fresh air and..."

Harry was standing and towering over her before she realized he had even pulled his hands away from his face.

"Harry..." she breathed. His face was gaunt and pale. There was a new scar on his face. It was deep, freshly healed, and ran in a perfectly vertical line down his cheek. She reached up as though she were going to touch it, but Harry practically snarled at her. His hair was more disheveled than usual, giving him the look of a maniac. The look in

his eyes didn't bode well for her.

"Get out," he repeated in a forced calm voice.

"Just... just listen to me."

The muscle in his jaw worked frantically. He was counting to ten in his head, something Hermione had said would calm him down. It wasn't working. His nostrils flared angrily and he clenched his fists at his sides. "Do you have to come over here and be so bloody nosy? Do you have to prance around here as if everything is *quite all right*?" he snapped.

Ginny's eyes widened. "Harry?" she asked as if this wasn't the Harry she knew at all. And it wasn't.

"I want to be alone. I want you to get out of *my* flat and I don't want you to come back until I come to the Burrow. Do you understand that or is your brain *that* insufficient? Would you like me to write it down so you don't forget?"

The hurt in Ginny's eyes was prominent. She didn't try to hide it. It had only been a week since he was released from St. Mungo's. Perhaps she was silly for thinking that he would want to have company so soon. After all, he had ignored her mother and Tonks. What made her so special? She bit the inside of her cheek hard. Her lips parted and she moved them wordless for a few seconds before any words came out. "I'll... just... let myself out..."

"Repair the damn door on your way out, too."

Ginny's facial expression changed. It wasn't soft and caring anymore. Now it was indignant and almost angry. She was hurt and now she was insulted. Did he think he could just order her around? "Excuse me?"

"Do I have to repeat everything I say, because if I do this could be a long and tiring conversation, and I'm not entirely sure I'm up to it at the moment." Harry crossed his arms over his chest.

"Of course you're not up to it," she said, crossing her arms over her chest and cocking her hip out. Harry had always been incredibly selfish, but this was taking it too far. He was acting as though she and her family hadn't suffered loss just as intense as his. "Because you're never up to moving on, are you? You always want to stay stuck in the pa..."

"Ginny, get the bloody hell out of my house before I remove you from it."

"Make me," she said, lifting her chin.

"Do you have any idea how thoughtless you're being right this very moment?" asked Harry incredulously.

"I'm being thoughtless? What about you?"

"Oh, I have plenty of thoughts," said Harry, nodding at her matter-of-factly. His tone was mocking and condescending. "Most of them are revolving around you. You and leaving."

"I'm not leaving, Harry. You can't stay holed up in here forever. You have to get out, keep living, your life isn't over. Stop being a selfish pra..."

Something inside Harry snapped. Ginny Weasley broke into his house and then proceeded to tell him how to live his life. Harry earned the right to dictate his own life. It was his and he intended on doing whatever he wanted with it. It had taken him years to earn the right to live freely. He'd paid dearly for it.

He reached out and backhanded Ginny. Hard.

Things started to happen in slow motion.

Ginny's head flew to one side. Harry's eyes widened dramatically. Ginny's face pinched up in shock, in pain. Her hand flew to her reddened cheek. Her mouth hung open stupidly. Harry took a step back from her. Ginny gawked at him in disbelief.

It felt like all of the oxygen had been sucked out of the room. Harry's chest started to constrict. He looked down at his hand as though he had never seen it before. He turned his terrified gaze back to her, eyes still wide, filling rapidly with apology. "Ginny..." he whispered. "Ginny, I'm so sorry."

"You hit me," she said breathlessly. Her hair looked oddly tousled and her face was painted with mistrust. Never would she have thought Harry would hit her. Never would she have thought he would say such rude and awful things to her. The lump in her chest began to expand, painfully so, until she felt like she was going to cry. She felt betrayed, injured, but she didn't show it outwardly.

Harry's eyes were darting back and forth between hers. "Ginny, Ginny," he said softly, looking hesitant, but ultimately like he wanted to touch her. She took a step back from him and he hung his head in shame. The heavy weight of guilt began to pool in his stomach, adding even more sorrow to that he was already feeling. He had just hit one of the only people he had left. And all she was trying to do was check on him.

"Don't touch me. Stay away from me," she hissed, shoving past him and rushing out of the room, still holding her cheek. Harry barely caught a glimpse of tears brimming her eyes. He felt a jab of something unpleasant in his stomach. Guilt.

"Ginny, wait!" he called after her, but it was no use. He heard her footsteps pound against the fallen door, and a moment later, she'd fixed it and disappeared.