

## CHAPTER 1

This story is from Hermione and Harry's perspective. It will mostly rotate back and forth but sometimes I may have one perspective back to back and Hermione may have more chaps than Harry by the end. Just some information for you all. :)

Just so everyone knows: NO H/HR IN THIS STORY AT ALL! NOTHING WILL EVER HAPPEN BETWEEN HARRY AND HERMIONE IN THIS STORY - NOTHING! LOL, SO, DON'T WORRY...THEY ARE FRIENDS...AND STAY FRIENDS...NO TOUCHING, KISSING, 'FAKE RELATIONSHIP', OR 'HIDDEN FEELINGS' OR ANYTHING AT ALL!

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter

She giggled again but this time it was more high-pitched. The sound seemed to echo around the Great Hall, and Hermione's appetite decreased more and more by the minute. The noise sounded like the slaughtering of a baby mandrake to her.

Hermione looked up. Lavender was sitting across from her and had her head on Ron's shoulder. She was staring up at him while tickling his side.

Ron jumped slightly once again, touching her hand. "Come on, Lavender," he said softly with a smile.

Lavender gave another horrible giggle. "Sorry, Won."

Hermione wanted to throw something at her or at least correct her. His name was Ron - not 'Won', 'Won Won', 'Wonnies', or any other ridiculous name the girl had come up with over the past couple of months.

Hermione peered down at her food, not really wanting to eat anything. Yes, her toast and eggs looked delicious, but it couldn't cure her hunger. She looked up again.

Completely ignoring Lavender, Hermione concentrated on Ron: he was holding his spoon to his mouth while flipping through a Quidditch magazine. As he read, his blue eyes were so focused and alive. She smiled.

Ron loved Quidditch; Hermione loved how much it meant to him. She also appreciated what it was doing to his body. While Ron Weasley was still very tall and lanky, his shoulders were broadening and his body was becoming more firm and toned. She had always found Ron attractive, but now he was losing his boyish figure and was morphing into a man who Hermione thought was both very sexy and enticing.

"You know, if you stare for too long, then your eyes will get stuck that way," Harry mumbled from next to her.

Hermione quickly looked away from Ron. "Hush, Harry."

He chuckled, rolling his extremely green eyes. "What?" he whispered. "You're staring at him like a starving woman."

Hermione sighed and said nothing; Harry had no idea how hungry she truly was.

Ron closed his magazine. "I reckon we're gonna head off. I forgot something in the Common Room anyway." He stood up and Lavender speedily joined him.

"See you in class," Harry said.

Ron nodded then walked off with Lavender closely beside him. Hermione rubbed her eyes, exhaling deeply. Lavender was like Ron's shadow and didn't move unless her boyfriend was moving as well.

"Do you want to go?" Harry asked.

"Might as well," Hermione said, almost in defeat. "I'm not hungry anymore."

The pair walked to Potions in complete silence. They both had so much swimming in their heads and had things that needed to be said, but neither possessed the courage to speak their minds.

Hermione and Harry took their usual seats at the front of the classroom. While he hated it, she fancied sitting as close to the front as possible. Professor Slughorn gave them a wink as he came from behind his desk; he always winked at members of his Slug Club.

"Today, we're going to discuss Love Potions," Professor Slughorn said. Hermione heard Harry snort. "Now, who can tell me about this curious type of potion?" Hermione raised her hand. Slughorn smiled brightly at her. "Yes, Ms. Granger?"

"Love Potions are some of the strongest potions in the world, and for that, they are also some of the most dangerous. If not brewed properly, it can leave the drinker in a state of madness." She heard Lavender giggle.

"Very excellent, Ms. Granger. Ten points to Gryffindor," Slughorn said. He rubbed his hands together, pacing the classroom. "It is important to understand that these types of potions are never to be taken lightly. There's a fine line between love and obsession and that is sometimes the consequence of improperly concocted potions."

Parvati raised her hand. "Sir, if these are so dangerous, then why do people make them? Why are we studying them?"

Slughorn grinned. "My dear girl, everyone wants love and wants to be loved by someone - no matter how dangerous it is."

Hermione tapped her quill on the desk. The class was easily becoming the story of her life. She had to tell herself repeatedly all through to Potions to focus on the task at hand and not make connections to what she was creating and her

personal life. When the class period finally ended, Hermione was actually ecstatic to get out of there and away from the potions.

The day dragged on, but by lunch, she was finally hungry enough to eat.

"Slughorn is the biggest twat in the whole bloody world," Ron grumbled as they sat at their table.

"Language, Ronald," Hermione said, sitting across from him, "and you need to get over your frustration already."

"I'm over it," he mumbled. "I just don't like him."

"Well, there are other things for you to think about - like beating Hufflepuff," Ginny said.

Harry smiled at her. "Yeah, I agree."

Hermione mentally laughed. Harry was a bit rich telling her not to stare. He couldn't have been more obvious unless he wrote 'I Love Ginny' on his forehead.

"They won't be a challenge," Ron said. "Hufflepuff lost two of its best players this year."

"It helps that you're on the Gryffindor team, Wonnies," Lavender said, caressing his cheek.

Ron blushed a little. "Cheers."

Lavender giggled, closing the gap between their lips. Hermione felt her stomach turn over. Lavender was all over Ron, again. Her hands were gripping his arms while her tongue thrashed around in his mouth. Hermione hated it. She wanted to turn away, break it up, or pull Lavender off of Ron; however, more than anything else, Hermione wanted to take her place.

It wasn't as if her feelings were new. Hermione had fancied Ron ever since they met, and as the years had progressed, her feelings and attraction intensified. By fourteen, she couldn't do anything around him without burning with excitement and need. Now, at seventeen, it was past fancying - Hermione was in love with Ron. She loved him more than anyone or anything and he had her completely. No one got to her in the way that he did, and no one fired her up in the way that he could. Every time Ron smiled at Hermione, her heart skipped a beat and she felt somewhat lightheaded. He was the only person who truly made her feel things.

In spite of all this, Hermione couldn't tell Ron how she felt. She doubted if he even had feelings for her that went beyond friendship. There was once a time when Hermione had thought that Ron possibly fancied her, but everything had changed the moment he started dating Lavender Brown.

It had happened at the very beginning of the school term. Out of nowhere, Ginny had told her and Harry that she caught the pair

snogging in the Common Room. Hermione didn't believe it at first. Everything about her and Ron had seemed so perfectly matched, yet he'd somehow found his way to Lavender.

Even after two months, Hermione couldn't understand how it had happened or how they were still together. Lavender Brown was decent enough, but she wasn't right for Ron. He needed someone who could teach him things and would challenge him. He needed someone who could make him laugh and feel important - not just use him as a saliva swapper. Yes - Ron needed a girl who was smart and kind with brown hair and brown eyes and

"Hermione," Harry said, tapping her shoulder, "we should get to class, yeah?"

"Oh, right, sorry," she breathed, shaking her head and getting up. She hadn't realized that she had lost focus or that Ron and Lavender were already gone. Hermione looked down at her plate, sighing once more. Maybe she'd finally get a chance to eat at dinner.

Hermione loved Transfiguration. Professor McGonagall was her favorite teacher, and she adored the learning exercises.

"Mione, can you help me?" Ron asked, crinkling up his nose.

She smiled at him; Hermione also loved the class because she got to sit next to Ron.

"You're still not holding your wand correctly, Ron," she said. "You have to be a bit more firm with your grip."

Ron nodded. He held the wand tightly in his hand then moved it in a clockwise direction. "Metimors Mano," he said clearly. The fingers on his left hand began to shrink. "Blimey," he said in what appeared to be shock.

Hermione chuckled gently. On his tall and long body, his now very small hand looked extremely out of place. "See? It's all in the wrist."

Ron wiggled his fingers. "So, I reckon this is what it's like for normal people, eh?"

"Oh, your hands are fine," she rushed. In fact, Hermione thought Ron's hands were perfect. They were the perfect size and fit for her.

Ron smirked, holding up his hand. "Put yours against mine."

Hermione's heart skipped a beat. "O-okay." She licked her lips, pressing her hand to his; her body heated up. Every time her skin touched Ron's, she felt a wild fire blaze inside of her body. Hermione studied their hands. His pale, freckly skin against her more tan and clear complexion looked amazing. She only wished that it was his actual sized hand. Hermione would love to see how her hand fit against his larger one.

"Bloody hell, mine is still bigger," Ron said, wiggling his fingers against hers.

"Yes, I do have rather small hands," Hermione said, moving her fingers back.

"That's not a bad thing," he said with a grin. "I like your hands. They're nice."

Hermione didn't know what to say; all she could do was smile. Ron kept looking at her, and she slowly lost herself. He was incredibly gorgeous: freckles sprinkled his skin everywhere, his lips were full and smooth, and his hair was fiery and hung in his face perfectly. Ron looked so much older and sexier at sixteen, but there was still a hint of mischief and innocence in his features that Hermione had cherished since she was twelve.

Hermione suddenly heard a noise as if someone was choking. She and Ron both turned behind them; Lavender was practically glaring at them. The two immediately dropped their hands, turning back around.

They didn't say much to each other after that.

The end of the school day couldn't have come soon enough. All Hermione wanted to do was read in the library. She had a lot of coursework to complete, and she refused to save it all until the last minute.

She was deep in Arithmancy when Harry came over to her table. "Thought I'd find you here," he said, sitting down.

She looked up from her parchment. "Yes, well, I thought I'd never find you here unless threatened with magic."

He shrugged. "Ron and Lavender are sucking each other dry again andâ€¦! Ginny is in the room with Dean, Seamus, and Neville." He looked away, pretending to clean his glasses.

Hermione bit her lip, feeling Harry's pain. She knew that he couldn't be in the same room with Ginny and Dean for too long because he was in love with Ginny. Hermione had seen Harry's feelings for her grow over the past couple of years, and while Ginny returned his feelings, Harry had simply been too late to discover his own. Ginny was now happy with Dean Thomas and had been since the end of the last school term.

Hermione had to do something for him but she didn't know what. "I've got plenty of books, if you want to study," she offered.

"I may not be having a good day but I'm not that desperate - at least not yet," Harry said. "I just wanted to come see if you were okay. I'm probably going to go outside for a fly."

"Yes, I'm fine. I have a lot of work to do, so this is where I'll be for the night. Go get some fresh air." Hermione gently rubbed his arm.

"All right. I'll see you." He gave her a small grin then walked away.

Hermione spent the next few hours in the library. Schoolwork always kept her mind off everything and everyone; however, as the night pushed on, her eyelids began to droop and focusing became harder to do. Bed would be the best thing for her now.

She walked into the Common Room. Ron was sitting on the floor, writing fiercely.

"What are you still doing up?" Hermione asked.

He looked up at her. "Trying to finish a bit of work."

Most of Hermione's fatigue faded. She sat next to him. "What are you working on?"

"Bloody Potions. I swear Slughorn makes this shit up just to bother me."

"I doubt it's personal, Ron. Do you need any help?"

Ron gave her an incredulous look. "Hermione - I always need help."

She winked at him then moved his essay in front of her. They worked and bickered over the paper for the next hour; Hermione loved it.

When they were alone, it was always intense for her. Ron had no idea what he did to her. His voice was deep, calm, and reached inside her chest; the firelight danced across his pale face, making his crystal eyes glow. He was simply stunning, and she loved and wanted him so badly.

"I don't know why you wait to do your coursework," Hermione said sometime later as they stood up and stretched.

"It's not my fault. I couldn't exactly do it withâ€¦Lavender and allâ€¦" He trailed off, looking away. Hermione didn't speak either. They never really talked about his relationship with Lavender.

Hermione hated the awkwardness that had quickly grown between them. "Well, I can understand how she would be a distraction."

Ron frowned a little. "She's not a distraction. She justâ€¦we didn't feel like studying."

"Fine! I get what you're saying, Ron," she snapped. They went silent again, and she couldn't look at him.

"Well, I'm gonna go to bed," he mumbled. "Thanks for the help."

Hermione nodded, biting her lip again. She didn't watch him walk up the stairs. She sat for a while, wishing that her relationship with Ron wasn't so complicated or that she didn't miss him as

much as she did. Hermione saw Ron every day, but for some reason, she found herself missing him often.

When she opened the door to her room, she heard Lavender's giggle. She was sitting on Parvati's bed.

They looked up at her as she walked in. Hermione tried to look unfazed. "Hello."

"Hi, Hermione. Did you get all your work done?" Parvati asked.

"Yes, I'm finally finished," she answered, taking off her shoes.

Lavender raised an eyebrow, continuing to stare at her. She gave her a look then turned back to Parvati. "Like I was saying, Ron definitely knows how to kiss. The bloke is a genius with his tongue."

"Lavender!" Parvati whined. "I don't need to know all of this!"

Lavender tossed her hair, smiling wickedly. "Oh, he is so good, Patty." She paused then said very clearly, "And his handsâ€¦I love how big and strong they feel against me. They're brilliant!"

Hermione couldn't take it anymore. She got into her bed, yanking the curtains closed. Hermione could hear Lavender giggling; she knew that she was doing it on purpose. The two of them had never technically been friends, but ever since she started dating Ron, Lavender had become a lot more condescending toward her. Ginny said that she was just threatened but Hermione couldn't understand why. Lavender had Ron. All she had were her dreams.

Hermione wanted to do something. She needed to make things right but she didn't know where to start.

Hermione Granger was known to be genius in a lot of ways, but when it came to matters of heart, especially when the heart belonged Ronald Weasley, Hermione had the mental capacity of a teaspoon.

\*\*\*\*Thanks for reading! Review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 2

Thanks you lot for the reviews! They made me very happy! Okay, I will say it again so everyone understands. \*clears throat\* THIS IS NOT A H/HR STORY AND NOTHING WILL EVER HAPPEN BETWEEN THEM! NO FAKE RELATIONSHIP OR HIDDEN FEELINGS OR QUICK KISS OR ANYTHING! THEY WILL FOREVER SEE EACH OTHER AS PLATONIC FRIENDS...AND NO - NOT THE KIND OF FRIENDS WHO SHAG OR ANYTHING. SO NO WORRIES! I HAVE R/HR LITERALLY TATTOOED ON MY BACK (as an otter and dog playing together in a pond). R/HR FOREVER!

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Quidditch was one of the best things that Harry had discovered existed in the wizarding world. So when he was made Quidditch captain for the Gryffindor team, he couldn't have felt happier. There was something incredibly thrilling, yet peaceful, about the sport. There was a sense of-

"MAKE LOADS OF SAVES, WONNIE!" Lavender Brown bellowed. Ron, who had been adjusting the foot hooks on his broom, suddenly turned bright red and closed his eyes.

Harry looked toward the benches. Lavender was standing up, waving madly. "Ron...why is she here?"

"I dunno, Harry," he said with a shrug. "I told her that I had practice today."

"Well, do you mind telling her to save the cheering for later?" Ginny asked. "We're trying to practice."

Harry couldn't help but to smile. Ginny was the feistiest person he had ever met; he loved it.

Ron glared at her. "Fine." He stormed off to where Lavender was sitting. Harry watched with his arms crossed over his chest. He was ready for what he knew was about to happen: Ron said something to her, looking down. Lavender then stomped her foot, saying something as well. Ron merely shrugged. She turned to the team for a moment then tossed her hair. Lavender grabbed her bag and gave Ron a sloppy kiss before stiffly walking away.

The team tried to contain its collective snickers as Ron slumped back over to them.

"Sorted, mate?" Dean asked. Ron rolled his eyes, exhaling deeply.

"She'll survive," Ginny said. "Bloody hell, I'm glad that I'm not like that."

Dean curled an arm around her waist. "Yeah, you're perfect." He looked into her eyes and she stared back, touching the hand that was on her.

Harry felt his blood boil. His wand was in the practice tent so he couldn't hex Dean into a hundred pieces or create some sort of barrier between him and Ginny.

"Okay! Okay! Can we just get started?" Ron asked impatiently with a frown.

"Good idea. Let's warm up," Harry said. He was thankful that he and Ron were best mates. Ron was probably the only person who was as bothered by Ginny and Dean as Harry was. Only, he doubted that it was due to Dean. Ron simply didn't want anyone with his baby sister. It was one of the many obstacles that Harry had to deal with. It was complicated being in love with his best friend's younger sister.



Harry's strategy for the year was centered on endurance. He wanted everyone to be in the best shape possible. Harry made the team practice running, diving, flying at high speeds, and anything else that would make them stronger and faster. They were already doing well, and he wanted his first year as captain to be a success.

While in the air, Harry watched his teammates, concentrating the hardest on Ginny. She zipped around, passing the ball to her fellow Chasers. She was brilliant. Harry didn't want to exaggerate, but he was sure that one day she could enter into a professional league.

Dean zoomed over to Ginny. Once again, irritation built inside of Harry but he had a solution this time. He couldn't keep Dean away from Ginny any other time of the day, but at practice, he had all the power in the world.

Harry flew over to them. "Dean, you need to work on your aim. It's a bit off center."

Dean frowned at him. "Really? I hadn't noticed."

"That's why this is practice and why I'm the captain," Harry said, feeling slightly like a prick. "You're strong but you need to work on your aim. They are some better balls in the tent that you can use. Work that arm out more."

Dean gave him a look. "All right, Harry." He gave Ginny a smile before flying away.

Ginny then turned to Harry and grinned; he tried not to drool like a starving man gazing at a delicious meal. Ginny was gorgeous: her brown eyes were so big and dark, and her thick, bold ginger hair was tied in a long braid.

"What do I need to work on, Captain Potter?" Ginny asked.

Harry knew that she was just teasing, but there was a playful sexiness to her voice that made the broom terribly uncomfortable between his legs. "Nothing at all," he breathed.

Ginny chuckled, raising an eyebrow. "Really? So why do I have to be out here getting all hot and sweaty?" Yes - the broom was getting more and more painful for Harry.

"Well, it wouldn't be fair if I let you skive off, yeah?"

"No, I guess it wouldn't be."

They simply stared at each other. Ginny was the first to look away. "I better get back to it." She flew past him without another word. Harry had to blink several times to regain his focus; Ginny always put his mind in a state.

Practice went smoothly enough, but by the end, Harry was sweaty and completely knackered. He returned to the practice tent and erased the board.

Suddenly, he heard something. It was a moaning sound. He rolled his eyes. Lavender had evidently snuck in and found Ron. Harry walked out of the tent and over to the shed so he could drag Ron away; however, the scene before him caused Harry to freeze mid step.

Ginny was pressed against the door of the shed; Dean was against her. They were snogging ferociously. Ginny's hands were on Dean's shoulders while his roamed all over her stomach and chest.

"Bloody yes, Ginny," Dean groaned.

She moaned, making Harry feel even hotter than he already was.

"Dean," she panted as he sucked on her neck.

Harry couldn't take it. His heart dropped whereas his stomach went into knots. He walked away as quickly and quietly as he could. He didn't stop until he was inside his dorm room.

Luckily, Harry was alone. He tore off his Quidditch robes then sat on his bed. He took off his glasses, rubbing his face roughly. He was incredibly hard and frustrated at the same time. He had to shower and relieve himself of the tension.

Getting dressed afterwards, Harry tried to calm himself, but seeing Ginny and Dean usually always angered him while also making him feel slightly pathetic. Dean was his mate but Ginny meant so much more to him. Harry simply couldn't be happy for them, and it was terribly difficult to watch Dean touch the body that caused Harry to constantly have a weak wrist.

It wasn't just a physical attraction though. Harry knew that he loved Ginny with everything that was inside of him. After saving her during his second year, Harry knew that what he felt for her was special and different from what he had felt for other girls prior; however, he'd always assumed that it was a sister-brother thing. It wasn't until his fifth year, and after the disaster with Cho, that Harry realized his true feelings for her. He had always compared Cho to Ginny and found that Cho didn't measure up. He enjoyed everything about Ginny and had been annoyed that Cho couldn't be more like her. Harry could talk to Ginny so easily. She didn't believe in bullshit, and she was incredibly bold and honest. He loved her bravery and passion.

Harry felt like such an idiot. Ginny had always fancied him, but by the time he had realized what he truly felt, it was too late. After Ginny had announced her new relationship with Dean, Harry knew it was over.

It wasn't right. He wanted Ginny; he was so angry with himself for not taking her like he should have. Everyone thought that he was so brave, but he was too afraid to tell her the truth. Ron being her older brother didn't help matters either. Everything seemed to be working against him, but it couldn't alter his feelings.

Now, Harry had to watch Ginny be happy while he was constantly in a state of confusion and madness. It was a difficult way to live but almost everything in Harry's life came with complication.

He eventually walked downstairs to the Common Room. Hermione was sitting alone on the couch (she was reading, of course). He sat next to her.

"How was practice?" she asked.

"Fine," he said, trying not to think about it too much.

She gave him a look. "Are you sure?"

He gazed at her. She knew him too far well; he couldn't really hide things from her. "Yeah, I'm fine...just...I don't know..."

"Is it about Ginny?" she asked. He turned away from her, slowly nodding. "Harry, I-"

"Why in the bloody hell did you run off?" Ron asked, coming into the room.

"I didn't feel too well," Harry said.

Ron walked over to them, sitting on the floor and bringing in a strong scent of outside. He was still in his Quidditch gear and was rather sweaty. Harry noticed how Hermione began chewing on her lip as she stared at him. He wanted to laugh. He'd never tell her - because he enjoyed having two bollocks between his legs - but she had a lot more in common with Lavender than she realized. Both were obvious and randy when it came to Ron.

"Is it your scar?" Hermione asked.

Harry shook his head, not really knowing what to say.

"It's a good thing that you got sick then. Ginny and Dean were all over each other near the shed," Ron explained with a frown. "I had to break it up, 'course. She got all mouthy with me though while Dean - the wanker - tried to apologize."

Harry grinned at his best mate. He was so lucky that Ron was the way he was: emotional and completely impulsive. Though Harry didn't have nerve to speak his mind about Ginny and Dean, Ron certainly did.

Hermione didn't seem nearly as happy about Ron's actions as he was. "Honestly, Ronald," she said dully, "they've been together for a while now."

"I don't care. I don't want my sister snogging against the equipment shed - or...worse."

"Oh, but letting Lavender grope you in the Great Hall is completely okay?"

Harry mentally groaned. Hermione just had to go there.

Ron blushed fiercely, looking away. "I need to shower." He got up then quickly walked up the stairs.

Hermione covered her face, sighing.

"You know how much that gets to him, right?" Harry asked.

"I don't care!" she snapped. "He's being a hypocrite."

"There's nothing wrong with not wanting you sister to be seen as something she's not," Harry said.

She rolled her eyes. "You're just happy that Ron stopped them. If had been you and Ginny, then you wouldn't be so understanding!"

"And I reckon if it had been you and Ron, then you would be more understanding!" Harry snapped back.

"I would certainly care! Ron deserves more than that! I'd...make sure that it wasn't tasteless like...she does." Hermione's face flushed. She shook her head, looking away.

A pang hit his heart. Harry felt like a prick. "I know you wouldn't," he said in a softer voice. "I'm sorry that I said that. I wouldn't be that way with Ginny either."

Harry and Hermione merely looked at each other. He knew that they were both boggled because they wanted what they couldn't have. Harry was completely aware of Hermione's feelings for Ron, and he reckoned that she knew what he felt for Ginny.

Hermione finally moved her gaze. "I'm going to dinner," she said, getting up. "Are you coming?"

"I'll meet you there," Harry said.

She nodded then walked out of the Common Room. Harry rubbed his hands together, waiting for Ron.

About ten minutes later, Ron came down and sat next to him. "What - did Hermione run out of things to lecture me about?"

"She's just not having a good day," Harry said.

"Then she should just say so and not snap at me like that."

"She does have a point though."

Ron smirked. "Yeah, I know. She always does, but I honestly don't want Ginny to be that way. I know that I can't stop her but still..."

"You don't have to explain it to me, mate," Harry said.

"Good. I don't know why Ginny is so surprised. She's my sister. It does my head in when I see a bloke touching her...like that."

Harry strained a nod in agreement. "You don't think any bloke is good enough?"

Ron shook his head. "Haven't met him yet."

Harry felt another pang; he had to change the subject. "So...how angry was Lavender?"

"Plenty, but I told her that no one is allowed at practice," Ron said. "She was okay with that idea."

Harry frowned. It didn't make sense to him that Ron had to give her a reason at all. "How do you put up with it, mate?"

Ron gave him a look. "What do you mean?"

"Well...Lavender. Doesn't she wear you out?"

Ron ran a hand through his hair, blushing. "Not really. Lavender's just...intense, but she really fancies me, and she thinks that I'm great. Not everyone does, you know. I'm not adored like you."

Harry wanted to roll his eyes. Ron had no idea had adored he truly was. "If you say so," he said. "Do you really fancy her too?"

Ron shifted in his seat uncomfortably. "Of course I do. Why are you asking me this?"

"I don't know. We never really talked about Lavender. I didn't even know that you planned to date her," Harry said.

He rubbed his neck. "I didn't plan it exactly, but I have liked her for...awhile. I just didn't feel the need to say anything. It's not like Ginny told anyone that she fancied Dean. I never thought that she'd get over you."

Harry felt a spike of anger that he couldn't get over. "Yeah, and I guess Hermione never really told us she used to fancy Krum either." He honestly didn't mean that. Harry just wanted to have something on Ron. He had always told Harry that Ginny fancied him but Harry had done nothing with the information.

"That doesn't matter," Ron muttered, lightly punching the couch cushion. "I'm glad the bloke is gone now."

Harry smirked. He wanted to ask why Ron was glad, but the portrait hole opened.

"Wonnies, I've been waiting for you!" Lavender said. "Can we go eat now?" She came over, wrapping her arms around his neck.

Harry instantly felt a wave of annoyance flourish inside of him. Lavender was like an itch to him: she was terribly annoying and never really went away.

"Sure," Ron said with a smile.

As the three of them walked to the Great Hall, Harry tried his best not to feel bothered. He would always support Ron to the best of his ability, even if he didn't quite believe in what he was doing.

Eating at their table was always awkward: Harry and Hermione sat on one side while the Weasleys and their mates sat on the other. Harry attempted not to focus on how Dean kept whispering in Ginny's ear or how her left hand was under the table, probably on his leg. Harry looked to Hermione for support, but of course, she was gazing at Ron.

"So, Hogsmeade is next weekend. I was thinking that we could all go together," Lavender said cheerfully. Harry noticed Hermione's slight eye roll.

"Doesn't sound like a bad idea to me," Dean said.

"I think it's a great idea too, but that's only if it's okay with Ron," Ginny teased.

"You're so bloody clever, Ginny," Ron said, poking her in the arm with his fork.

"Oh, brilliant! All six of us can go - like a triple date!" Lavender said. The table went quite. "What?" she asked, looking around.

"Um, maybe you should rethink your numbers," Ginny said. Harry snorted at her cheek. He loved her so bloody much. Ginny looked at him, smiling. He grinned as well, and for a moment, they simply stared at each other. Harry felt heat expand on his back while his insides jumped about. Her chocolate eyes were so rich and beautiful. She was powerful and so damn sexy in every way.

"What does that mean?" Lavender asked; her voice finally broke Harry and Ginny out of their moment.

"Nothing, babe," Ron said to her. "It's just...you said the six of us."

"But there are six of us."

Hermione gave a heavy sigh. "Lavender, you said triple date, but there are only two couples here. Do you understand the confusion?"

"Yeah, Hermione and Harry are not together," Ron said pointedly.

Ginny nodded. "Of course they're not. That would be a laugh."

Lavender waved a hand, flipping her hair. "Oh, that doesn't matter, Won. They can still come, and they might as well be a couple."

"No, we shouldn't," Harry and Hermione said together.

Lavender's cheeks went pink. "Well, I didn't mean to upset anyone. I was just saying that it might be cute. We could all-"

"- you don't know what you're talking about, Lavender. We can all go but it doesn't have to be a big date between us," Hermione said.

Lavender huffed at her. "Hermione, you don't have to act all bitchy."

"Don't call her a bitch, Lavender," Ron swiftly said.

Lavender gaped at him. "Won Won, did you not hear how she spoke to me?" When he didn't say anything, she pouted, standing up. "Fine. I guess I won't bring up any more ideas since I don't have my facts rights!" She stood up then quickly walked away from the table.

"Don't bother, Ron," Ginny said.

"Shut up, Ginny." Ron stood up then chased after her.

Dean chuckled. "Have I told you how lucky I am, Ginny?" Hermione got up from the table as well. "Blimey, what in the bloody hell is wrong with everyone?" Dean asked.

Dean was gazing at Ginny, but she was looking at Harry. She didn't have to say anything for him to understand.

"I'll go after her," he reassured.

It was never hard to find Hermione when she stormed off. There was an abandoned classroom that she always went to. When Harry walked in, sure enough, she was leaning against the windowpane.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Yes," she breathed.

"Are you sure about that?"

Hermione faced him. She had tears in her eyes. "No, I'm not. Harry, I-I think I hate her. I really think that I hate Lavender." She slid down the wall, sitting on the floor.

Harry sat next to her. "You know...I think I hate Dean sometimes too. I really wish that I could rip his heart out, but I know that I don't really mean it. I don't reckon you hate Lavender either."

"Neither do I," Hermione said, almost regrettably. "I just - urgh! I can't believe that he's with her. I'm so angry and so..."

"Jealous?"

She wiped her eyes. "That's pretty juvenile of me, right?"

He shook his head. "I don't think it is. I actually did see Ginny and Dean after practice. I...wanted it to be me with her." The truth was hard to say; Harry felt unbelievably pathetic. He was relieved when Hermione didn't laugh at him.

"I had a feeling there was more to that story," she said. "I understand how you feel. No matter how tasteless I think it is, I do wish that it was me who Ron groped in the Great Hall."

He smiled. "I reckon I could stomach you and Ron a bit better."

She smiled as well. "And I'd rather it just be the four of us going to Hogsmeade."

"Agreed. Dean and Lavender can bugger themselves."

Hermione laughed a little but tears still escaped her eyes. "Harry, I love Ron. I love him so much."

"I know you do," Harry said, taking her hand. "I love Ginny. I feel so thick for not telling her when I had the chance."

They sat in silence for a while.

"I hate being like this, Harry. It isn't right," she abruptly said, standing up.

"But what can we do?" Harry asked.

"I don't know," she said, pacing. "I just can't stand Lavender's giggling and her calling him 'Wonnie'."

Harry laughed. Hermione was so fired up; there was a fire in her brown eyes. "So let's make her stop," he said.

"What?" Hermione asked.

"Lavender shouldn't be with Ron," he confessed.

"Ginny shouldn't be with Dean," Hermione added.

Harry nodded, feeling some power grow inside him. "Exactly. They should be with us. I can't keep going on like this; I know you can't either."

Hermione looked at him apprehensively for a moment before shaking her head. "No, I can't. Oh, Harry, you're right."

"I have my moments," he cheeked. "So what's the plan?"

"I honestly don't know. There's no book on this," Hermione said. "Maybe getting some sleep should be where we start."

That night in bed, Harry tried his hardest to fall asleep but it was difficult. All he could think about was Ginny and Dean by the shed and what he and Hermione planned to do. He wasn't sure if they would actually do anything or if they were just trying to make each other feel better, but they had a point.



They were the ones who understood the Weasleys the best, and there was simply too much between the four of them to have Ron and Ginny be with other people. Some things just seemed to fit and nothing was more perfect to him than having Ginny snuggled closely against him.

Some 'Chose One' he was. Fighting Death Eaters and Voldemort was one thing, but fighting for the love of his life was something else entirely.

\*\*\*\* Thanks for reading and REVIEW!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 3

Cheers lot for the reviews!

Disclaimer: Potter is not bloody mine

While at The Three Broomsticks, the six of them sipped drinks and ate sandwiches. The atmosphere in the room was, as usual, cheerful and lovely. It was a beautiful Hogsmeade weekend.

Ginny giggled, touching Dean's cheek. He ran his fingers through her long ginger hair, pecking her lips. Hermione turned to Harry. He was staring deliberately into his mug.

"Yes! This will look so pretty with my skirt. Don't you think so, Won?" Lavender asked. She flashed her new purple bracelet in front of his face.

Ron wasn't paying attention. He was staring out the window. The gaze of his blue eyes seemed so far away from their table. Hermione thought that the intense and somewhat distant look in his eyes made him look enchanting. She wondered where Ron was in his head and what he was doing.

"Won Won, are you listening to me?" Lavender asked. She patted his arm.

Ron shook his head, blinking several times. He turned to her. "Yeah, sorry, what did you say?"

Lavender sighed. "I asked if you liked my bracelet. I think it would go great with my skirt."

"Yeah, it's nice," Ron said. Hermione suppressed an eye roll. She hated that Ron had to engage in such dim conversation and give his opinion on things that he had no clue about nor did he care for.

"Oi, do you lot want to head over to the Quidditch shop? I heard that they have a new shipment in," Dean said.

"Yes, let's go," Ron said, quickly getting up.

Lavender remained seated. "Why do we have to go there?"

"Because there's supposed to be some new equipment out," Dean said.

Lavender flipped her hair. "But that doesn't sound like too much fun. Why would girls want to go look at that stuff?"

"Sorry but why wouldn't girls want to go look? Are you saying that girls don't like Quidditch?" Ginny asked.

"No, that can't be it. I mean, you're probably one of the best players in the school," Harry said. Ginny turned away from Lavender, looking at him. She smiled and Hermione could have sworn that her ears went pink.

"I agree, Harry. My babe is quite the star, isn't she?" Dean said to Harry.

"This isn't about Ginny. I mean...yes, she may like Quidditch but what about me and Hermione?" Lavender asked.

"Please - don't bring me into whatever this is, Lavender," Hermione said. "I have no problem with going to the shop. I may not play Quidditch, but I enjoy watching it."

Lavender completely ignored her and turned to Ron. "Wonnie, I don't want to go."

"Lavender," he groaned, "we won't be in there all day, I promise. Just do it for me, please?"

Hearing Ron say the word 'please' must have touched Lavender because her features softened. She rubbed his cheek. "All right. For you, I will." She then gently kissed his lips.

"Let's get out of here, eh?" Harry said, getting up and leading the group out.

Hermione watched as everyone but Lavender rushed to the Quidditch shop. Lavender merely kicked at the ground, pouting like a child.

"You know, Lavender, Ron really enjoys Quidditch," Hermione said.

Lavender turned to her. "I know that, Hermione. It's his favorite sport and has been since he was little." She spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, as if the information was new to Hermione.

All Hermione could do was nod. "Yes, and since you know this, it would probably be for the best if you didn't treat Quidditch like a horrible disease."

"I don't do that," Lavender said. "I'm just not keen on looking at sports rubbish all day when I could be spending time alone with Won." She stepped closer to Hermione. "Wouldn't you agree?"

Hermione felt heat on her neck. She had never really been a violent person, but at the moment, nothing seemed more appealing than slapping her hand against Lavender Brown's face.

"Yes, that's what I thought," Lavender said, stepping back. "Do us both a favor and keep the relationship advice to yourself, yes? I seem to have the upper hand here." With that, she ran up to the group.

Hermione stayed completely still, telling herself not to explode.

Hermione spent the rest of the afternoon fuming, and no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get what Lavender had said out of her mind. Everything about her eyes, tone, and body language just made Hermione want to...

"Are you okay?"

Hermione looked up. Ron was standing right in front of her. "Yes, I'm fine," she quickly said.

He didn't seem convinced. "Oh yeah? Well, I've been watching you for a bit and you don't see okay to me. You've been standing here and staring off with that look on your face."

Hermione gave herself a moment to react to the fact that Ron had been watching her. She touched her ear in a nervous twitch. "What 'look' would that be?"

Ron grinned handsomely, shrugging. "I dunno - like someone threatened to burn down the library or something."

She chuckled, shaking her head. "Oh no, it's nothing that extreme. I just...I guess I haven't been having a really good day."

"Yeah, I know what you mean." He looked away.

Hermione touched his arm. "Are you okay?" Ron turned back to her, causing her to melt a little. His blue eyes were striking, and his lips were incredibly lush. Ron was such a gorgeous bloke; all she wanted to do in the moment was kiss him. "R-Ron, are you okay?" she repeated.

Ron bit his lip, slightly shaking his head. It was barely a head movement, but Hermione was positive that he had shaken his head.

Before she could ask any other questions, Lavender came over. She put a hand on Ron's shoulder. "We're ready if you two are." Her tone was sharp but Hermione didn't care. She kept her focus on Ron.

"I'm ready," he said, turning away from her and smiling at Lavender.

"I guess I am too," Hermione said. She walked away from them and to the door. Harry was peering out of the window. "Do you want to go back?" she asked.

Harry's face was a bit and his expression was vacant of anything. "They want to visit a few more shops," he said, gesturing to Ginny and Dean - they were checking out their merchandise - "But why not? I doubt that she'll even notice if we leave. Come on."

The two slipped out of the shop; Hermione didn't even look back. She didn't want to see Lavender with Ron for another second.

Hermione and Harry walked in silence around the village. There was a lot to say but both were too bitter to speak.

"Today has been shit," Harry said after a prolonged silence.

"I agree. I can't believe this is happening," Hermione added.

Harry turned on a street then walked over to a wire fence that blocked the downward hill. He took off his glasses, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "I'm sorry, Hermione."

"For what?"

Harry put his glasses back on, sighing. "I just feel like I should apologize."

She leaned against the fence. "It's not your fault, Harry. We're both miserable."

"Yeah, but didn't we say that we were going to do something about it?"

"I think you and I both know that it was all talk," she said. "There's nothing that we can do. It's not as if Ron and Ginny are being for date them. They're doing it because...they want to." Hermione did her best to swallow her resentment.

"I mucked up, didn't I? I could've had her, Hermione. I was too stupid," Harry said.

"You weren't stupid, Harry, and at least you had a chance," - she paused - "Ron has never liked me."

"That's rubbish," Harry said. She gave him a curious look. "Ron is a lot of things on the surface," he continued with, "but inside the bloke fancies you. I think he's just intimidated by Krum."

"Krum?" Hermione asked, feeling gobsmacked. "Oh, honestly, he doesn't mean anything to me. I probably should have told Ron that a long time ago."

"Or I could've said something for you. I could have talked to Ron," Harry said.

"And I could've told Ginny to wait just a bit longer. I guess we both had things we 'could have' done." Hermione turned away from him.

"What are you two up to?" a voice asked.

Hermione looked up; Neville and Luna were close by.

"Nothing," Hermione and Harry said together.

Luna smiled. "Where are Ron and Ginny?"

"Don't know. We lost track of them," Harry muttered.

Neville and Luna exchanged glances. It made Hermione grin. Neville and Luna were Hogwarts most interesting couple and probably the sweetest as well. "It's a beautiful day, you shouldn't waste it," Neville said.

"Neville's right. The sun is always shining - you just have to really look beyond the clouds at times," Luna spoke softly.

Neville chuckled, kissing the top of her head. "Have fun you two." He and Luna walked off and down the street.

"Was that supposed to be have some sort of hidden meaning?" Harry asked.

"Knowing Luna, I think it did. She does have a point though," Hermione said.

"And what is that? I reckon I missed it through all of the cryptic," Harry said.

Hermione gave him an intense look. "Harry, do you love Ginny?"

"Is that a serious question, Hermione? Of course I do."

"Do you think she's truly happy with Dean?" Hermione asked.

Harry looked down for a moment. "Even if she is, there's no way that he loves her more than I do."

Hermione knew that Harry's words were the truth. She could both feel and hear his intensity. "Then maybe we really should do something. I love Ron, and there was a time when I thought he had feelings for me too. It seems as if he wants to say something to me sometimes but she keeps him at bay."

"But what can we honestly do, Hermione?" Harry asked.

"I don't know," she said impatiently. "I guess we...have to make them see that we're the ones that they should be with."

"And how do we do that without just telling them? It can go pear-shaped if we do that."

Hermione nodded frantically, searching the ground as if it would provide answers. "I know. I know. Maybe...maybe it would be better...if I talked to Ginny and you talked to Ron. It might be easier that way. Lavender doesn't let me anywhere near Ron these days."

"Yeah, and I can't even look at Dean without wanting to strangle him. What am I supposed to say?" Harry asked.

Hermione was getting frustrated with all of Harry's questions. She didn't have everything figured out yet but the pressure was making her brainstorm at an accelerating rate.

"I don't know, Harry!" she said. "I'm not sure what to do at all. Um, what I think is important is that Ron and Ginny first realize how they really feel about Lavender and Dean. I think Ron is unhappy for some reason. He won't tell me but I know he'll talk to you about it. So try and figure out what's going on; I'll do the same with Ginny."

Harry slowly shook his head. "This sounds a lot harder than you're making it seem."

"I'm not saying this will happen overnight but we have to start somewhere!" Hermione snapped. "Do you have any better ideas?"

Harry shrugged. "No, but what if all this does is confirm how happy they are? Ginny looks really care for Dean."

Hermione touched his shoulder. "Harry, I know that Ginny loves you. Feelings like hers just don't go away."

"Maybe it's Dean that I should get rid of," Harry breathed.

"Yeah, and I can get rid of Lavender," Hermione added.

He smiled at her. "That may not be such a bad idea. She's already mental. You could drive her over the edge."

"Literally sounds good," she cheeked.

Harry laughed, leaning against the fence. "Okay, so, I'll talk to Ron. He should know that...Krum 'accidentally' sent your letters to me. English post can be a bother."

Hermione frowned at him. Harry was smirking his eyes were glowing brightly. After a few moments, things made sense to her. "Yes, I believe it can be a bother. Well, as you know, Padma and I are friends. Sometimes she tells me things...like about how Cho still has a lot to say about you. Maybe I should forward the news to Ginny."

Harry's excitement only seemed to grow at her words. "This is bad, Hermione."

"This is smart," she corrected. "If there's one thing that the Weasley's can't stand, it's competition. We can't let this get us down anymore. What do you think, Harry?"

He merely looked at her in silence for a few moments. "I think...this is the best shot we have right now. I do have to say this though, Hermione, I love you...but as my sister...even as my nagging mother sometimes."

She rolled her eyes. "Well, if you didn't behave like such a child, I wouldn't have to act like your mother. You're like the brother I never had."

"Good because I have no intentions on making them jealous by creating something between you and me."

"Of course. That's past jealousy, Harry - it's simply wrong," Hermione teased. She ruffled his hair.

"Oi, why did you two leave?" Ginny asked as she, Dean, Ron, and Lavender walked over to them.

"We just wanted some air," Harry said.

"I'm actually ready to go back now. I've done enough walking today," Hermione said.

"Me too. I'm hungry," Ron said.

"You just ate, Won Won," Lavender said.

"I have a strong appetite."

"I'm hungry too. Food in the Hall sounds brilliant," Hermione said. He smiled at her and she returned the smile.

Lavender flipped her hair. "Well, let's go then. I don't want my love to starve." She grabbed Ron's hands, leading them back to school. Ginny gave Harry a look but quickly turned and followed as well.

Hermione and Harry lagged in the back.

"So are we sure about this?" Harry asked.

"The sooner 'Won Won' and 'Lav Lav' are over, the better," Hermione whispered.

They gave each other a quick nod in agreement before catching up with the group.

Let the games begin.

\*\*\*\*So, I know the last piece of convo between H/Hr may have seemed a bit much for them but I really wanted to get the point across and a bit of satire is always great, lol. I don't believe in the "touching and snogging for the plan" and then "wow, I actually love you" thing. Anyway, thanks for reading and REVIEW!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 4

Thank you all for the reviews!

Disclaimer: Potter is not and will never be mine

"This seems risky."

"It's not risky as long as we don't get caught."

"It is risky because it's lying."

"Well, it's not like you have real ones."

"Who says that I don't!"

"...Do you?"

"Well...as a matter of fact, I do."

"How many?"

"A fair few."

"Hermione...what exactly went on between you two?"

"Harry, don't make me hurt you! Nothing went on. We wrote each over the summer and then again last year. They were harmless."

"But you still have them-ow!" Harry rubbed his arm and Hermione folded hers. They both sighed and rolled their eyes. They two of them were in the library going over their plan. "Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you," he said, rubbing his arm. "I'm just confused. I'm beginning to think that Ron had every right to feel what he did."

Hermione groaned. "I feel bad enough, okay? We never talked about anything important. It's Viktor Krum. We talked about Quidditch, Quidditch, a bit about me and school, you, Quidditch, Quidditch, and yes my favorite topic, him being the seeker on his Quidditch team."

Harry tried to stifle his laugh. "For fuck sake, Hermione, if it was that awful the why did you bother?"

She felt her face heat. She looked down at her hands. "Because...I knew that he was interested in me. No one has ever really fancied me, Harry."

Harry patted her arm. "You're wrong about that. That's why we're doing this remember?"

She tried her best to return his smile. "I know, but I feel so stupid looking back on it now."

He exhaled deeply. "Tell me about it. Every day I think about all the times that I could have just told her the truth. With everything that goes on, it's hard to find time to..."

"Be normal?" Hermione pitched in.

He looked at her and nodded. "Exactly." Harry looked at the scattered pieces of parchment on the table. "I reckon you should



get those letters. It'll be better if I have them. It's not really lying then, is it?"

"What do you plan to do with them?" she asked.

"Dunno, but i'll have them on my bed. I'll complain about Krum sending them to me instead of you. Should I open them?" Harry asked.

She thought about it. "I don't know. I guess it would be good. Ron will be curious to know what's in them."

Harry's eyes lit up. "I'll make up some rubbish. I can throw in some 'I can't believe' and a few 'that horny bastard.'"

They laughed. She stopped and really considered it. "Are you sure that this isn't wrong? We'll be getting Ron all worked up over nothing."

"Oh, this is brilliant. As soon as he realizes that you and Krum might have something going on, he'll cave. This may take less time than we think," Harry explained. "It's Ginny that I'm concerned about."

"Well, I plan on just talking to her. I'll ask her about how things are going with Dean, and I'll just slip in something about Cho. Maybe you should be there so I can tease you about it," she said.

"I'm just so afraid that she won't care or that she'll have this big, gorgeous smile on her face and just say how happy she is for me," he said. Harry's expression was so lost and anxious. It was strange. The Harry Potter she knew was always brave and determined. It was only in regards to Ginny that he finally let his true vulnerability show. Ginny made Harry more human.

"Harry, I've known about Ginny's feelings for ages. She's putting up a front. She doesn't want to seem weak around you anymore, and can you blame her? She's always been known as your love-sick fan girl. She doesn't want to be that way anymore," Hermione told.

Harry took off his glasses, and put his face in his hands. "I know all this, Hermione. You don't have to remind me." He pulled his hands away. "I fucked up majorly."

She smiled and rubbed his arm. "We're going to fix it. We should probably get back." The two packed up their plans and headed back to the Common Room.

"Oh shit," Harry breathed as he walked in.

As soon as Hermione entered, she realized why he was upset. Ginny and Dean were at the table in front of the fire playing Exploding Snaps. The couple looked up. "Hey, do you want to join us?" Dean asked.

Harry began to shake his head, but Hermione quickly stuck him in the rib. "That would be lovely."

They sat on the floor on the opposite side of Ginny and Dean. She noticed how Harry gazed at Ginny for a moment before collecting his cards. Hermione tapped her fingers on the table. She glanced at Dean and felt a bit guilty. Dean Thomas was a nice bloke, and she never had a problem with him. For a moment she regretted their plans, but she swallowed hard and gave herself a small nod.

"So, have you two been in here long? We didn't see you at dinner," Hermione said.

"Yeah, we weren't really hungry. We wanted to get some rest before Harry starts up practice every bloody day again," Dean cheeked.

"I don't mind it. I want us to be the best that we can be," Ginny defended.

Harry smirked. "Smart words from a real player."

"Oh, I'm a real player. I just miss being able to hold my babes whenever I want to," Dean added. He wrapped his arm around Ginny and kissed her cheek. Hermione frowned. The action reminded her of Lavender. It was then that she found her nerve. "Well, I think Ravenclaw will be pretty tough. I've been talking to Padma, and she says that Cho is really serious about winning this year."

Ginny rolled her eyes. "Please, she's nothing special."

Hermione laughed. "She really has it in for Gryffindor and a certain seeker on the team."

Harry woke up from his sulk and looked at her. For a moment confusion swam in his green orbs but then he said, "Leave it alone, Hermione. I don't want to hear it."

"Why not, Harry? I find it very interesting," Hermione teased. She turned away from him and back to her cards.

Dean grinned. "Wait, what is going on?"

"Nothing is going on," Harry said.

"Nothing is going on with what?" Ginny asked.

Harry didn't look at her. "Please ignore Hermione."

Ginny turned to Hermione. Hermione tried her best to smile. "It's nothing too serious. I just heard that Cho hasn't really dropped her feelings for Harry."

"That's nothing new. Of course she still fancies him." Ginny tucked hair behind her ear and sat a little taller. "She's probably brewing a love spell just for you, Harry," she added.

He dropped his cards. "I think I'm going to go to bed." Hermione opened her mouth, but didn't really know what to say. She watched him stomp up to his room.

"What do you think is up with him?" Dean asked.

"He doesn't like to be teased about Cho. They did end up pretty rough, didn't they?" Ginny explained.

Hermione turned to her. She was smiling at Dean and touching his face. "I think I'm going to head up to bed as well." Instead of going to her room, she went up to the sixth year boy's dorm room. She knocked on the door a couple of times. To her surprise Ron answered. A wave of heat went through her.

Ron took out the sugar quill that was in his mouth. "Hey."

She licked her lips several times. He had on loose maroon pajamas and a tight black Chudley Cannons shirt. She tried to move her eyes, but they were stuck to his body. She was able to drag them up to his face, eventually.

"Um, is Harry in there?" she asked.

Ron folded his arms over his chest and frowned. "You're looking for Harry?"

"Yes, we were studying in the library and he sort of left upset. I want to check on him," she explained.

"Hmm," he said. He took another lick of his quill, and Hermione watched as he dragged his tongue around the candy piece. She wished that the quill was a body part of hers. "He hasn't been back yet."

"Please, Ron, where else would he go?" she asked.

Ron chuckled and opened the door wider. "Look for yourself." Hermione walked into the messy dorm room. There were untidy beds, mess of clothes, papers, and food wrappers on the floor but Harry's bed was empty. Ron was the only person inside. He sat back on his bed. "I told you that he wasn't in here. Maybe he went to another staircase to mope."

Hermione closed the door before sitting on Harry's bed which was right next to Ron's. "That's very sensitive of you, Ron."

"What did I do now?" he asked.

She smiled; his red hair was so fluffy. She figured that he must have recently dried it. Hermione longed to smell his hair and run her fingers through the silky, fiery locks. "Nothing as usual," she breathed with a smile.

He threw a pillow at her. She gawked and grabbed it. She walked over to him. Ron began to laugh, and he held up his hands. "Okay, okay, I'm sorry, please, don't hurt me."

Hermione sighed and lightly hit him on the head. "Fine, I won't stoop to your level this time." She sat on the edge of his bed. Ron sat up and began to suck on his quill again. She couldn't

believe it. All Ron was doing was eating a candy piece. He wasn't even looking at her, but somehow he had her in a trance and her body in a burning fury. She felt her skin damp with sweat and her knickers soak with moisture. Ron Weasley didn't even have to touch her to make her body pulse for him.

"So, no Lavender tonight?" Hermione asked, trying desperately to distract herself.

Ron took the quill out of his mouth and put it on top of the wrapper on his side table. He ran his fingers through his hair. "Can we not talk about her, please?"

A spike of excitement hit her. "Sorry, are there problems?"

He gave her a look. "No, everything is just fine. It's just...we always end up arguing when we talk about her, and I'm in no shape to do that tonight."

"We don't argue every time we talk about her, Ron," Hermione corrected.

He rolled his eyes. "Yes we do, Hermione. Every time her name comes up in conversation, we end up fighting."

"No we don't, and I can't believe you'd say that. I'd like to think that we can talk about it," she snapped.

Ron's face turned red. "Well, we can't, Mione. I mean look at us now. We're already starting to argue."

Hermione opened her mouth again but closed it. Ron was right. She wanted to tell him off a bit more, but it was rare that she got to spend time with him alone so she backed off. Instead, she cleared her throat and laughed. "I guess you're right." She looked around the room. "Where is everyone?"

"Dunno where Harry is. Seamus and Neville are somewhere with Luna and Hannah, I reckon, and Dean is downstairs with Ginny." Ron frowned at the last part. She grinned. He looked adorable with his face crinkly and his freckles coming together.

"Ron, you have to get over that," she said.

He shook his head. "Hermione, I can't get over that git with Ginny."

"Dean isn't a git. You're just angry that she's with someone. Would you be happy if she was with someone else?" Hermione asked.

He rubbed his neck. "Well, it's weird. I thought that she'd get with Harry sometime."

Hermione sat up straighter. "Really? You want Harry to get with Ginny?" Ron gazed at her and grinned beautifully. He laughed. "What?" Hermione asked with a smile.

Ron shook his head. "Nothing it's just...you reminded me of Lavender when you did that. She always gets this look in her eyes when she's excited."

Her smile faded. She turned her head. "Tell Harry that I came by to check on him." She got up from his bed and hurried to the door.

"Wait, what's wrong?" Ron asked, jumping out of bed. He grabbed her arm as she turned the knob.

Hermione closed her eyes. Ron's hand was so big and his soft, warm fingers were holding on to her forearm so tenderly. There was something about Ron's touches that sent fire all through her body. It drove her mad that someone so tall and strong could be so gentle and supple. It felt good, and she didn't want to pull away. She turned back around. "Nothing is wrong. I'm just tired."

Ron gave her a curious look. "You don't have to leave. I'm sure Harry will be back soon."

"This isn't about Harry, Ron," Hermione whispered.

Ron's grip on her arm tightened. He moved closer to her. Hermione had to bite her lip. She wanted to moan. Ron's smell was intoxicating. It was sweet and fresh. His blue eyes were so beautiful, and his lips were teasing her. She could see a bit of green color from the sugar quill on his bottom lip. She wanted to lick it off. She wanted to suck and nibble on his mouth and absorb every bit of his treat. "Then what is it about?" he asked quietly.

Hermione gazed into his face. There was a certain electricity between them. They were so close to each other. Her skin burned where Ron's hand still gripped. It felt so incredible. She loved Ron so much and she needed him so badly. "Hermione," he whispered.

She whimpered a bit. The way he said her name practically dripped in sexual heat. "R-Ron I- ow!"

The door hit her head very hard. Ron let go of her and she jumped out of the way. Harry slowly came from the other side. He raised an eyebrow and looked from her to Ron. "Um...am I interrupting something?"

"Of course not, Harry," Ron said as he quickly went back over to his bed. "She was looking for you."

Hermione nodded frantically. "Yes, um, you left so upset and I was wondering if you were okay."

"Yeah, I wasn't feeling well so I went to sit downstairs," he said.

She exhaled deeply, and ran a hand through her hair. She didn't know why she was shaking. "Well, good, I think I'll just go to bed now." She walked out of the room.

"Hermione, what the hell is going on?" Harry asked from the staircase.

She turned around. "Nothing Harry, honestly. I just came to check on you. Nothing is going on." She didn't give him another word. She swiftly walked to her room. As always Lavender and Parvati were giggling on Lavender's bed.

"I think he's gorgeous, Patty," Lavender said.

"Really? I mean he is a Slytherin," Parvati said with a sigh. She took a piece of her long jet black hair and twisted it in her fingers.

Lavender snatched the piece and quickly began to braid it. "So, who cares? He's not like Malfoy or his goons. Blaise is so much better and quieter than that. What do you think, Hermione?"

Hermione almost dropped her night shirt. It was rare that Lavender said anything to her unless it was condescending. "If you like him Parvati and he likes you, then I don't see why not."

Parvati smiled at her. "Thanks, Hermione."

"Yeah, I mean take me for example. I've fancied Ron for ages and finally I just couldn't take it anymore. Look at us now," Lavender squeaked.

Hermione turned away from them and continued to dress for bed. She settled under the covers and wasn't surprised that Lavender didn't invite her back into the conversation. It didn't matter. She had too much on her mind. She couldn't get Ron's eyes out of her head or the way he smelled. Her arm still tingled where he had held on to her tightly. There was something. There was something about the way he had said her name and the way they were so close that drove Hermione mad.

She put a silencing charm around her bed and double checked to make sure her curtains was nice and tight. Hermione closed her eyes and let her hand travel down her stomach and below her pajamas and knickers. It didn't take long. Thinking about Ron always made her finish within minutes. She pounded her fist against the mattress and cursed herself as the rush of heat came over and settled. She didn't want to have to do this for the rest of her life, but she didn't know how to change.

There was so much confusion.

\*\*\*\*Oh! what could this mean! what's going on? what will happen now! lol, review please and find out! thanks for reading.

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 5

Oh, I love the reviews! Thanks, they keep my writing!

We tap into Harry's mind again in this chap. I want to say this again for the people who keep asking. HARRY AND HERMIONE ARE JUST FRIENDS AND WILL NEVER BE MORE THAN THAT. THEY ARE VERY CLOSE BEST FRIENDS AND LOVE EACH OTHER BUT IT'S LIKE BRO/SIS AND NO NOT THE BRO/SIS RELATIONSHIP WHERE THEY KISS OR SHAG, SO NO WORRIES! TRUST ME; I'D EAT ROAD KILL BEFORE I'D EVER WRITE ANYTHING H/HR, EVEN THOUGH H/HR IS PRETTY MUCH ROAD KILL...ANYWAY... Sorry if you ship H/Hr and are reading this story. I don't mean to insult you but...yeah... still love ya!

Disclaimer: Potter not mine

"Hermione, I'm going to ask you again, what the hell happened?" Harry asked

Hermione shook her head slowly. "Nothing happened, Harry. How many times do I have to say it?"

"Rubbish, I walked in on something," he shot.

She looked at him. Harry actually believed her for a moment. She seemed just as confused as he did. "I don't know, honestly. I got up to leave because of something Ron said and he grabbed my arm and asked me to stay. We just kind of...stared at each other in silence for a bit. It was so strange." A smile suddenly formed on her face. She held her forearm and rubbed it slowly.

"Hmm, yeah, I see now for sure that nothing went on," Harry cheeked.

Her smile faded. "Oh, it's not like we snogged or anything. It was just a moment, but trust me it didn't mean anything to him. He hasn't brought it up since it happened. Has he said anything to you?"

"No, he really hasn't said anything to me all day. He was gone by the time I got up," he explained. He pulled out blades of grass and threw them. He felt so bitter. Last night had been a disaster. Ginny didn't give a damn.

"Enough of this for now. We need to work on the Cho idea," Hermione whispered.

Harry shook his head. "Don't bother. I quit."

"You quit what?" Hermione asked.

He didn't turn to her. "This plan. I don't want to do it anymore. It doesn't matter."

"Of course it matters, Harry. If you want Ginny, then it matters," she said.

He finally turned to her. "I doesn't matter if I want her. She doesn't want me."

"Oh, Harry that's not--"

"Will you just stop it? She doesn't want me okay? It's not like with you and Ron. Ginny and I don't have moments. Dean isn't a complete nutter like Lavender is. You haven't hurt Ron the way I've hurt Ginny." He stopped and shook his head in frustration. "She's happy with him. I'm just her friend. Gods, I now know how she felt. There's like this burning ache I have and it won't go away. She loved me once, and I made her stop because I was too scared and too proud to admit that I needed her too." He ignored the sadness in his chest.

He learned years ago to toughen up. He learned how to be strong and how to swallow emotion in order to get the job done. He had to do it to survive, but now it was all coming undone. Ginny always made his exterior wall crumble. He promised himself that no one would ever find his most tender spots, but Harry would gladly show Ginny every single one. He trusted her with his weakness. Ginevra Weasley was the only person he trusted enough to.

"Oh, Harry, I'm so sorry," Hermione whispered. She pulled him into a hug. Harry held her back and let himself feel for a moment. "Last night I left because I made him laugh, and I wanted to know what I said. He actually told me that I reminded him of Lavender."

Harry pulled away. "Really?"

She nodded before looking off toward the many hills and trees the Hogwarts property had to offer. "Yes, and it felt like being slapped in face."

He could relate. "It's a constant punch in the stomach for me. I mean last night it was as if Ginny didn't even give a shit about me. It's like everything she used feel about me is gone, like she forgot about it."

"She hasn't, Harry. Ginny's a tough girl. She's not the type to just let her emotions run everywhere. She's like you in that way, I guess, but she cares. When she used to talk to me about you, there was this excitement and passion behind her words and eyes. She loved you then, and she loves you now. I promise you that." Hermione took his hand and squeezed it.

Harry smiled. "Thanks, Hermione." Somehow she always knew how to get him back on track. He stood up and stretched. "I think I'm going to go inside, are you coming?"

"Actually, I'm going to stay out here. I brought my book," Hermione explained, adjusting against the tree.

Harry chuckled. His best friend was always reading. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that it was probably her escape from everything. It brought her peace like flying did for him. "See you later." Harry went up to his dorm room. All his roommates were inside sitting on floor.

"Harry, you're just in time," Seamus said.



"What's going on?" he asked, joining them on the floor next to Ron.

Ron sighed and rolled his eyes. "Ignore the arseholes in this room."

"Oh, don't start that rubbish now. Lavender isn't in here. You can tell the truth," Dean said.

"Of course, Seamus wants to know everyone's love life or sex like, I guess," Neville said.

Harry nodded. "Ak, I get it. Seamus, why are you always in other people's business? Is it because you can't get any yourself?"

The blokes laughed, and Seamus gave him the finger. "Go have a wank, Harry. Everyone knows that you aren't getting any...or are you?"

"That's none of your business," Harry mumbled.

"I think it should be public record. It's Cho, isn't it?" Dean asked.

Harry was about to say they were barely friends, but he thought about it. "Maybe...maybe not."

"It is, isn't it! For a moment I was thinking Hermione. You two have been together a lot lately," Seamus said with a laugh.

Harry gave him an incredulous look. "Never in this life time or the next. Can the focus leave me now? What about you, Neville?"

Neville blushed and rubbed his hands together. "Luna is great."

"How great?" Dean asked. "Or should I ask you, Ron?"

Ron gawked. "Me? How the bloody fuck would I know?"

"She's been your neighbor for ages, and I could have sworn she used to fancy you. Ginny told me," Dean explained. Harry tried not to glare at him.

Ron shook his head. "No, never, not me and Luna. At best she's like a weird but in a cool way sister of mine or cousin. She's better off with someone from her planet like Neville here."

"Ta to you Ron, and fuck off," Neville mumbled.

Ron laughed. "Seamus, you're the one asking all the questions. What is up with you and Hannah?"

Seamus licked his lips. "She's incredible and totally sexy. I love her."

The room got quiet. "Mate, are you being serious?" Dean asked

For the first time since Harry had met him, Seamus seemed completely serious. "I think I do."

"I think you do, too. It's written all over your face," Harry said.

"Yeah, you look like Dean," Neville joked.

Dean grinned broadly. "I know that I love with Ginny. She's amazing. She's the best."

Harry felt a lump in his throat. He recognized the gleam in Dean's eyes. He understood his feelings. "You really love her?" He hadn't meant to speak. It was barely a whisper.

Dean looked to him. "Yes, I do." He didn't lose eye contact with him. Harry was the first to look away.

"Okay, I'm starting to feel really uncomfortable talking about this," Ron said.

"You might as well face it, mate. Ginny is all grown up," Neville said.

"No, she's not. She's fifteen," Ron shot.

"Ron, mate, I'm not going to hurt her. I really care about her," Dean urged.

Ron shrugged and rubbed his neck. "I know it's just...she's my little sister. I...dunno." For a second he looked to Harry. There was something about his expression that made Harry shrug. He wasn't sure what they were saying to each other, but it was enough. "Just as long as you never talk about shagging her, then I guess it's okay."

"Ron, the only people shagging in this room are you and Harry," Seamus said.

"What?" Harry and Ron said together.

"Don't give us that sopping bollocks, Harry, everyone knows you and Cho got it on. You're probably still fucking her," Seamus said.

"No, he's not!" Ron shouted.

"And how would you know?" Dean asked.

"B-because...Harry and I tell each other everything. I would be the first to know if he was having sex with Cho or anyone," he said.

Harry smirked. "Is that so?"

Ron blinked several times. "Well...I thought it was. Should I think otherwise?"

"I dunno, Ron. You didn't tell me about Lavender," Harry said quietly.

"Yeah, Ron, when in the bloody hell did that happen?" Neville asked.

Even more color flushed on his mate's face. "It just did. We were on the couch talking and next thing I knew, we were snogging."

"Lavender Brown, though?" Dean asked.

Ron frowned. "What's wrong with her, Dean? Do you not like her because she's not a Quidditch fan like Ginny?"

"No, I don't have a problem with her. I just thought that you and Hermione were going to get together," Dean said.

All the red color that was on Ron's face vanished. He looked down. "No," was all he said.

"So, you are shagging Lavender, then?" Seamus asked.

"It's none of your business!" Ron snapped.

"Yeah, maybe you should lay off," Dean said to him.

"This is a stupid conversation, anyway. Let's talk about something else," Neville added.

"No, I'm just curious. I mean if you're not shagging Hermione and Harry isn't, then who is Hermione with? Aren't the three of you like a group? She's got to pair off with someone. It would be terrible if she was the only one not getting tickled. I'm sure her fur could use it," Seamus said with a laugh.

"You're such a fucker, Seamus," Harry said with a frown. Seamus continued to laugh. Ron glared at him and before Harry knew it, Ron reached across the circle and punched Seamus in the face.

Seamus grabbed his nose and yelped. "Fuck, Ron, what is your fucking problem?"

"He was just taking the piss," Dean defended, helping his best friend up.

Ron rubbed his knuckles. "Don't ever talk about Hermione like that! She is not just some girl that you can put into one of your stupid little games. She's...better than that." He got up and left the room.

Harry quickly got up and followed him out of the room. "Ron, Ron, what the hell was that?" he asked as they walked out of the Common Room and down a corridor.

"I couldn't take his shit anymore. You heard what he said about Hermione. She's not a slut or anything," Ron explained.

Harry grabbed his shoulder and stopped him. "True, but it's Seamus. That's how he is. He's a prick. It's never made you hit him before."

Ron exhaled deeply and leaned against the wall. He ran a hand through his red hair and glared. It reminded him of Ginny. There were a lot of expressions Ron made that Ginny must have gotten from him. They didn't look a lot alike. Ginny resembled their mother and the twins, but there were times when Harry felt so exhausted looking and talking to Ron because Ginny was so much like him. Other than Hermione, Ron and Ginny were the best people in the world and the people that he loved the most, but due to his stupidity, neither of them knew it.

"I know, it's just...Harry, you're not sleeping with Mione are you?" Ron asked softly.

At first Harry thought that he had spent too much time in the sunlight. He could have sworn that Ron just asked him the most absurd question in the entire world. "Excuse me?"

Ron chewed on his lip a bit. "Hermione, Harry, are you with her? Are you two...having sex?"

Harry's jaw dropped. "Are you having sex with Ginny?"

Ron looked as though he was going to chuck. "Don't be sick."

"Then you don't be sick, either. Shit, Ron, of course I'm not. I would never ever in my life and neither would she. I know that the rest of the world may think it, but I didn't know that I'd have to explain it to you. Ron, Hermione is like my sister. Fuck, she is my sister. I love her like my friend, like my blood," Harry explained. "Why would you ask that?"

Ron's demeanor changed a bit. "I dunno, because of what you said. You and Hermione have been spending a lot of time together. She came to the room looking for you and I mean, would you tell me?"

"Ron, I was just pissing around. I'd tell you if I was interested in Hermione, which I'm not, and if I was shagging her, which I never plan on doing, honest. You're my best mate. I swear to you that I'll always tell you the truth, and you'll always be the first to know everything." Harry smiled and nodded frantically.

It made Ron chuckle a bit. "Okay, I'm sorry. I guess that means that you and Cho aren't shagging."

"No, we're not and neither are you and Lavender, right?" Harry asked.

Ron shook his head and looked at the floor. "No, we haven't gotten that far."

They were silent for a bit. "Ron, Hermione and I are together a lot now because you and Ginny are always busy with Lavender and Dean." Harry looked into Ron's face. He tried to find out what it was that Ron was hiding.

He shrugged. "She's my girlfriend."

"And we're your best friends," Harry added. Ron looked away again. "Ron, what happened last night between you and Hermione? I know that I walked in on something."

Ron shook his head. "I don't know. Nothing, I reckon. She was looking for you."

"Don't do that. I'm talking about when I opened the door. You two were pretty close," Harry said.

"No, we weren't, Harry. I was just saying goodbye," he said.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yeah, well, that was the most intimate goodbyes that I've ever seen. I saw the way you looked at her. You never look like that with Lavender."

A pained expression flashed across his face. "Do you think that Dean really loves Ginny? He seems like he does. Maybe I was wrong about him and their relationship."

It felt like he had just been punched in the stomach again. Harry's heart dropped. "I don't know. Maybe you should talk to him about it." He knew what Ron was doing, and he hated it. He turned away from him and walked down the hall. He decided to go to the Great Hall and on the way he ran into no other than Ginny. A rush of pleasure ran through him.

She smiled brightly. "Hey, Harry."

"Hi, Ginny, are you looking for Dean?" he asked shortly.

"No, I'm actually looking for you. Mum sent us letters, and there's one in here for you. She probably wants to know if you're eating enough." Ginny handed him the letter and Harry grazed her hand as he took it.

"Thanks," he whispered.

Ginny's smile faded a bit. "Are you okay?"

Harry wanted to tell her the truth. He wanted to tell her that he loved her, and he wanted her more than anything. He had faced Dementors and death eaters. He had even squared off against Voldemort, so he couldn't understand why Ginny Weasley terrified him so greatly. "I'm fine...just tired, I reckon," he said.

She rubbed his arm and immediately gave him goose bumps and a stiffy. "Well, rest up. We start practice again next week, captain." Ginny gave him one more smile before walking off.

Harry didn't watch her leave. He couldn't. Instead, he kept walking. He wanted to prove that he was fine without her. However, he knew his efforts were useless when he turned and saw her mass of red hair flow down the hall.

He smiled. Harry Potter was too in love not to look back.

He would always look back.

\*\*\*\* Oh, poor Harry, but NOT poor Seamus. The bloke had it coming! GO RON! Lol, thanks for reading. Please review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 6

Cheers everyone! Thanks for the reviews! Oh, they make me want to write my arse off, lol

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry or his Potter

It was nice and quiet in the Common Room. Mostly everyone else was in class but Hermione had a free period. However, at the moment there was nothing really free about it. She had a load of work to do from her Ancient Runes class.

"Can I join you?"

Hermione looked up from her work. Ginny was smiling at her. "Shouldn't you be in class?" Hermione asked.

Ginny chuckled and sat next to her on the couch. Her long, thick red hair dragged on the back cushion and spread like a wild fire. "I have a free period."

"Fifth years don't have free periods. In fact, OWLs should keep you constantly busy," she explained.

Ginny rolled her eyes and held up her hands. "Okay, okay, I'm skiving off."

Hermione frowned. "Ginny, you shouldn't do that."

"Oh, it's just one charms class. It's not like I'm missing anything important." Ginny snatched one of Hermione's books and flipped through it. She crinkled her nose and raised an eyebrow. "What is this?"

Hermione laughed rather loudly. The gesture reminded her of Ron. Ginny often made her think of him. They were alike in many ways. "It's too complicated to explain. Ginny, why are you spending your free time here?"

Ginny shrugged, "I don't know. I just wanted to talk to you. We haven't spent a lot of time together this year."

"We've both been busy. You've been really busy with Dean," Hermione cheeked.

Ginny licked her lips slowly. "Yeah, Dean."

She watched as Ginny smiled and flipped through pages absentmindedly. "So, um, you're happy with him?"

Ginny looked to her. "Yes, he's great. We have a lot of fun."

"Is it more fun than you have with Harry?" she asked.

Ginny's smile faded. "Harry and I don't really hang out."

"I guess you're too busy for the lot of us," Hermione said quietly.

"What are you saying, Hermione?" Ginny asked.

Hermione moved in a bit closer to her. "Nothing at all. Well, when did Dean become your entire existence?"

"He's not. He's my boyfriend, and I really care about him. He's a great guy," Ginny shot.

"I know you do, and I know that he is. This isn't even really about him," she said.

"Then what is this about? Harry? Is this about Harry? Are you angry that I'm not pissing myself over him anymore? Is he angry that I don't fluster up when I see him?" Ginny's face was quickly turning bright red.

Hermione looked around. "Let's take this somewhere else."

Ginny shot up off the seat and headed for the door, and she scurried to keep up with her. Ginny didn't really slow down for her. She paced down the hall with her arms swinging. "If he's angry with me, then you can tell him to get over himself. It's not my fault—"

Hermione grabbed Ginny's arm to stop her. Ginny looked at her. Her cheeks were rosy and she was even a bit out of breath. "Wow, Ginny, slow down a minute. I'm sorry for whatever I said to set you off. That's not what I meant. Harry is not angry with you at all."

Ginny caught her breath and closed her eyes for a moment. "I'm sorry, Hermione. Shit, I don't know what got into me."

She let her arm go and gave her a look. "I think you do. What's wrong?" Ginny shook her head and shrugged. "Ginny, last time I checked we were friends. You can talk to me."

Ginny sighed. "It's Dean. He feels uncomfortable. He thinks that Harry hates him."

"Harry does not hate Dean. They're friends," Hermione said.

"Hermione, it's not that simple anymore. Dean knows how I feel—well, how I used to feel about Harry and apparently he's been short with Dean," she said.

"Ginny, I think you should talk to Harry about this. From what I know Harry doesn't have a problem with Dean," Hermione said.

Ginny nodded. "Even if he does it doesn't matter. It's not like it isn't his fault."

Hermione frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Well, if he's jealous or whatever then he needs to get over it. He had his chance." Ginny practically spat her words and didn't look at her.

She folded her arms. "Ginny, what does that mean? You aren't with Dean just to get back at Harry, are you?"

"Of course I'm not, Hermione. I really care about Dean. He loves me," Ginny explained.

"Do you love him?" Hermione asked.

Ginny tucked hair behind her ear. Her brown eyes didn't move. "I think I do. Weâ€¦started having sex."

Hermione's jaw dropped. "You're sleeping with him?"

"You say it like it's a bad thing, Hermione. Dean and I care about each other, and we're ready. I want to and so does he," Ginny explained.

She didn't know what to do. There was no way that she could tell Harry. "I guess that's all that matters."

Ginny frowned. "You don't like me with Dean, do you?"

"Ginny, whatever makes you happy is fine with me. I was the one who told you to get out there remember?" Hermione said.

Ginny smiled. "Yeah, you did. Thanks, Hermione." Hermione wasn't sure if she wanted to be thanked for that. She tried her best to smile. Ginny chuckled. "I wish you would have given Ron that advice before he started dating tit bags."

Hermione laughed. "Ginny, that's rude."

She rolled her eyes. "What? You know it's true. I love my brother, but he's acting like the world's biggest prat right now. All Lavender Brown has are tits. She's dafter than Crabbe."

Even though she was upset about Dean, she was happy to hear that Ginny didn't approve of her brother's new girlfriend. "Oh, I don't think she's that bad," Hermione muttered.

Ginny grinned at her. It was the same grin that Ron made when he thought he had the upper hand. "I know you don't mean that. You don't like her either. I see the way you look at her. You don't want her anywhere near Ron."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "If Ron wants to date her, then I can't stop him but you're right, she's not my favorite person."



Ginny tapped her chin. "I wonder why that is?"

She was about to answer, but the expression on Ginny's face let her know that she wasn't really asking her. "Ginny, Lavender and I have never been good friends."

"I know that, and I also know that you and Ron have always been good friends. In fact, you two are really close good friends." Ginny's brown eyes were bright. She had the biggest smile on her face.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yes, we're good friends and only good friends. Anyway—the only reason why I wanted to know if you were happy with Dean was because I was going to help Harry out with Cho." She tried her best to seem completely professional, but Hermione could see the bit of curiosity and annoyance in Ginny's expression and she wanted to laugh.

"Why would you need to ask me?" she asked.

Hermione shrugged innocently. "I guess for the same reason that you came to me about Dean. I just want to make sure that it's okay to move on. She's really into him, and I'm pretty sure that Harry fancies her still."

Ginny pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes a bit. "That's great for them. Go ahead—I won't be bothered." Ginny turned away. "We should head on to lunch." They didn't say another word as they walked to the Great Hall. Ginny kept her head tilted up a bit and crossed her arms. Hermione had to bite her lip to keep from laughing.

"I still wish that you'd tell me why you have a black eye, Seamus," Hermione said at the table.

Seamus, who was sitting across from her, shrugged. "I slipped in the bloody shower."

"I'm sure that's not what happened," Lavender said.

Hermione turned to Harry. He shrugged. "It's just a bruise. It will heal."

"Besides, Seamus is a big boy. He'll live," Ron said.

"Oh, that's so sensitive of you, Won Won," Lavender cheeked. She kissed his ear and laid her head on his shoulder. Ron sighed and picked at his food. He didn't tell her to move, but Hermione knew that he didn't want Lavender on him. Since the night in his dorm, they hadn't really talked, and even if they were, they didn't talk alone. Ron always ran off, and Hermione was never sure of what to say anyway.

Ginny chuckled. "I'm sure Seamus was drunk, weren't you Seam?"

Seamus rolled his eyes. "No way am I going to talk about that here. I'll get busted."

"You lot better leave my mate alone. It's been a long day," Dean said. He patted Seamus on the back and made a pouty face.

"Mmm, I love it when you do that," Ginny said softly to him. Dean winked at her and bit his lip.

Hermione took a glance at Harry. He was staring at the ceiling. "So, um, Harry, when is practice?"

Harry looked at her. "In a couple of days. Why?"

She had to think about her words. It would be the first official action. "Well, I was thinking about having you and Cho help me with an assignment McGonagall gave me. It's over some Quidditch regulations, and you two are both captains. I thought it would be best if you two could assist me."

It only took a second. Harry hopped on her thought train and grinned broadly. "Okay, sure, that sounds great. We can work on it tomorrow."

"Oh, you and Cho, Harry?" Lavender teased.

"You can stop what you're thinking," Harry said.

"I think it's you who needs to stop, mate," Neville cheeked.

"I figured you'd like that, Harry," Hermione said with a wink.

"Yeah, anything for McGonagall," Harry said with smirk. Hermione flicked her eyes to Ginny. She was poking at her sandwich with a vacant expression.

The rest of the day Hermione was all smiles. She had successfully made a move in helping Harry. Finally, at the end of the day she was able to talk to him alone. They went to the Prefects' bathroom. "Just so we're clear, I don't really have to help you with regulations, right?" Harry asked.

"No, I just thought that would be the most believable story," she said.

Harry bounced on the heels of his feet. "What about Ginny? Did she seem to care?"

"She seemed sulky. I ran into her before lunch. I asked her if it was okay for me to help you hook up with Cho--"

"What did she say?" Harry interrupted.

"Well, she said it was fine but of course she would. She's not going to just tell me no," Hermione explained. Harry didn't seem convinced. "Trust me, she wasn't thrilled about giving me permission."

Harry exhaled deeply. "She confuses me so much. She always seems happy with Dean and never gives a shit about what's going on with me. Maybe she really is in love with him."

Hermione's heart dropped a little. She thought about her conversation with Ginny. All day she had been thinking the same thing. "Harry, I promise you that she still loves you, but there's no way that she's going to show it right now. She's too proudâ€¦just like you used to be."

Harry made a face as if he had been struck in the stomach. He leaned against the wall. "I try to tell myself that every day."

She patted his back. "Well, keep saying it. It's going to work out. This was a good move."

Harry seemed a bit more excited. "Yeah, you're amazing. I can't believe how clever you're being. I haven't really said anything to Ron yet. I should get a move on."

"I need to give you the letters. Let's go get them now." As Hermione and Harry made their way out of the bathroom and down the hall, they ran into Ron and Lavender.

"Hey, I was looking for you two," Ron said. He seemed nervous.

"We were just talking about the regulations, Ron," Harry reassured gently. He gave Ron a look that Hermione didn't understand.

Ron nodded slightly and turned to her. "I didn't hear about this assignment."

"That's because it was given to me," Hermione answered.

"But why would she give it to you and not me? Obviously, I would have been more help. I mean...I'm on the team for starters," he snapped.

"Don't fuss at me, Ron. Ask her if you want to know," she said.

Ron crossed his arms and frowned just like Ginny had done earlier. "Whatever, Hermione."

"Why are you so upset?" Harry asked.

"If he's angry, then he has every right!" Lavender shot.

"Oh, shut up," Hermione breathed.

Lavender gawked and took a step toward her, but Ron put a hand on her stomach. "Babe, can you give us a minute."

"Wonnies, I want to stay here with you just in case you need someone on your side," she whined.

"We are always on his side," Harry said.

"Right now you're not. Right now you're making him angry," Lavender said.

"Everything can't be bracelets and lip gloss, Lavender," Hermione said.

"Just stop it, okay!" Ron yelled. He rubbed his temple and looked at Lavender. "Baby, please, I'm fine. I just have some things that I need to talk to them about. I'll meet you in the Common Room, yeah?"

Lavender gazed at him longingly. She rubbed his cheek. "Okay, love." She leaned forward and kissed him tenderly. When she pulled away, there seemed to be stars in her eyes. Hermione dreamed to have those same stars. She couldn't imagine the bliss that Lavender must have felt. She hated it. Lavender didn't look or say another word to them before walking off.

Ron turned to them. "What's really going on?"

Harry opened his mouth to answer but Hermione cut in. "I'm trying to give Harry and Cho some free time alone."

Ron rubbed his neck. "What? Why?"

"W-well, if you haven't noticed Cho fancies Harry, and he's never really given up on her," Hermione explained. She looked to Harry.

He nodded. "Sorry I didn't tell you, Ron. I justâ€¦I felt embarrassed."

Ron shifted his eyes from her to Harry. "Harry, so what if you like Cho? That's great, I guess. Why the bloody hell would that bother me?" Harry looked down. He shrugged and shook his head. "And Hermione, when did you start playing matchmaker?"

She put her hands on her hips. "Believe it or not, Ron, but I do want my friends to be happy. It's goodâ€¦to have someone you care about and someone you want."

She stopped talking and gazed at him. Ron stared back at her. Once again she was lost in his bright blue eyes. She felt the pulse between them again. "I guess you're right," he whispered. There was silence. Hermione looked into his eyes. She searched Ron for any sign of hope. He didn't give her one. He looked away.

"Yeah, Hermione would know all about that and so would Krum, right?" Harry asked.

Hermione shot her head to Harry. He was smirking. She was about to ask him what he was talking about but then she remembered. "Hush it, Harry."

He held up his hands. "What? I'm just saying that you teach what you know, and you seem to know a lot."

Hermione tried her best to smile. She slowly turned back to Ron. He was frowning at the floor. "Well, enough about me, Harry. Ron, are you okay with this? There's no assignment."

He looked back up to her. His face was blank. He shrugged. "Fine, good luck with it." He turned away from them and headed down the hallway. However, he turned around and said rather coldly, "I'd appreciate it if you two didn't give Lavender such a hard time. She makes me happy and since you two are such firm believers in happiness, I assume that you'll learn to back off." He turned back around and disappeared down the hall.

Hermione groaned. "That was a disaster."

"No, that was Ron being jealous. He's always an arse when he's jealous. This is good news. I'm glad that I added that," Harry said with glee.

"How can you be so sure?" she asked.

Harry smiled. "I may not have a clue about Ginny, but I know an awful lot about her brother."

She tried to find comfort in his words. "He seemed so angry with us about the stupid Lavender thing."

He rolled his eyes. "He needed to get us with something. He does that a lot. We had him with Krum, so he threw in Lavender. Why did you bring up Cho, though?"

"Well, it's not enough that we know. It's so much more effective if Ron thinks you like Cho, and Ginny thinks I like Krum," Hermione explained.

He nodded in agreement. "That won't be too hard. As soon as Ron sees the letters, he'll go off and probably demand details for Ginny and me."

"Let's start by getting those letters," she said.

Harry touched her arm. "Wait, I want to tell you something. I know that I'm breaking some bloke code butâ€¦Seamus's black eyeâ€¦there wasn't a drop of shower water around, but there was Ron's fist."

Hermione blinked several times in confusion. "What are you saying?"

Harry gave an exaggerated shrug. "Dunno, just know that you should have a bit more faith in Ron." He started walking down the hall and Hermione tagged at his heels.

All the way to dinner he wouldn't tell her what he meant.

\*\*\*\* Ahh, I think I'll stop here. Things are finally getting underway for the Operation! Thanks for reading and review review review review please!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 7

Cheers for the reviews!

There is one thing that I need to clear up. I usually never give hints because I love keeping you kiddies in suspense but I have to say this. The Ginny in my story is not a total monster. She's not just using Dean. She really does care for him. I'm not the biggest Ginny fan but in this story, I'm not trying to make her the "bad guy." She's simply torn.

With that said, here's another Harry chap for you!

Disclaimer: Potter...me...no connection

It was a Saturday morning. It was also a practice day. The combination of events couldn't have been more perfect. Harry sighed and picked up a letter from his bed. It had Krum's thin and slanted handwriting.

"Harry, can I be a bit late to practice today?" Ron asked, walking in. Harry ignored him. He opened the letter and skimmed its contents. "Um, Harry," Ron said again.

Harry didn't look up from the letter. "Sorry, what did you say?"

He walked over to him and shook his arm. "Wake up you dozy midget!"

Harry finally looked up. "What is it, Ron?"

Ron chuckled. "What are you reading?" Harry didn't have to answer. Ron saw the envelop in his lap and picked it up. He frowned. "Krum is writing you?"

He laughed. "Mate, look at the address name. It's to Hermione."

Ron's blue eyes suddenly grew twice their size. He gasped. "What? Give me the letter!"

"No, I need to seal it back up and give it to Hermione. I keep telling her to talk to Krum about sending the mail to her and not me." Harry snatched the envelope and put the letter back.

"Wait, you mean Krum is sending Hermione letters Like...more than one?" Ron asked.

Harry shrugged. "Yeah, he's been doing it all year."

He crossed his arms. "Well, what does he want?"

"I dunno, Ron. I don't read them," he answered.

Ron nodded. "What does that one say?"

Harry smiled. "Hmm, I think I'll leave it to Hermione to tell you." He got up and folded the letter in his pocket. He patted Ron's arm. "And the answer is no. Come to practice on time, or it's your bollocks." He walked out of the room with the smile. On his way to the Great Hall, he ran into Cho.

"Hello, Harry," she said cheery.

Harry swallowed hard. Being around her always made him a little uneasy. "Hey, Cho."

She ran a hand through her extremely long and jet-black hair. It seemed to fall in slow motion. Cho Chang was a beauty. "So, are you ready for the game?"

"It's against Hufflepuff. I'm not that worried," he said.

She nodded. "Yes, well, it will be a good warm up. If everything goes according to plan, then it should my team versus yours in the finals. It's my last year, and I intend to win this cup."

Harry smiled. Cho was a Quidditch fanatic just like himself. She still wore her Tornados pin on her cloak. "Well, it may not be my last year but it's my first as captain. I intend to win as well."

Cho put a hand on her hip. "Well, let me give you some captain to captain advice. It's good to have one-on-one time with each of your players before a game. I've noticed that you have many team practices, which are great, but it's also good to take individual time out for each of your players for training and pointers. It's helps a lot."

"Brilliant, that actually sounds like a great idea. Why are you telling me this?" Harry asked.

She shrugged. "It's good sportsmanship, and I know you helped Cedric out with the dragons..." her voice trailed off and she turned away for a second.

Harry felt even more uncomfortable. It was then that he remembered why it didn't work out between them. Not only was Cho not Ginny, but she was still grieving over Cedric and he just couldn't take the extra guilt. "Well, thanks for the advice. I will definitely do that," he said, changing the subject.

"Good boy, well, see you." She turned away from him and walked down the corridor. He watched her for a moment before stepping into the hall. He took a seat by Hermione.

"Good morning," he said cheery.

She gave him a curious look. "Why are you in such a good mood?"

He pulled the letter out of his pocket. "Tell Krum to check where he sends his letters next time." Hermione's brown eyes lit up, and she quickly took the letter.

"Oh, who is that from?" Neville asked.

"No one you would know," Hermione mumbled.

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure. Neville, he plays Quidditch and I hear he's pretty good as the seeker," Harry cheeked.

"From Krum!" Ginny said.

Hermione laughed a bit. "Don't give me that look. We still talk. It's no big deal."

"Please, I'm sure it's big," Seamus said. While Hermione's cheeks turned a faint pink, the table laughed. Harry stopped however when he saw Ron followed by Lavender come to the table. He sat next to Ginny. He had a pout on his face.

"Ron, did you know that Hermione is dating Krum?" Ginny asked.

"I am not dating Krum," Hermione answered.

Ron rolled his eyes and poured himself some cereal. "If you two are sending love letters back and forth, then what do you call it if it's not dating?"

Harry quickly glanced at Hermione. She raised an eyebrow. "They aren't love letters, Ronald."

He tapped his spoon on the bowl. "Then what are they? I thought you were finished with Vicky."

"His name is Viktor," Hermione said.

"Oh, sorry, I didn't mean to offend your boyfriend," he said sarcastically.

"He's not my boyfriend," she snapped.

Harry didn't know what to say. He didn't want Hermione and Ron fighting in front of everyone. "Um, okay, I thought it over, and I'd like to have some alone time with each player on the team. The game is at the end of the week, and I want to make sure everyone is prepared." He looked to Ron. "You don't have to worry about coming to practice today and you don't either Dean. Ginny, I'd like to start with you."

She frowned. "Why me first?"

Harry grinned. "Because I said so." She shook her head slowly and bit her lip.

"How long are these single sessions?" Dean asked.

Harry tore his eyes away from her and looked at him. There was tightness around his mouth. "No more than an hour. It depends on where I think each player is. This will only be before every game. We'll still have group practices."

"This is great, Wonnies. Now we can spend the whole day together," Lavender said with a giggle. She kissed his cheek.

Ron turned to her and ran a hand through her hair. "That's right," he said softly. He leaned forward and kissed her.



"Oh, please, get a room," Ginny said before making gagging noises. However, Ron didn't listen. He deepened the kiss, making Lavender squeak. Harry turned away. He couldn't watch them, but he also wouldn't dare look at Hermione.

Ron finally pulled away. His face was red but there was something in his eyes that Harry couldn't read. He knew Ron so well that he could easily tell by his eyes how he felt. Whatever it was now, it wasn't happiness. "I say we start now."

Lavender giggled again. "Okay, Won."

They got up hand in hand. Ron turned to Harry. "Thanks for this. Let me know when it's my turn." Lavender continued to giggle and pulled him away from the hall. Harry closed his eyes and mentally kicked himself. He didn't see that coming.

"Well, that was fucking disgusting," Ginny said.

"Let them be," Dean said.

"I think it's hilarious. Ron and Lavender Brown," Seamus started.

"Shut up, Seamus," Harry said. He finally looked to Hermione. She was staring into her cereal as if she was considering drowning herself in it.

"So, when does practice start?" Ginny asked.

"Huh?" Harry asked.

She chuckled. "Practice, Harry James Potter. When do we start?"

He rubbed his eyes. He wanted to comfort Hermione, but he couldn't. "Now, we should start now." He got up from the table and Ginny did as well. "Meet me in the tent."

"Okay," Ginny said. She kissed Dean gently. "See you later."

Harry rubbed his palms against his jeans and gave Hermione another glance. She was still staring into her bowl. He paced the tent repeatedly. He was finally going to spend some alone time with Ginny.

"Okay Captain Potter," Ginny said, walking in. She had on her Quidditch robes and her broom over her shoulder. Her long red hair was in a braid.

"Right, let's get in the air. With you it's a matter of accuracy with your passing." He clutched his broom as Ginny listened to him intently. She had to know that she was giving him a stiffy just by staring at him. The two of them went into the air. Harry popped the quaffle from one hand to the next. "Okay, when there are other players on you, you tend to throw the ball without much direction."

"Yeah, I get angry and I just don't want to give up control," she explained.

"It's understandable, but you have to remember to stay calm. You're small so keeping the ball close to your chest like this," Harry demonstrated, "will keep them from taking it or you from dropping it. It's also good to fly low when a lot of players are on you. Not many players are comfortable with dives and flying low to the ground. If you can do it, then they may get off your back more."

He tossed the quaffle to her, and she caught it easily. "Okay, I can try. I'm not that confident with it, either."

"Just practice for a while. Dive down low the ground, throw, and catch the ball. Get a feel for it," Harry said.

She nodded and took off. He watched her with a smile. Ginny Weasley was an excellent player. However, as much as he was enjoying himself, he was worried about Hermione. He hoped that she wasn't thinking about giving up.

Ginny came back up. The sun's rays stained a bit of red burn on her fair-skinned face. "How was I?"

"Great, I knew you would be," Harry said.

Ginny grinned. "Cheers." She passed him back the ball and wiped her forehead. "Ron is really something, isn't he?"

"Sorry?" he said.

She rolled her eyes. "Come on. He was all over Lavender, and it was even more than usual. You don't think it has anything to do with Krum, do you?"

"You know your brother, Ginny," Harry said.

She gave him a look. "Not as much as you do, Harry. This thing with Lavender drives me mental."

Harry wanted to snog her so badly. She was so bloody bold. "Are you not a fan of Lav Lav?"

Ginny laughed and clapped her hands together. "Fucking hell, that girl! I mean if she makes Ron happy, then I have to put up with it. Even though he can be such a twat, he's my brother and I don't want him to be alone. It's not a good feeling."

The smile vanished. Ginny stared at him. Harry was lost in her large chocolate eyes. "I know what you mean," he said softly.

She nodded and moved closer to him. He could smell her natural sweetness and a bit of sweat on her skin. The mix sent his body into a frenzy. He had to bite his lip to keep from kissing her. "Is that why you're getting back together with Cho? Are you're tired of being alone?" she asked.

"It's hard seeing everyone with someone. I never really gave it a chance. I was too scared last time," he whispered.

Ginny frowned. "What do you have to be afraid of?"

Harry gripped the ball in his hands. He never had the strength to put up his wall around her. He always wanted to express himself. "Losing people...because of something I've done." She put her hand on his leg. He couldn't keep it in. He moaned slightly. Even more red stained her face, but Harry was sure that it was from the heat.

"Harry, you should be more afraid of losing people because of the things you don't do." She gave his leg a squeeze before letting go.

Harry's entire body was sweaty. He could feel his heart racing. "I-I think we're finished."

She nodded. "Right." She flew away without another word.

Harry stayed in the air a bit longer and tried to clear his mind. After wanking in the equipment shed, he took a long, cold shower. He let the freezing water sting his body. It wasn't cold enough. Ginny's words wouldn't leave him. He couldn't understand what she meant. Girl cryptic was a mystery to him. After changing, he went into the dorm room. Lavender was at the other side when he opened the door.

"Oh, hi, Harry," she said cheery.

He tried his best to smile. "Hey, Lavender."

"Won's in here," she said with a giggle. She opened the door wider. Ron was in his bed tossing a pillow repeatedly in his hands. "See you later, Won," Lavender said.

"Bye, babe," he breathed. She waved to Harry before walking out of the room. He walked over and sat on his bed. Ron had a vacant expression once again.

"How was practice?" he asked.

Harry sighed. "Ron, about breakfast..."

He sat up. Harry could see a small, red, blotchy mark on his collarbone. "What about it? Sorry I didn't stay longer."

"It's not about that at all and you know it. Hermione isn't dating Krum...at least, I don't think that they are right now," Harry said, trying not to look at the hickey.

"So, I don't care," Ron said.

"Well, you sure seemed like you did when you snapped at her," he said.

Ron twirled his thumbs. "I'll apologize. I didn't mean to act that way, and I don't want to upset her. I really just don't care about her with the prat, and I'm tired of hearing about him."

"Okay," Harry said.

Ron stared at him. "So, how was practice?" he asked again.

"It was fine," he mumbled.

"When is my turn?" Ron asked.

Harry shook his head. "I don't know yet."

"But you knew that Ginny's had to be today?" he asked.

Harry frowned. "What are you getting at?"

Ron raised an eyebrow. "Nothing, but this is the first time that I've ever heard of you wanting to do single practices."

"It was a last minute thing. I was talking to Cho, and she brought it up. I think it's a great idea. Do you have a problem with it?" Harry tried to control the slight annoyance that he felt.

Ron crossed his arms over his chest. "Hmm, I see, and why not have Ginny go first, right?"

"Why the fuck does it matter, Ron?" Harry asked.

Ron took a deep breath. "Harry, last year, more than ever Ginny was out of sorts. You...you really hurt her."

Harry knew this. Hearing it from himself was bad. Hearing it from Hermione was worse, but hearing Ron say it, killed him. "I know, okay?" Harry whispered.

"She fancied you for ages and for whatever reason you just weren't into her. That's fine, mate. It's none of my business, but it gutted her. I hated how-"

"When is your point coming, Ron?" Harry interrupted. He felt sick, and his throat was tight.

Ron walked over and joined him on the bed. Harry didn't want to look at him, but he did. "Harry, she's with Dean now and she's happy. If you're just playing some game to fuck with her, then stop it."

Harry couldn't believe Ron's words. "How well do you know me, Ron? I would never do that."

Ron turned away. "I'm sorry it's just...I don't want you hurting her again. She has a boyfriend. Dean is with her."

"Oh, so now you're on his side? You like Ginny with him?" Harry asked.

"I like Ginny not crying. She doesn't cry anymore. She's my baby sister, Harry. I have to protect her," Ron said.

There very few things that tore past his barrier. Ron not trusting him was one of them. "From me?"

He let out a shaky breath. "I don't know yet."

They were silent. Harry didn't know what to say. It was times like these when Harry truly realized the complication of his situation. He hated that Ron didn't want him anywhere near Ginny, but he loved that he was careful of her and didn't want her hurt. "Where is this coming from, Ron? I haven't done anything."

"I just think that it's time we all moved on," he answered.

Harry snorted. "Oh, like you did? You're so much better and wiser now that you're with Lavender Brown?"

"You know what Harry? I'm so bloody sick of you and everyone giving me such a hard time about her. I have a right to do whatever I want to just like Hermione does," he said.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I thought you said that we should move on. This isn't supposed to be about Hermione. Maybe before you start giving advice, you should look in the mirror. For fuck sake Ron, why are you acting like this?"

Ron rubbed his eyes. "Because it's time to let go. You need to let go...and so do I."

"What does that mean?" Harry asked.

He turned away from him and rubbed his eyes harder. "People never get what they really want. Sometimes, you should just take what you can."

"If you're saying that we should settle, then forget it. Ron, about Hermione-"

Ron shot up from the bed. "I have to go, Harry."

He didn't even have a chance to stop him. Ron was out of the room before he could get another word in.

Harry lay back on his bed and took off his glasses. There was too much to think about at one time.

\*\*\*\*Oh, a bit of angst, love it! Thanks for reading and REVIEW it please! It's the fuel I need to keep writing. :)

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 8

Cheers you lot! I love the reviews!

Disclaimer: Potter is not mine

Hermione gazed out the window. Winter was on the way. The weather was chilly and the breeze usually stung her skin. The grass was less green, and the flowers wilted in coldness. Without the snow, winter was harsh and depressing. She could easily identify with the atmosphere.

"Oi, are you paying attention?"

Hermione turned back to the table. Ron had an amused expression on his face. "Of course I am," she whispered.

He raised an eyebrow. "Oh, really, well, you seemed to be out the window a minute ago. Where did you go?" He smiled at her. His lips stretched deliciously, and his curiosity lit up his blue eyes. She tried her best not to be trapped in the bright blueness.

"I went to a place where ginger boys don't ask ridiculous questions," she mumbled.

Ron softly snorted. "Blimey, sounds bloody dull." He chuckled and she joined him.

"Now, I think we should talk about December," McGonagall said rather loudly. Hermione and Ron instantly quieted and sat up straight. They were in the middle of their weekly Prefect meeting. "After much thought and debate, we've decided to have a small Christmas party."

Hannah gasped and raised her hand. "Will it be like the Yule Ball?"

McGonagall took off her glasses to quickly wipe them. "Well, Ms. Abbot, it will have the same ideas as the Yule Ball, yes."

"I didn't know Hogwarts had regular Christmas parties," Ron blurted.

McGonagall gave a tight smile. "We don't but the seventh years put up a very good fight for this. With all the recent activity in the papers, Dumbledore thought this would be fun."

Hermione knew that McGonagall despised the idea. She smiled at her and nodded in support. "What can we do to help?" she asked.

McGonagall grinned at her. "That's great of you to ask, Ms. Granger. We need to organize the decorations. We need to think of a menu and a theme for this dance. It will only be years five through seven. This is a special occasion for the upper classes." Pansy tugged on Draco's arm. He didn't seem impressed by the idea. "I will assign you all jobs. We have about a month to plan and prepare. It will be the weekend before exams. So, start thinking of ideas. By our next meeting I want everyone to have something to contribute."

"Can we have live music?" Terry asked.

McGonagall gave him a look. "We will discuss the matter at the next meeting. I should say this, as Prefects you all must attend. You will be the main chaperons. The Head Boy and Girl will have the night off. It's their last year. This means no disciplinary trouble from you all. I expect you all to act and dress appropriately." Hermione looked to Ron. He rolled his eyes and groaned a bit.

After the meeting, Hermione and Ron walked down the hallway to head back to the Common Room.

"At least you have better robes now. It was nice of Fred and George to buy them for you," Hermione said.

Ron pouted at the ground. "I guess. Bloody hell, I can't believe that we're having another dance. The last one was a disaster."

Hermione nodded in agreement. The Yule Ball fourth year was at the top of her list of events to forget. "Yes, but it won't be like that this year."

Ron rubbed his neck. "I suppose. Lavender will be happy to hear about this. I reckon she'll go all around the school screaming about it. She loves dancing."

Hermione tried to seem interested. "That would be something to see. I don't think Harry will be happy to hear about it. He hates dancing."

He laughed. "At least he'll know to ask Cho right away." She didn't know what to say. She had no idea who she would go with.

"So, Weasley, are you going to grace us with those fantastic robes this year?" They turned around. Draco Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson sneered at them. Hermione instinctively grabbed Ron's arm.

However, he didn't budge. "Piss off, Malfoy. I'm in no mood to see your rat face."

Draco didn't seem offended. He and Pansy walked closer to them. Hermione sighed quietly. Malfoy had nothing better to do than to fire Ron up. She and Harry had learned early to ignore his stupidity but Ron not so much. It only took a comment from Malfoy to have his face red and fists clenched. At times Hermione thought it was ridiculous, but most of the time she found it sexy. Ron was kind a bloke. Yes, he got moody and could say mean things, but he was a naturally sweet person. She loved seeing him fuming and aggressive. It excited her.

"What, are you upset that you have to go to the dance? I know that you must be worried about Lavender tripping over those big feet of yours," Draco said slowly. Pansy giggled and rubbed his arm.

"Come on, Ron. We'll come back when he has better material," she said, pulling his arm.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Granger. I didn't notice you there. I guess I'm not the only one," Draco cheeked with a sigh. Hermione looked into his steel eyes. There was no warmth at all. He smirked. "Did I touch a nerve? Who are you going to the ball with?"

"What's it to you, Malfoy? Are you planning on asking her?" Ron shot.

Draco laughed. "Bollocks no. I paid good money for my robes. Why would I want filth ruining them? No, I was simply curious because Krum isn't around this year, and I don't think there will be any other desperate Quidditch players to go with."

"Even Ron has a date, Herms. How pathetic does that make you?" Pansy asked.

"Shut up," Hermione whispered.

"Why don't you two go bugger yourselves? We all know that you'll be going together. It will be the rat and the pig. It's a brilliant image, really." Ron's face flushed and he spat his words.

Pansy put her hands on her hips. Draco frowned at him. "Hmm, who will Potter go with? There's word that he has a thing for Cho. She's such a sap for blokes with a death wish."

Ron lunged at him, but Hermione held his waist. "Then I guess she'll ask you because I'm about to break your pointy little face," he growled.

Draco simply chuckled. "Then again, he could ask Granger."

"Oh, Potter and Granger! How sweet and perfect," Pansy chimed in.

Ron stopped struggling. He stared at Draco. Draco brushed off his cuffs. "Just a thought." He took Pansy's hand and led her down the hall.

Hermione watched them walk into the next corridor. She didn't let go of Ron's waist. In fact, she wrapped her arms around his stomach. She could feel the vibrations from his heart against his stomach. It was beating rapidly. She clutched his body. She couldn't help it. Even through his shirt, she could feel his warm skin. Ron slowly walked back into her. She rested her head on his back. Her heartbeat picked up as well. Ron put his hands on hers. They were so warm and big.

"I'm sorry. I reckon I lost it," he said.

"It's okay. I'm just glad that you didn't hit him. You don't need any more detentions. I think Malfoy was trying to get you in trouble before the dance," she responded. She didn't remove her head from his back. It felt so good to hold him. His arse was against her stomach. She wanted him to push against her, and she wanted to move her hands lower. She was so turned on. Moisture creamed her knickers.



"I fucking hate them," he said.

"I know you do, but you can't let what they say get to you. It's what Malfoy wants. He has nothing else going on in his life. He's jealous." Hermione took in his scent. It was a bit like apples.

"What does he have to be jealous of?" Ron asked. "I don't have anything that he wants."

"Ron, money isn't everything. He's an arse, and you're not. People love you and want you around. I don't think Malfoy can say the same," she answered.

"I don't care what he thinks of me. I hate it when he talks about you lot." Ron gave a heavy sigh, and Hermione bit her lip. She couldn't believe that they were still holding each other in the hallway.

"I know that, and he does, too. Ron, everyone knows how protective you are of the people you care about. It's so incredible." She noticed how her tone was soft and low. She couldn't help it.

"You-you think I'm incredible?" Ron's voice was barely a whisper.

Hermione smiled and held him tighter. "Of course I do."

Ron finally let go of her hands and pulled away. He turned to her. Though his breathing was normal, his face was flushed. Hermione couldn't stop herself. She looked down. She could see a slight bulge in his trousers. She tried to drag her eyes away, but she couldn't. She licked her lips and looked up at him. Ron gazed at her with droopy eyelids. His mouth was halfway open. He swallowed hard, and she watched his Adam's apple bob. He opened and closed his mouth several times as if he wanted to say something and flushed even more. Hermione looked down again. She had to clutch her skirt to keep from touching him.

"Um, sorry," he wheezed.

She shook her head. "No, don't apologize."

Ron bit his lip. They stared at each other. She couldn't explain how hot and horny she was. She had never felt so electrified before. It didn't help that Ron's hardness was right in front of her eyes. She had read books and heard stories. She knew at Ron's age stiffies happened quite often at random times. She felt lucky to be a girl. Her excitement was well hidden in her knickers.

He roughly rubbed his neck. "I-I need to go." He rushed past her and down the hall.

Hermione leaned against the wall. It was hard to breathe. She ran to the nearest bathroom to do what she always did when the pressure wouldn't leave her middle.

When she finally got back to the Common Room, it was filled with her fellow six years. They were by the fire. Parvati noticed her first. She motioned her with a hand. "Get over here!"

Hermione tried her best to smile. She walked over to the group. Ginny, Dean, and Seamus were on the love seat. Parvati and Neville were in chairs and Harry, Ron, and Lavender were on the floor. She took a seat next to Harry. Ron, who was sitting on the other side of Harry, looked away. Lavender was between his legs. He put his chin on her shoulder.

"So, Ron isn't mental? There really is a dance?" Dean asked.

"Yes, we're going to have a Christmas party," she said.

Lavender squeaked and clapped her hands. She fell back against Ron's chest. "Oh, this is wonderful! I can't wait! Patty, we have to get jewelry in Hogsmeade!"

Parvati giggled. "I can't believe we're having another one. Sorry, Harry, I can't be your date," she cheeked. Harry rolled his eyes.

"He's going with Cho, anyway," Ron mumbled.

"Oh, that's right. You'll get her this time around, eh?" Dean said.

Harry smiled a bit. "If she wants me."

"Of course she does, Harry," Hermione said. "Ask her."

"You two will be really cute!" Lavender said. Ron grinned and winked at Harry.

Harry blushed a bit. "I guess I will."

Hermione took a glance at Ginny. She was playing with a loose string in her jeans. Her lips were very tight. "Oh, good for you, Harry," she whispered. It was very quiet. Hermione was sure that she was the only one to hear it.

"That makes all of us with dates! Well, except for you Hermione," Lavender said.

Hermione turned from Ginny and looked to her. "Sorry?"

Lavender flipped her hair. "Well, all of the Gryffindor sixth years have dates. It would be weird if you didn't have one. Oh, and you're chaperoning so you definitely need one."

"Lavender, do you have to do this?" Ron asked.

She gazed at him. "Do what?"

Ron rolled his eyes. "Pressure her about a bloody date. We just found out today about the dance. Can't you just leave her alone?"

Lavender's cheeks went pink. Hermione's heart melted. "Well, Wonnies, I was just asking her, that's all. Don't be mad at me, baby."

Ron sighed. "I'm not mad. I'm just annoyed. I'm so sick of everyone being in people's business." Lavender's jaw dropped.

"Hey, Ron, calm down. There's no need for you to snap at her," Dean said.

Ron gave him a look. "Was I talking to you, Dean?"

Dean sat up. "You are now."

"Dean, stop it! You're just trying to pick a fight!" Ginny snapped. Dean glared at her and folded his arms. Ginny turned away from him. Hermione glanced at Harry. He was already staring at her. She raised her eyebrow and he twitched a smile.

"Well, I guess I'll just leave since I'm annoying you." Lavender moved away from him and stood up. She sniffed and wiped a tear from her eye before running out of the room.

"Fuck," Ron breathed. He rubbed his eyes.

"It's okay, Ron. I know that you didn't mean to make her cry," Hermione said. He looked at her. The fire she saw earlier was gone. He got up and left the room as well. The rest of the evening was quiet. Everyone left soon after.

Finally, she was able to sit alone with Harry by the fire.

"What in the bloody hell is going on?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. Earlier, Draco gave us a hard time. He asked us about who'd we go to the dance with. He upset Ron," she answered.

Harry chuckled. "He always upsets Ron. What about with Ginny and Dean? I think they're fighting. They've haven't gotten on all day."

"She's upset that you're going to the dance with Cho," Hermione said with a smile.

Harry scratched his head. "Do I really have to?"

"It would test Ginny's feelings. She might crack that night. What, do you honestly not want to do with Cho?" she asked.

He looked into the fire. It made his green eyes glow brightly. "I just find it funny that I might have a chance with Cho now, but I don't want it. What about you?"

She sighed. "I have no idea. I could go with Cormac."

Harry cringed. "He's a dick, and Ron hates him—it's perfect."

"What if you can't go with Cho, and I can't go with Cormac?" Hermione asked slowly. She didn't know if she could even consider going with Harry.

Harry frowned. "Is going stag an option?"

"Let's just hope that we can find other dates. I just can't believe tonight." She thought about telling him about Ron. She wanted to keep it to herself but she had to say it before she exploded again. "Ron and I had a...thing"

"Really? What does that mean?" Harry asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

"Oh, it's not what you think. Draco said something to really set him off. I had to hold him back only, I didn't let go and he didn't either. Neither of us did." She shivered at the thought of his scent.

Harry grinned. "That's great. I noticed that he seemed a bit dazed when he came in here. I think something is starting to come together. I had some letters this morning on my trunk. He stared at them like a nutter before leaving."

"Ginny seemed really angry tonight," Hermione added.

"She's in a fiery mood. The other day at the practice I got the feeling that she wanted to tell me something but didn't," he said.

"You should ask her about it at the dance. I'm sure that she'll be happy to explain it while you two slow dance," Hermione cheeked.

He rolled his eyes. "Please, Dean won't let her dance with me."

"It's Ginny we're talking about. Dean can't tell her what to do. Besides, even if he did, it would only make her want to dance with you more. That's how she is," she explained.

"Yeah," he said slowly, "she loves to do things her way."

"Just like you," she added. Harry smiled at her before looking back into the fire. They talked for a while but eventually Harry went up to sleep. Hermione laid down on the love seat. She smiled and gazed into the flames.

Hermione sat up and rubbed her eyes. She didn't plan on falling asleep in the Common Room. She got up and went to her room. However, as she climbed the staircase, she could hear people talking. She held back. It was Ron and Lavender. They were sitting on the step that lead to her room. Lavender wiped her eyes and sniffed. Ron sighed and rubbed his hands on his knees.

"I'm sorry. I really am. I didn't mean to hurt you," he said softly.

She nodded and smiled. "I just don't know why you're so mad at me."

"I'm not mad at you, babes," Ron said. He rubbed her back.

"Then why did you yell at me?" she asked, closing her eyes at his touch. Hermione rolled her eyes, but felt her heart pull a bit. Lavender's eyes were swollen with tears. She had never seen her so human, and she knew that Ron felt bad for making her upset.

Ron bit his lip. "I didn't mean to yell. I've had a really bad day, and I took it out on you. I shouldn't have."

Lavender gave him a look. "It's not just that, Won. You always get mad at me when I talk to Hermione."

He turned away from her. "She's my best friend. I'm protective of her. It's an impulse."

Hermione smiled and rested her head against the wall. "And I love that impulse," she whispered to no one.

Lavender folded her arms. "And I'm your girlfriend. You can't snap at me every time I say something that she may not like. I just wanted to know who she would go to the dance with."

"I know, I know. I fucked up, okay. Malfoy and Pansy gave her a hard time about it earlier. I didn't want to hear it again. Can you understand that? I wasn't mad at you." Ron tucked hair behind her ear.

Hermione could see Lavender shiver. Jealously set in. "Yes, I understand, Wonnies. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you or her. I can apologize, if you think it'd be best. I want you to know that I'm trying. If you care about Hermione, then she must be something." Lavender touched Ron's cheek.

He smiled. It was so tender and soft. "You don't have to apologize." She giggled and leaned in. She kissed him gently. She tangled her fingers in his hair and moaned. Ron placed his hands on her knees. He squeezed them and moved closer to her. Lavender moaned again loudly. Ron broke away. "Baby, your mates are sleeping. You have to be quiet." Hermione's ears burned. There was such sensuality in his voice.

Lavender licked her lips and stood up. "Let's go to the Prefect's bathroom then, Won Won." Hermione got up and ran down the stairs. She left the Common Room and ran down a corridor. She didn't stop until her legs gave out. She leaned against the wall and slid down. She blinked away tears, and held her legs close to her chest. She was too afraid to go back to her room for a long time.

By the time she finally tripped in her room, Lavender was snug in bed. She had a content expression on her face and a tiny red mark right below her earlobe.

Hermione lay in her bed and closed her eyes.

She didn't sleep a wink.

\*\*\*\*Okay, that's enough for this chap! Blimey, so many ups and downs! I love it! Thanks for reading and review if you want the next bit. Thanks!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 9

Thanks you all so much for the reviews! They make me oh so so so happy!

Disclaimer: Don't own Potter but Rupert Grint was extra sexy in Half Blood Prince, yeah?

Harry pulled on his scarlet jumper and laced up his boots. He tried not to think too much. It was always good to clear his mind before a match. "Fuck," Ron whispered, walking into their dorm room and sitting on Harry's bed. His face was paler than usual and his blue eyes were massive.

"What is it?" Harry asked.

He shrugged. "I can't find my bloody chin strap. I think I left it at home."

"So, there are some more in the shed. Just get a new one when we go down there," Harry reassured.

Ron rubbed his palms together and exhaled deeply. "It won't be the same. I already broke that one in. A new one will be uncomfortable."

He smirked at him. He knew that he really did not care about the strap. "Ron, you'll be fine. It's just against Hufflepuff."

Ron rolled his eyes. "I know that. Everyone keeps telling me the same thing. I dunno what's wrong with me. I'm no good at this."

"Ron, you're just nervous which is completely normal, and you're actually very good. I wouldn't have picked you if you weren't." He rubbed Ron's arm and smiled. He really did not understand why he was so hard on himself.

"I don't want to be a disappointment. Cormac thinks I'm rubbish. I don't want him to be right." Ron didn't look at him. He studied the pattern on Harry's blanket.

"Hey, Cormac is prick. You can't let him bother you. You're great, and I couldn't be happier that you are on the team. I know you try your best and that's all anyone can ask for," Ron opened his mouth but Harry quickly added, "and your best is good enough."

Ron laughed. "You know me too well."

Harry stood and stretched. "Better than I want to sometimes."

Ron got up as well and pulled his gloves out of his trunk. "You don't seem nervous."

"Eh, I'm the Chosen One, aren't I?" he cheeked.

Ron's jaw dropped. "You fucking tit." He jumped at Harry but he moved out of the way. The two of them ran downstairs and into the Great Hall. The hall was buzzing with its usual pre-match excitement. Many classmates came up to them and offered luck. The Slytherns and Hufflepuffs simply gave them dirty looks.

Cho casually walked up to them. She smiled sweetly. "Good luck today boys, but I don't think you'll need it."

"Cheers," Ron said. Though his pep talk helped a bit, Ron was slightly turning green.

"Thanks, Cho, and thanks for the idea about single training. I think it really helped," Harry said.

"I don't mind helping friends out. Well, at least not while we're the ones playing each other. See you." She walked away but gave Harry one last smile before leaving the hall.

"Blimey," Ron breathed.

"What?" Harry asked.

Ron smirked. "She really does want you, mate."

"What are you on about?" he asked with a frown.

Ron cleared his voice. "I don't mind helping friends out," he said in a screeching, somewhat high pitched voice that sounded nothing like Cho.

Harry rolled his eyes. "So, we are friends."

Ron gave him a look. "She wants to be more than that, Harry. Why haven't you asked her to the dance?"

Harry turned away. He didn't know why he was stalling. "I dunno. I've just been focused on the game and getting us ready. I'll ask here once it's over, I guess. I hope she says yes."

"She will say yes, Harry. You saw the way she looked at you, and I'm pretty sure that you still have drool on your chin," Ron said with a laugh.

"You're so clever, Ron," Harry mumbled. They continued to walk down the aisle. Cormac passed by them with sulk all over his face.

"He didn't look too happy," Ron whispered.

Harry grinned broadly. It was a good time to say it. "Well, he'll feel better after Hermione asks him to the dance."

"What? She's taking him to the Christmas party?" Ron asked.

Harry pretended to be surprised. "Yeah, he's her first choice. Didn't she tell you?"

He chewed on his lip a bit. "No." He didn't say another word as they reached their table. The rest of the team was already eating. Harry buttered some toast and Ron poured cereal.

"You ready?" Neville asked.

"I just want it to be over," Harry said.

"Then I guess you'll have to hurry up and catch the snitch," Ginny said.

Harry smiled at her. "Score as many goals as possible to back me up, just in case it takes a while."

She chuckled. "I'll do my best, Captain Potter." They gazed at each other. Harry felt a tingle in his stomach that had nothing to do with the nerves.

"So, I saw you talking to Cho. Did you ask her to the dance?" Dean asked rather loudly.

Ginny looked down and Harry looked at him. "No, but as soon as I do, you'll be the first to know."

"Ron, how are you feeling?" Hermione asked, trying to change the subject.

He looked up at her. "I'm fine."

She smiled. "You'll be great, Ron. You're an excellent keeper."

There was something in Ron's eyes that bothered Harry. "Better than Cormac?" Ron asked.

Hermione frowned at him. "Well, obviously you are. You're on the team, and he's not. Did he give you a hard time or something?"

"Forget it," he said, turning away.

"Oh, my Won Won. You look so sexy in your robes. You're going to kick arse this morning!" Lavender was practically screaming as she ran down the aisle to their table. She flopped on his lap and kissed his cheeks and forehead repeatedly.

"Lavender, please, I have a stomach ache," Ron said, pulling away.

Lavender got off his lap and sat next to him. She rubbed his stomach. "Nervous my love?"

"A bit," Ron mumbled.



"Nerves are a good thing. You'll perform better with some adrenaline running through you," Hermione said.

"Hermione is right, Wonnies. Besides, it will wear off once you really get into it. I'll be cheering you on. I made a poster!" Lavender screeched with a giggle.

Harry couldn't eat another bite of his toast. "I think we should head out."

"Good luck, lot," Seamus said.

"Yeah, you all will be great," Neville added.

Lavender gave Ron a sloppy snog and kissed his ear. "Weasley is my king," she moaned.

Ron's entire face went red. It matched his jumper perfectly. "T-thanks. Thanks, Lavender." She flipped her hair, locked her arm with Parvati's, and headed out the hall. He cleared his throat. "Quidditch really gets her excited."

"I can see that," Harry said.

"I think it's disgusting," Ginny whispered.

"It doesn't matter. She'll be rooting for you. I will, too," Hermione said. She squeezed his hand. "You don't need luck. You're great already."

For the first time all morning, Ron smiled genuinely. "Thank you." She gave Harry a nod and walked off. Harry smiled at her. Everything easily could have gone to shit, but she held it in.

"Ready to go, mate?" he asked Ron.

He was still smiling at her figure walking away. "Yes, I'm ready."

"Okay, we've been practicing non stop since school began and what have we been focusing on?" Harry asked his team in the Gryffindor holding tent. He could hear the chants and cheers of fellow and opposing classmates outside. He did feel a bit nervous. He wanted his first year as captain to be a success.

"Endurance and speed," Katie Bell answered.

Harry smiled at her. He had been playing with her since first year. "That's right. We've been working on our endurance and speed. The reason is that Hufflepuff is a bit slow but bloody accurate and patient. They will drag us out there all day if they can. They're hoping to tire out our chasers, make our beater's arms ache, and bore the living shit out of our keeper."

Ron snorted. "Not a chance."

"Good, if you all can just keep at it, I'll get the snitch. Their new seeker isn't very good, and I know they'll be hoping to score

a lot of goals before I catch it, but don't give them the opportunity. So, play a good game and this will easily be ours. Hands in lot." Harry held his hand out and his teams joined in. "Gryffindor on three. One, two, three, GRYFFINDOR!"

The team roared and headed out of the tent. Ron and Ginny stayed behind.

"Wow, you make a great captain, Harry," Ron said before leaving.

Ginny took his hand. "They won't tire me out."

Harry squeezed her hand back. For once, he agreed with Lavender. Quidditch robes really did look good on Weasleys. "I know you won't. You're my fastest chaser. Show me your moves out there, yeah?"

Ginny suddenly turned a bit red. She licked her lips and said very gently, "I'll show you everything I have."

Being a girl is hard. Harry knew that, but being a bloke was certainly difficult as well. He shifted and clutched his broom. He hoped his stiffy wasn't noticeable. He really didn't want to fly with two kinds of wood between his legs. She kept her eyes on him without blinking.

"Good, I'd like to see it," he said.

She smirked. "We should go."

It was hard, for many reasons, for Harry to focus on the snitch. His was proud of his team. Ron was excellent at saving goals and the beaters were more aggressive than he anticipated. They fought against the bludgers with ease, and the chasers worked as their own team. He knew that they would win, yet he didn't care. Harry could not stop thinking about his exchange with Ginny. She was so confusing. One minute it seemed as if she hated him, but other times he was sure that with a bit more time and privacy, they could have been against a wall shagging.

"Shit," he breathed. He didn't want to think about them hot and sweaty against a wall or Ginny moaning his name as he touched her body everywhere. He shouldn't have wanted to feel her lips kiss him and feel her fiery tongue on his stomach. Yes, he loved her. He wanted to walk with her across the grounds and talk. He wanted to hold her while they did homework together, but he was a sixteen-year-old male. He had physical needs that just seemed to grow each day.

"Wacher Harry!" Dean bellowed as he zoomed over his head. Harry broke out of his trance and saw Dean knock a bludger away from Katie. Dean was a great player. He was also sixteen and had urges. Harry wondered if he and Ginny acted out on those urges. It made him shudder. Thinking about Dean and Ginny having sex made his skin go cold.

The snitch buzzed around his ear for a split second before zooming off. He had to get it together. He gave a heavy sigh and

zoomed after it. It didn't take long. As soon as the snitch was in his sight, his eyes never left it. He went as fast as his Firebolt would allow and stretched out his hand. As soon as the golden metal was against his palm, he dove and caught it. It was a glorious feeling. The game was over. His team had won.

As always, the Common Room was booming with laughter and cheers. Harry stood against the wall and watched his teammates and friends re-enact certain moves and re-tell how close it got at times. He tried to enjoy it, but he was so distracted. He noticed Hermione fully engage in conversation with Ron and Lavender. She seemed to be trying more. Harry didn't understand why he couldn't be more of an adult about the situation with Dean. His hands itched to do something. He left the Common Room and went to the Prefects' bathroom for privacy.

However, as he opened the door, Cho Chang came out. "Oh, sorry, Harry," she said, moving out of the way.

"It's okay. I sort of rushed the door," Harry said.

Cho put a hand on his shoulder. "You all did amazingly. I was worried about you for a moment. You seemed to be out of it."

Harry nervously chuckled. "I was distracted."

She gave him a look. "By what? I hope it was good. It could have cost you the game."

He looked into her large, dark eyes. Cho was beautiful. He couldn't deny that. He had always thought that she was exotic and mysterious in a way. "I was thinking...about the dance."

Cho ran a hand through her black hair. It was like coal. Her hand seemed to disappear in the strands. It wasn't deep and thick like Ginny's. "Yes, I'm so happy that McGonagall finally caved in. I was one of the front runners."

"Do you want to go with me?" Harry blurted before he lost his nerve.

"Pardon?" she said.

He licked his lips. "Sorry, I mean to ask, do you want to go to the dance with me? It doesn't have to mean anything. I just thought--"

"Yes, I'd love to go with you," Cho cut in. "We didn't even get the opportunity to dance last time. I'd love to finally get one in."

He smiled. "Well, I'm rubbish at dancing, but I'm sure we can work something out." Cho chuckled and tucked hair behind her ear. "I better get back to the party."

"I thought you had to come in here," Cho said.

Harry shrugged. "Not anymore," he said quietly. When he did get back to the Common Room, it was mostly empty except for Ginny and a few others. Dean was not present.

"Where did everyone go?" he asked, joining her on the couch.

Ginny sighed. "Cormac came over to congratulate Ron on a good game. Of course, it was full of spite. He then wanted to speak to Hermione alone."

"About what?" Harry asked.

Ginny scrunched her eyebrows. "He asked her to the Christmas dance, and she said yes. Ron wasn't too happy about that. He left. Hermione left. Lavender stormed after him and the party rather died out. I sent Dean to check on him."

Harry noticed how quiet her voice was and how her eyes were fixed on the fire. "Why didn't you?"

She shrugged. "I don't know what to say to him. Hermione didn't do anything wrong, and I wanted to wait for you." She pulled her eyes from the fire and looked at him. Harry had to remind his body how to breathe.

"I just needed some air," he explained.

"I understand that. We played a really good game," she said.

"I about lost it. Did you notice how the snitch almost went by me without me seeing it?" Harry asked.

Ginny laughed. "You did seem incredibly distracted. It doesn't matter. You caught it, of course. You're the best seeker in a long time. Your dad would be so proud of you."

Harry had to look away. He swallowed the lump in his throat. Talking about his dad and Quidditch always brought emotion out of him, even though he didn't want it to. "I think about him when I play. I wonder if I make a dive that he would have or if he saw the snitch as clearly as I do."

"I'm sure he did. You're a natural. You get it all from him. Your plaque will be put right next to his someday." She put her hand on his knee.

Harry couldn't understand how she did it. Ginny always so easily brought feeling out of him. "I would love that," he said. For some reason he couldn't hold it in. Tears skidded down his cheeks. He hardly cried and when he did, it came out of nowhere. "I'm sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me." He continued to wipe tears but more fell. He sniffed and wiped his nose on his sleeve. Even though he couldn't remember them, he missed his dad and his mum so much.

"Nothing is wrong with you, Harry. It's okay to feel. You don't have to be strong all the time," Ginny said, wiping a tear that he had missed.

He shivered and took her hand. "You seem to be."

Her bottom lip trembled. "I'm not," she whispered. He held her small hand and stared at her. She stared right back at him fiercely. He wanted her so badly. Harry couldn't stop himself. He leaned forward and she moved closer to him. He could hear his heart beating rapidly, and he could have sworn that Ginny's breathing was shaky. He didn't know what to do.

He didn't have to make a move. The door to the room opened and Hermione stepped in. She was pale, and her eyes were rather red. "Oh, I'm so sorry."

Ginny pulled her hand away and got up. "No, it's okay. I need to go to bed. Th-thank you." She didn't look at him. She ran upstairs. Harry sat back against the couch.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I thought that you'd be in bed by now," Hermione said, taking Ginny's spot.

"No. I just needed some air," he answered again. His hands were shaky but his mind was moving so slow. He didn't know what was wrong with him.

Hermione nodded and stared into the fire. "I see. Cormac asked me to the dance. I said yes."

"Ginny told me. I asked Cho. She said yes," Harry said.

"We both have dates," Hermione whispered.

"Yeah," he said flatly.

Hermione looked to him. "And judging by your eyes and by mine, we've both been crying."

Harry stared into the fire. He couldn't take looking at Hermione. "Yeah."

Hermione didn't say anymore. The two of them continued to look into the fire.

\*\*\*\*Wow, finally some juicy H/G right? Lol. Oh, the lightening is about to strike now! If you want to see the next part...REVIEW! Cheers

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 10

Thanks for the reviews! Oh, they just make me so happy and keep me writing!

Disclaimer: I do not know Harry Potter

"And before we adjourn, let me just add that there is to be NO altering of the beverages. If there is even one complaint or idea

that someone has spiked the drinks, the party will be canceled, all future dances will be barred, and the culprit will be expelled, are we clear?" McGonagall glared them all down but focused the hardest on Ron. He shifted in his chair and looked away.

"I think she has it in for me," Ron mumbled as they walked down the hall after their Prefects meeting.

Hermione looked at him. They had barely spoken since Cormac asked her to the dance. "I think she's more worried about Seamus than you."

"Oh, I'm supposed to be able to control him?" he asked.

She shrugged. They walked slowly in silence. Hermione watched him. He had his hands deep in his pockets, and his head was down. She didn't know what to say to him. "So, you're talking to me now?" she asked.

Ron stopped walking. "Of course."

She ignored how beautiful his eyes were. They weren't standing very close, but she could feel him. It hurt. "You haven't been. You've been angry with me."

"I have not," he shot.

"Oh, really, so, when you blew up at me the other night, I was actually dreaming?" Hermione could feel her heartbeat pick up. She did not want to fight with him.

"Sorry that I wasn't in the best of bloody moods. Cormac asked you to the party, and you said yes. You said yes, Hermione." Ron looked away and ran a hand through his hair.

She could already feel a mix of anger and regret boil inside of her. "It's just a dance, Ron. It's not as if we're getting married. Besides—no one else has asked me. I-I wouldn't have anyone else to go with."

Ron looked back to her and walked closer. "That's not true."

Hermione didn't know how to respond. Everything was always so intense between her and Ron. "Then who should I go with? Who would want to go with me?"

He opened his mouth several times and rubbed his neck. Eventually, he gave up with a sigh. "It's Cormac, Mione. He hates me, and you said yes."

There was shakiness in his voice. Ron's deep eyes were so open, and his face was stern. She wanted to tell him. She wanted to apologize and explain but fear set in. She couldn't bring herself to say it. "Lavender hates me, but she's your girlfriend."

He shook his head. "She doesn't hate you. She's trying to be nicer."

"Don't give me that! Yes, to your face she's nice to me, but as soon as you leave the room she's a bitch like-"

"She's not a bitch," Ron interrupted.

She laughed harshly. "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry that I offended her. Well, I guess I have a right to defend Cormac. He doesn't hate you. He's just angry that you are on the team and he's not. Please, Ron, what do you want me to do?"

"I don't know! What do you want me to do?" Ron shouted.

"I want you both to take this to your Common Room before I hand out detentions," Snape said from behind them.

Hermione wiped her eyes. "I'm so sorry, Professor Snape. Come on, Ron," she said quickly before Ron could reply with something cheeky. She took his hand and led them to her abandoned classroom. She closed the door behind them and leaned against it. Ron leaned against the desk next to the door.

"Look, I'm sorry that I shouted at you and about the other day," he said.

"I'm sorry, too," she replied. They were silent for a while.

"It's just this entire Christmas party is turning to shit. It's even more stressâ€¦" he trailed off.

She gazed at him. He looked toward the window with the same distant look in his eyes that he had at The Three Broomsticks. "What other stress do you have?"

Ron chuckled and started to walk around the room. "Well, there's school, Quidditch, Ginny, my Prefect duties, and other things."

"What other things?" Hermione asked. She walked over to him. He stopped pacing and stood in front of her. He shrugged. "Come on, Ron, you can tell me. If you have something to say, please, say it."

He chewed on his lip and moved even closer to her. "You."

His voice was so quiet and delicate. It gave her chills. "What?" she asked.

"You-you stress me out, Hermione." Ron's voice was just as quiet.

She swallowed the lump in her throat. "I stress you out? How do I do that?"

He didn't move his eyes from her. "I never know what you want."

Hermione's body heated. Her already rapid heartbeat increased. "I can say the same for you."

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to," Ron whispered.

"Neither do I. I didn't know," she answered.

He nodded slowly. "Believe it or not but I don't enjoy us fighting. I don't mean to make you upset."

"It kills me, Ron. I hate it." Hermione could not understand why she was so emotional. She couldn't keep her feelings in no matter how hard she tried.

"I'm so sorry. You have no idea how badly I feel when I make you like this. I'm sorry, Hermione." Ron reached out and took her hand. He held her wrist tightly and rubbed his thumb across her skin.

All her hairs stood up. She shivered. "I'm sorry, too. I don't like upsetting you either, Ron. I want you to be happy. I justâ€¦" she couldn't continue. The lump in her throat burned and swelled. She closed her eyes. She felt pressure on her arm and then something warm and firm against her cheek. She opened her eyes. Ron was holding her. He wrapped his arm around her waist. Hermione stood on her toes and put her arms under his arms. She closed her eyes again.

They didn't speak. Ron rested his cheek on her head and held her tighter. She gripped his back as best as she could. The lump in her throat slowly deflated. It felt so amazing feeling Ron's body. He smelled good, and he was gentle.

"You're my best friend, Hermione," he said after a while.

"You're my best friend too, Ron," she replied. She let go of him. As much as she didn't want to, she did. "We should get back. Everyone is going to want to know about the final plans."

Ron smiled and looked away. "Yeah."

They didn't speak the entire way back to the Common Room, but it was okay. There were a million things going through her but now she was okay with letting them go. When they got back, most of their year was waiting for them but unfortunately, Cormac was also in the room.

"It's about time!" Parvati said.

Ron took a seat on the floor in front of Lavender's chair. There was an empty spot next to Cormac on the love seat. He smirked at her. "I won't bite." She tried her best to smile and sat next to him.

Lavender bent down and wrapped her arms around Ron's neck. "So, Wonnies, what happened?" She kissed the top of his head and tangled her fingers in his hair.

"Well, it's set for the weekend right before we leave for holiday, from nine to twelve," he explained.

"That's not very long," Seamus said.



"Are you mental? It's three hours," Ron said.

"Three hours of pranks. Not enough for Seam," Neville explained.

"There won't be any of that Seamus. McGonagall was very adamant about trouble. If you wreck this, then there won't be any more parties," Hermione said.

"Yeah, and it will be my arse. I think she's holding me personally responsible if any Gryffindor causes trouble," Ron mumbled.

Lavender massaged his shoulders. "That's because she trusts you, love."

"And because she's punishing you for all the things Fred and George did in the past," Harry said with a smile.

Ron closed his eyes and nodded. "Hmm, that sounds about right."

Hermione watched as Lavender squeezed and dug into his shoulders. She had to do something. She touched Cormac's knee. "We should go to Hogsmeade together. We need to pick up accessories."

"Oh! That sounds like fun! Won Won, we need to do that too!" Lavender squealed in a high-pitched voice.

Ron winced. "Fine, Lavender."

Cormac licked his lips slowly. "That sounds great, Hermione. We can get something to eat as well. Possibly come back a bit early." Hermione blushed terribly and felt a bit of sickness in her stomach. She didn't want to go or come back anywhere with him.

"Oh, are you two dating?" Lavender asked.

"I don't see how it's any of your business," Harry shot.

Cormac laughed arrogantly. "Ease up, Potter. It's just a question, right Hermione?" He once again smirked at her. She once again did not know what to say.

"Hermione?" Ron asked.

She turned to him. He was frowning at her. She opened her mouth to speak, but the door opened. Dean came storming into the room. He had a harsh expression. He marched straight up the stairs without a glance at them, and Ginny came in right after him. Her eyes were puffy and red. Ron and Harry automatically stood up.

"Ginny, are you okay?" Ron asked. He balled his fists.

She quickly wiped her eyes. "I'm fine; I'm just going to go to bed."

Hermione watched as Harry looked toward the staircase. She knew that he wanted to go after Dean. "Hey, let's go for a walk." She got up and put a hand on Ginny's shoulder.

"Okay," Ginny said with a stuffy nose.

Hermione looked from Ron to Harry. She knew that they wanted to tag team and kick Dean's arse. "Everything will be fine, right Ginny?"

She nodded frantically. "Yes, everything is okay."

"Wonnie, come on!" Lavender whined.

Hermione lead Ginny out of the room. Ginny continued to sniff and wipe her nose on her sleeve as they walked. "Let's get you cleaned up," Hermione offered.

They went into a loo. Hermione brought her over to the sink and turned on the water. Ginny splashed it on her face and rubbed some on her neck. She ran her hands through her thick, fiery hair repeatedly. Hermione rubbed her back as Ginny's tears mixed with the water droplets. Though they disagreed on issues and didn't have a lot in common, Hermione considered Ginny a good friend and even a little sister. She handed her a towel.

"Thanks," Ginny breathed. She turned off the water and scrubbed her face.

"What happened?" Hermione asked.

She leaned over the sink. "Dean and I had a horrible fight."

Hermione put a hand on hers. "Over what?"

She shrugged. "I dunno. We were talking a walk around the castle. We were just talking about the holiday. We started talking about plans. He asked me if Harry was staying with us. It went to shit after that. I don't think he trusts me."

"Harry always stays at your house," Hermione said.

"That's what I told him. It's not like Harry has anywhere else to go." Ginny closed her eyes and exhaled deeply.

"Why is Dean just now getting upset about this? What is he thinking? Does he honestly believe that you'd cheat or something?" Hermione asked.

"I think he's more worried about Harry coming on to me. I reckon in Dean's mind I'm just a stupid fan girl. I'll just rip my knickers off and jump on him without question. That stupid fucker." Ginny gripped the sink as if she wanted to pull it out of the wall.

It didn't occur to Hermione that there was real jealousy coming from Dean. "He's just worried, Ginny. Can you blame him?"

She turned to her. "What, you think I still want Harry?"

"That's not what I'm saying," she said softly.

Ginny laughed and tucked hair behind her ear. "So, what are you saying? Do you think that I'm going to sneak into Harry's room and shag him? Are you on Dean's side?"

"Ginny, you need to calm down. I'm not attacking you, so don't attack me. I'm just trying to understand what is going on. I'm on your side. I don't think that you would hurt Dean, okay?"  
Hermione smiled as warmly as she could.

Her lip trembled. "Fucking hell, I'm sorry, Hermione. You're right. I just get so bloody tired of it. Dean and I spend so much time arguing about Harry. I'm trying to get him out of my life, but he won't leave."

"Maybe he's not supposed to," Hermione said.

She turned away. "He is supposed to. I'm with Dean and Harryâ€¦well, he has Cho and you."

Hermione frowned. "What does that mean?"

Ginny rolled her eyes. "Well, obviously he's shagging Cho or whatever and then you two..."

"Ginny, I'm not sure what is going on between Harry and Cho, but there is certainly nothing between Harry and me. I promise you that." Irritation pricked her skin. Hermione could not understand why everyone in the universe thought that she fancied Harry. She did not want him. She wanted his amazing best friend. Hermione didn't understand where all the speculation came from. She couldn't imagine being with Harry when she could have Ron. It was how she felt since she was eleven and met them both on the train to Hogwarts. She couldn't think of one thing that would make people believe that she wanted Harry or that he wanted her.

"It doesn't matter, Hermione. All Ron and I know is--"

"You and Ron? You talk to Ron about me and Harry?" Hermione interrupted.

Ginny put a hand on her hip. "He is my brother. We do talk."

"There's nothing going on between me and Harry!" Hermione urged.

She waved a hand. "Whatever, that's not what this is even about remember?"

Hermione rubbed her forehead. "You're right, this about you and Dean."

"There may not be me and Dean much longer. I don't know how much more I can take." Ginny rubbed her eyes.

"You're going to break up with him?" Hermione asked.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Hermione. I really care about Dean. He's a great guy, but we always fight now. It wasn't this bad until school started. We always fight about the same bloody thing." Ginny turned the water back on and tried to collect it in her hand.

Hermione watched as the liquid glossed her pale, freckly fingers. "Maybe you should talk to Harry about it."

She snorted. "I think Harry already wants to punch him."

"No, you talk to Harry. You should talk to Harry about Dean. It could help," Hermione said.

"And say what to him? This has nothing to do with Harry and everything to do with him at the same time. He wouldn't care, anyway. He has Cho now. I'm sure they'll be going to Hogsmeade to get matching accessories. Maybe you lot can double date," Ginny spat.

"Don't be like this, Ginny. I'm just trying to help. I know you're upset, but don't be this way." Hermione turned the water off and pulled on Ginny's shoulder.

Ginny sighed and looked at her. "I don't know what to do. I'm stressed out about all of this. I just can't get Harry out of my relationship."

Hermione smiled slightly. "Do you want to get him out of your relationship?"

Ginny chewed on her lip. It reminded her of Ron. "Honestly, I don't know. Harry and I—I don't know where we are."

"You don't fight with him," Hermione said.

"No, I don't." For the first time, she smiled. She gazed at the floor and smiled.

Hermione mentally patted herself on the back. "I'm going to head to bed. Will you okay?"

Ginny nodded and continued to look at the floor. "Yes, I'll be okay." Hermione gave her arm a squeeze before leaving. She wasn't sure what part of their conversation she would tell Harry. She thought about it as she made it back to the Common Room.

"Is Weasley better?"

Hermione looked up. Cormac was standing in front of her with his arms crossed over his chest. "Oh, um, yes, she's fine."

He nodded as though he couldn't care less. "So, you never answered Lavender's question."

"What are you talking about, Cormac?" For some reason he made her a bit uneasy.

He stepped closer to her. "About us dating."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You know we're not dating. We're going to the party together, that's all."

"That doesn't have to be all. Do you want it to be more?" he asked.

"Cormac, I'm tired. If you really want me to explain to you why we aren't currently dating, then I will be happy to do it in Hogsmeade, okay?" she snapped.

He held his hands up. "You win, Hermione. I can back off for now."

She gave him a quick nod and walked just as quickly back to the Common Room. Surprisingly, Harry, Ron, and Lavender were up waiting for her. They were seated on the floor. "How is she?" Harry asked.

Hermione sat on the couch in front of them. "She's okay. She just needed to wash her face."

"Is she breaking up with Dean?" Lavender asked.

She had to suppress an eye roll. "I don't think so."

"Can you give us a bit, babe?" Ron asked.

Lavender frowned. "What? I want to know what is going on, and if she's okay." Harry took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes roughly. He was not good at hiding annoyance.

"You heard Hermione, she's fine," Ron said.

"But--"

"She's my sister, Lavender," he interrupted before Lavender could start complaining.

Lavender's eyes widened. She nodded with a sigh and stood up. "Night," she mumbled before slumping upstairs.

"Anyway, what happened?" Ron asked as if nothing had happened.

Hermione tried to hide her smile as best as she could. "She really is okay. They had a fight."

"It took all my willpower and some of Harry's to keep from knocking Dean's face in. Seamus told us that he could handle it. Neville went with him," Ron explained.

"What did they fight about?" Harry asked.

Hermione looked him in the eyes. "I don't know. She's didn't say."

"I know what it is," Ron breathed. "It's Harry."

"What?" Harry asked.

Ron gave him a look. "Please, of course it's about you."

Harry shook his head. "I didn't do anything."

Ron pulled at the rug. "You don't have to. I know that expression she had. It's not the first time that I've seen her upset. I know my sister. They're fighting about you."

Harry looked to Hermione. She wasn't sure of what to say. The tone in Ron's voice was not of annoyance or gratification. It was harsh and deep. "I think they're going to be fine. When I left her, she seemed a bit better. Couples fight; you should know that by now, Ron."

He raised an eyebrow. "This is different."

"Really, how is that?" Hermione asked.

He continued to look at her. "Cormac was looking for you. Did you find him?"

"Ron, stop it," Harry rushed. Ron looked down at his hands and said nothing.

"I really don't know what else to say. She's not crying anymore. I'm sure they'll make up," Hermione said.

"If that's even the best thing for them," Harry said.

"What does that mean?" Ron asked.

"I don't know. If they always fight like this, then maybe they should give each other some space," he said.

"Do you really think that's the best thing for them? This is about them, Harry," Ron said.

He didn't look at him. "I'm going to bed." He didn't say another word as he slowly made his way upstairs. Hermione watched him with guilt. She had good news for him but couldn't say it in front of Ron.

"So, did you find Cormac?" Ron asked.

Hermione turned back to him. "Yes, I did, Ron. Is that a problem?"

He looked into the fire. The light made his eyes glow and hair flame even redder than it was naturally. "No," he said flatly. He lay back on the rug and continued to look into the flames. Lying down, his shirt rode up, and she could see his creamy stomach with tiny freckles splashed across his skin. She moved to the floor and sat by his head. She leaned against the chair and

watched him as he watched the fire. Nothing warmed her up more than Ron.

"Is Ginny really okay?" Ron asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"They were fighting about Harry, weren't they?" He turned to her.

She was trapped in his gaze. She couldn't lie to him. "Yes, they were."

Ron nodded and turned back to the fire. "Everyone is stressed."

Hermione lay on her stomach. Ron got on his stomach and adjusted so they could lie side by side. They watched the fire in silence and eventually fell asleep.

\*\*\*\* Oh, events are getting closer and closer! Thanks for reading. Please review and the next chapter will be up! It's like magic, lol.

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 11

SO SO SO SO SORRY THIS TOOK FOREVER! It's not that I've given up on this story, or lost ideas, or don't care. I LOVE this story and I love you all for enjoying it and reviewing. It's just I'm in the process of moving and it's been a nightmare, lol. I'm moving from England to New York so you can imagine all the things that I have to do.

So, thank you all for sticking with me and so sorry this took so long. It won't happen again \*or at least I'm going to bloody try to make sure it doesn't\* Cheers.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry quietly changed into his clothes and put his broom over his shoulder. He was tired and cranky but a morning fly around the empty Quidditch pitched seemed like a good remedy. It wasn't likely that he was going to be able to go back to sleep. The questions he had from the previous night were not answered and a terrible mixture of anticipation and anxiousness clogged his stomach. He needed to talk to Hermione and find out what happened with Ginny and Dean.

When he quickly padded across the room and opened the door, he had to bite his lip to keep from screaming. Lavender Brown was on the other side with her hand raised as if she was about to knock.

"What are you doing?" Harry asked at once.

She smiled sweetly and showed her white, perfect teeth. "Didn't mean to scare you. I need to speak to Won."

"He's asleep," he answered.

Lavender flipped her hair. "Well, can you wake him? It's important."

"No, I can't wake him. You know that he doesn't like to be awake when he doesn't have to be. You can talk to him at breakfast." Harry noticed the slight eye roll she gave him.

"I think I know my Won Won. Listen, it won't take long. I just want to know how things went last night," she said calmly.

It was Harry's turn to roll his eyes. Lavender Brown was one of the nosiest people he had ever met. The Dursley's would welcome her into the family with open arms. "Well, you can ask him at breakfast. I'm sorry, but I'm not waking him up." Harry was sure that Ron was dead asleep. Though he hadn't stayed up to wait for him, Harry never heard him come into the room so he assumed that he stayed up talking to Hermione. It thought made him even more nervous.

Lavender flipped her hair. "Fine, I guess I can wait a bit." Harry nodded and walked out of the room. He closed the door behind them, and the two made their way down the staircase. "You don't think he's mad at me, do you?" she asked out of nowhere.

He sighed. "I don't think so, but you're better off talking to him about it."

"Don't you think I want to? It's justâ€¦he's always around Hermione, so I never get the chance," Lavender whined. Harry frowned. He thought it was a bit rich of her to say that Ron spent all his time with Hermione. Lavender was usually stuck to Ron's mouth eighteen hours a day.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs, Lavender gasped loudly.

"Lavender, it's not that bad. I'm sure Ronâ€¦" Harry trailed off when he looked up and saw Lavender's face. He followed her eyes. In front of the fireplace were Ron and Hermione. They were lying on the rug with their heads facing each other. They seemed to be asleep.

"Wonnie!" Lavender screamed. She raced over to him and shook him. "Get up! Get up!"

"Hmm," Ron groaned. He stretched and slowly opened his eyes. They quickly focused, and he sat up. "Lavender."

"Don't you Lavender me! What do you think you're doing?" Lavender cried.

Hermione opened her eyes and sat up as well. She blushed terribly. "We fell asleep."

"Thank you for that careful analysis, smarty pants!" Lavender spat.



Hermione gave her a look like she wanted to say something but she simply stood up. "I'm going to take a shower." She hurried out of the room. Harry noticed Ron look after her.

"Oh, you better take a shower. Wash the traces of Won off you, right?" Lavender called after her.

"Lavender, please, calm down," Ron said, standing up and rubbing his neck.

Lavender wiped the tears off her cheeks. "How can you ask me to calm down? I caught you sleeping with Hermione."

Ron blushed terribly. "You know it's not like that. We fell asleep talking. That's all, I promise. I'm sorry."

Lavender didn't seem convinced. She turned to Harry. "And I guess you were covering for him?"

Harry gawked at her. "What? I didn't know anything. Don't bring me into this."

"Lavender, Harry didn't cover for me. There's nothing to cover. People fall asleep. It happens." Ron tone wasn't soothing or soft. He seemed irritated and bored.

"Well, usually when people fall asleep together, they do so with a girlfriend or boyfriend. You fell asleep with HER! How dare you, Wonnie!" Lavender's tears got bigger and fatter the longer she cried.

Ron's annoyance seemed to disappear. "Please, don't cry, okay. I'm really sorry. Nothing happened we just fell asleep. I'm really sorry." He took her hands.

Lavender immediately stopped crying. "Really?"

Harry wanted to knock himself out with his broom. He couldn't stand seeing Lavender treat Ron in such a way. He wanted it to end. He wanted to talk to him, but he knew it was useless. Ron would get defensive and call him a bad friend. He didn't want that. As much as Harry didn't want Ron with Lavender, his friendship with him meant the world to him, and he didn't want to ruin it.

"Really, okay. I'm sorry. Let's just talk, okay? I'm sorry, Lavender. I'm sorry," Ron repeated. Lavender smiled and jumped into his arms. Ron put his arms around her and looked at Harry. His face was blank and his eyes were dark. Harry couldn't take it anymore. He firmed his grip on his broom and stormed out of the room.

His fly wasn't as freeing as he thought. More and more seemed to fill his head and his heart. Things with Ginny were fucked up. He couldn't keep his plans in order, and Ron was suffering. He knew he was. Ron was probably in as much pain as he or Hermione was. He didn't stay in the air too much longer. His chest hurt, and

the chill was becoming too much. When he got to the practice tent, Hermione was sitting on a bench.

"What are you doing out here?" Harry asked.

"I brought you some breakfast. I'm sure that you didn't get any on your way out," she answered.

Harry smiled and joined her on the bench. He took the bacon sandwich and muffin from her. "Cheers." She smiled and nodded, but there was something to it that made Harry uneasy. "What's wrong?"

"Lavender was really upset," Hermione said.

Harry finally let out his laughter that he held in from earlier. "She was livid."

She didn't seem amused. "Did she cry?"

He stopped laughing. "Yeah, of course she did."

"I was afraid of that," Hermione said softly.

Harry gave her a look. "Why? Did something happen?"

She shook her head and shrugged. "I don't know. Neither of them was at breakfast. I assume Ron is in the room trying to calm her down and prove that he cares more about her than me."

Her brown eyes were glossy. Harry hoped that she wouldn't start crying. "He wouldn't do that, Hermione. Ron's not like that."

Hermione looked away. "Maybeâ€¦maybe not."

"Hermione, what happened yesterday, with everything?" he asked.

She took a breath. "I'm not sure. We talked after the meeting. He says that I'm stressing him out because I'm not clear about what I want. He's worried about Ginny and Dean, which I guess he has every right to be. Ginny said they're fighting a lot, and it's about you. Ron knows it."

There was so much for him to process at once. "Ginny and Dean are arguing about me?"

She looked back up to him. "Dean's worried that something might happen over holiday. Ginny's getting sick of it."

Harry gripped the bench. He wasn't hungry anymore. "Is she sick of me?"

"I'm not sure, Harry. I don't think so. I think she's more upset about Dean not trusting her. I think she's upset about a lot of things. We all are," she explained. "We didn't do anything, Ron and I. We were talking and fell asleep."

"I know that, Hermione. You don't have to explain it to me," Harry said. They were silent for awhile.

"Harry," Hermione finally said after some time, "do you think we're doing the right thing?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean with the plans. You and I are making all these arrangements, do you think it's wrong or if it's even worth it?" Hermione gazed at him so intently. She was always the smart one, she always had the answers for every problem, but for once she was looking to him for support and reassurance. He wanted to give it to her, but he didn't want to lie.

"I don't know. At first everything seemed so clear but not so much now. Sometimes, I think we should just tell them the truth, and sometimes I think we should just give up. I feel really badly, Hermione," he said honestly.

Her bottom lip trembled, "I do, too."

"You know what? I think Ron does, too. When he was apologizing to Lavender, there was this hole in him that I hated looking at. He's not like that with you. That night I walked in on you two, he was different. He was Ron." Harry smiled, hoping it would help. He didn't want them to be so upset all the time.

It seemed to work. Hermione grinned. "Ginny hardly ever really smiles anymore, but when she does, it usually because of you, Harry. I don't think her feelings have gone away one bit. In fact, I think they've grown."

"Ron loves you, Hermione. I don't know what he has with Lavender, but I don't think it's real. I think you should tell him how you feel," he said.

"And I think you should tell Ginny how you feel. You missed the chance once; I don't think you should do it again," she answered.

"The Christmas party is in just a few weeks. I reckon it will be the best time to tell them. It will give us time to figure out what to," he explained. It was like a light was finally being turned on in his brain. It seemed so easy. He didn't know why they hadn't decided to do it from the beginning.

"Okay, Harry, that sounds like a great idea. We can't wait what about Cormac and Cho?" Hermione quickly asked.

He had forgotten that he was going to the dance with Cho and that they were going to Hogsmeade the next day to pick up accessories. "Oh, err, well, I guess we'll have to still go with them. Ron and Ginny are still going with Lavender and Dean. Besides, I don't want to stand Cho up."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You care an awful lot more about your date than I do about mine."

"Hey, you're the one who said yes," Harry teased.

"Don't remind me. Tomorrow is going to be a nightmare. I just hope that he'll be able to keep his hands to himself," she said with a shiver.

He laughed and the two of them continued to talk about their new plan. It didn't involve schemes or tricky ideas. It was them simply deciding the best way to tell their love interests how they felt and for the first time, Harry was sure about it.

Hogsmeade was colder and gloomier than he had imagined it would be. The wind was piercing and his ears felt like they would fall off, but somehow, he was having a good time. He and Cho had already purchased their materials for the dance and were sipping butterbeers.

"So, my parents were a bit upset when I told them that I'm probably going to go into Quidditch professionally."

Harry took another chug of his drink. The warm liquid soothed his body and warmed his spirits. "They'll eat their words once they see you play. You're brilliant, and I honestly couldn't think of anything else for you."

Cho smiled. Her cheeks were a bit red. "Thank you, I feel the same way. What about you? I can see you out there playing."

"I don't know. I've thought about that before, but I think I want to be an Auror," he said.

"That makes sense. Plus, no camp in its right mind would deny you. You could always come back to Hogwarts and teach after you retire," she suggested.

Harry laughed. "Teach what?"

Cho shrugged. "Defense Against the Dark Arts. You know everything in the books already from experience."

He didn't know what to say. "I'm not sure about that. I couldn't imagine teaching kids like us things like that."

She frowned. "Why not, you did last year. You were great. I learned a lot from you. I learned things that I never would have, if you didn't help me." Her voice was soft, and her dark eyes were staring right at him.

He wasn't sure what she was trying to say. All day Cho had been eying him. "No problem. You didn't really need my help, though, just a few suggestions," he said awkwardly.

Cho continued to look at him and smile. "I guess so." They were quiet. Harry continued to sip his drink and look at the wooden table. Minutes passed without a word. "Well, if you don't mind, I think I'm going to head out. There are some other shops that I want to check out," she said suddenly.

"Oh, okay, that's fine," Harry rushed. He got out of his chair.

Cho picked up her bag and walked over to him. "Thanks for today. I had a lot of fun."

Harry smiled. "Yeah, so did I."

Cho squeezed his hand before slowly walking out of the shop. She gave him one more smile before getting lost in the crowd of people. Harry took his seat back at the table and stared at her mug. He had a really good time with Cho. However, her looks made him a bit uneasy. He couldn't tell what she was feeling or what she wanted. That had always been his problem with her. Nothing was straight forward. It seemed more and more that it was a common theme with him and Ginny. He didn't want his relationship with Ginny to turn out how it did with Cho. He wanted things to be different. He grabbed his bag and left the money on the table.

He walked around the village alone and in silence. He watched his classmates and visitors talk and laugh with each other. There was no sign of Hermione. Last time he saw her was at Honeydukes with Cormac. He hoped things were going well. He knew things were going well for Lavender and Ron. Before coming into The Three Broomsticks, he and Cho had spotted them slowly snogging by a Quidditch shop. While Cho thought it was funny, Harry had scowled. Increasingly, Ron's relationship with Lavender was more of a nightmare.

Harry's body collided with someone. "Sorry, I wasn't looking up," he hastily said.

"It's okay, Harry," Dean said.

Harry was frozen. Dean's eyes were red and swollen. He looked so lost. "Are you okay?"

Dean walked over to a fence and leaned over it as if he wanted to jump. "Not like you care, right?"

For a split second Harry considered walking away, but Dean seemed to be in real pain, and outside of the drama with Ginny, he and Dean had always been good friends. No matter how much Harry wanted to hit him sometimes, he didn't actually enjoy seeing Dean in so much agony. He walked over to him. "Dean, come on, what's wrong?"

Dean stared at his hands. "Ginny stormed off with Luna and Neville. She's mad at me."

Harry wasn't even happy to hear the news. Dean's voice was hollow. "What happened?"

"I don't know. We started fighting as always. It's the same bloody shit. I keep making her upset, but I don't mean to. I keep telling her that I'm sorry, and I keep fucking up," he explained.

He patted his back. "I'm sorry, Dean. I really am. Maybe you should just give her some time. When she's angry, it's best to let her be angry. I learned that years ago."

Dean moved away from him. "I bet you did. You must know a lot about her. You're around her all the time and spend every holiday with her."

"Don't do this. She's Ron's sister, and I'm always at his house. You can't get mad at me for it," Harry said.

"Don't try to make me feel sorry for you. I fucking get that you have nowhere to go and whatever, but don't think that I'm stupid enough to believe that you don't enjoy that you'll have her when I won't." Dean's tone was no longer soft. It was filled with spite and aggression.

Harry's sympathy was slowly draining. "Fuck off, Dean. I've spent holidays with her for years. You didn't seem to have a problem this past summer. I was at her house. It's not a big deal."

Dean laughed harshly. "Right, no big deal, that's what Ginny tells me, and then I see the way she smiles at you. You say it's no big deal, and then I see the way you stare at her. You both think you're fooling me, but you're not. I love Ginny and-and she may not love me as much, but I want her and I'll fight to keep her. I'll rip your teeth out to keep her, Harry. Don't think that because we're friends I'll let you take her like you do with everything else."

It took all of Harry's power not to whip out his wand and demand a duel. He wanted to. He wanted to tell him that he wasn't afraid and had fought tougher demons than him. He wanted to tell Dean that no matter how much he loved Ginny, it was nothing compared to his love and his connection. He wanted to say so much but decided against it. Dean had never said such things to him before. It was his rage and jealousy talking. Harry knew all about that. He had done the same thing on many occasions to Ron and Hermione.

"Dean, if anything is breaking you two up, it's you and how you're acting, not me. Maybe if you stopped trying to keep her on a leash, she wouldn't get bothered by you. Maybe if you trusted her. Maybe if you--"

He couldn't finish his statement. A pressure hit his face. He fell back against the fence. Harry opened his eyes. Dean was standing over him. He was grinning, but his eyes were something else. There was pain and panic in the brownness. Harry knew what was in Dean's eyes and what was in his heart. Harry knew because he felt it, too. "What is going on!" someone asked.

Harry looked beyond Dean and saw Ginny, Luna, and Neville rushing over. Harry quickly stood up and rubbed his cheek. It stung a bit. "Dean, what happened?" Ginny demanded.

"Harry, are you okay?" Neville asked.

Harry looked from Luna, to Neville, to Ginny, and then settled on Dean. There was something there that he understood. "Nothing, I mean, I'm fine. I fell back against the fence."

"How did you fall back?" Luna asked.

Harry looked around. "The ice makes these stones pretty slippery. I fell back, that's all."

"Oh, really, you just fell back?" Ginny asked. He knew that she was skeptical.

Harry had to talk to her forehead. He couldn't look her in the face. "Yeah, I fell, that's all."

"Well, are you okay? Did you twist something?" Luna said.

"No, Dean tried to catch me but it was too late," Harry came up with. He knew that he shouldn't have protected Dean, but he couldn't tell on him. Harry knew what it was like to feel hollow and he couldn't treat Dean the same way, no matter how much he wanted to. It wasn't in him.

"Sorry, Harry," Dean mumbled.

Harry tried to smile. He knew what he was really apologizing for. "It's okay."

Ginny looked from Dean to Harry. "Well, fine, as long as you're okay Harry and you just fell, right?"

Harry nodded and adjusted his glasses on his face to keep from looking at anyone. "Yeah, to be safe I'll go to the hospital wing."

He didn't give anyone time to respond. He didn't look back. He kept walking. He wanted to punch Dean back. He wanted to scream at himself for protecting him, but most of all, he wanted it all to end. He wanted Ginny. He wanted her terribly, but it was tearing Dean a part, and as much as he desired finding peace and happiness in his life, he wasn't sure if it was worth taking it from someone else.

\*\*\*\* Okay, that's the end of that! Let me say some things. First, the part with Cho, just in case some are wondering about that, I happen to really love Harry/Cho and I wanted her in this chap some, lol. I also wanted to show some contrast between Harry and his interactions with Ginny and his interactions with Cho so there can be some understanding as to why Harry's heart feels the way it does.

Also, about the Harry and Dean scene, I love Dean and I find him so fascinating. I also loved him with Ginny. I wish in HBP there was a bit more about how he felt after the break-up. Harry's relationship with Ginny doesn't just affect them but Dean as well. He's heart was invested in Ginny, and I couldn't just leave him out of this story. He's important and dictates many actions that will come in the future.

SO, next chapter is THE CHRISTMAS DANCE! Hehe, oh, I'm so excited and I promise it will be good! :D however, I'd hate to lead everyone in the wrong direction so let me just say, HARRY AND HERMIONE'S PLANS DON'T ALWAYS TURN OUT THE WAY THEY EXPECT OR AT LEAST IN THE WAY THEY PLANNED. Lol, so, enjoy and REVIEW because I gotta know people want me to continue in order to post the next chapter, lol.

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 12

Thanks everyone for the reviews! :D Okay, so, I've decided to split the Christmas ball chapter into two parts. I really wanted to write from both pov's, and I wanted you lot to be able to read from both perspectives. So, I decided to write from Harry's first.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry laced up his shoes. Dragonflies zipped around in his stomach. His hands were even shaking a bit. It was the night of the dance. It was the night of fun and relaxation before the big exams. It was the night that he would finally tell Ginny how he felt. He had been through his plan with Hermione time and time again, but it wasn't enough. He looked up from his shoes and saw Dean sitting on his bed. He was adjusting the collar on his shirt with a smile on his face.

Apparently, he and Ginny had made up.

"Has anyone seen my comb?" Neville asked, pacing around the room.

Seamus laughed. "Mate, you need to calm down."

Neville shook his head frantically. "I can't calm down. I'm sure Luna is going to look gorgeous, and she'll have to deal with me looking like a tit. My hair is terrible."

"Here, borrow mine," Ron said. He tossed his comb to Neville.

"Cheers," he breathed, going to the mirror and roughly trying to tame his hair.

"I didn't know that you owned a comb," Harry said.

Ron rolled his eyes. "I don't, but mum insisted of making me bring one. I think she's worried that I'm going to turn into Bill and have a ponytail."

"You might as well get an earring, too. Lavender would like that," Dean said with a wink.

Ron shivered. "No, I could never do that. Besides, I already swore to Hermione that I'd never get one."

"What does Hermione have to do with it?" Seamus asked.



Ron shrugged and looked away. "Nothing, it's justâ€¦last year we were doing some patrolling and just started talking about piercings and tattoos. I promised her that I would never get an earring if she promised to never get a tattoo."

"What's wrong with tattoos?" Harry asked curiously.

Ron looked to him. Harry noticed the tips of his ears glow red. "N-nothing is wrong with them. It's justâ€¦wellâ€¦I don't think Hermione needs to ink her skin up."

"It's perfect the way it is, eh?" Neville asked with a smile.

Ron gave a half smile. "Yeah, it is."

"Don't let Lavender hear you say that," Seamus cheeked.

Ron rolled his eyes again. "Fucking hell, I don't think I could take another argument. I just want to enjoy the night with her." He looked in the mirror and brushed lint off his shoulders. Harry could tell how relieved he was about his new robes.

"Well, we should probably head out. Don't want to keep our dates waiting," Dean said, getting up. The five boys gave each other a once over, checking for lint and earwax. When the coast was clear, they headed downstairs. The entryway was loud and bright as it had been during the Yule Ball. Students and their dates roamed around the halls. Large Christmas trees and ornaments hung and sparkled all about.

"Wow, this looks great," Harry said.

"I'm tired of looking at it already. Hermione and I spent ages picking out decorations," Ron said in his ear.

"Well, I'll see you blokes later," Seamus said as he spotted Hannah.

Ron grabbed his arm. "Don't even think about pouring, spilling, dropping, or anything else you can do with alcohol into the punch bowls. It'll be my arse."

"You can trust me, Ron. Besides, I have much better things to occupy my time with," Seamus said, wiggling his eyebrows.

"I better go find Luna. See you all inside," Neville said, leaving as well.

Ron looked around. "Where are the girls?" he asked a bit anxious.

"Knowing Lavender, she gave them all make-over's," Dean said. Harry had to laugh at the statement. He could easily imagine Lavender trying to apply eye shadow on Hermione. Dean looked at him and smiled. They hadn't talked very much since the afternoon in Hogsmead, but Harry was going to try and Dean seemed to be as well.

"Great job, Ron. It looks lovely in here," a voice said. Harry turned around. Ginny was standing by them. She had on a dark green dress with golden lace. It hugged her body in all the right places but was classy and beautiful. Her hair was pinned up but two curly strands of hair hung in her face. She was glowing. She was gorgeous. She was perfect.

"Wow," was all Dean could say. "Ginny, you look beautiful." Harry knew that beautiful was not the word to describe her. It wasn't even close.

Ginny smiled and took his hand. "Thank you, Dean. You look great as well."

"You know how to fix up, Ginevra," Ron cheeked.

"Wish I could say the same about you," she said with a wink. She then turned to him. Harry tried to slow his heartbeat. The green in her dress made her brown eyes pop and red hair flare. He wanted her so badly. He actually ached. "You look great, Harry."

He swallowed and tried to form thoughts and words. "Thanks, so do you." She continued to smile at him so he turned away. He didn't want to lose it yet.

"Everything looks magnificent! I'm so happy with the outcome," Cho said, walking up to them. Harry sighed in relief.

Cho looked amazing. She wore a long, tight black dress and her hair was down and shiny. "You look great, Cho," he said honestly.

"Thanks, you look very handsome," she answered.

"We should probably get in here, yeah?" Dean asked.

Harry tore his eyes away from Cho. "Hermione and Lavender aren't here yet."

"You think I should go check on them?" Ron asked, looking a bit worried.

"I'm sure they're okay. Probably just applying last minute touches," Ginny said. Ron nodded and rubbed his neck. The group headed into the hall. It had completely transformed. It was beautiful and bright. Students and faculty members were already dancing. The five of them took a seat at a table. Harry saw Neville and Luna dancing. Draco, Pansy and other Slytherns sat a table scowling about.

"They can't even be happy at a party. What a shame," Ginny said, rolling her eyes.

"Goes against their code. They have to be on constant alert. One tiny smile and they lose focus," Ron explained. Cho and Ginny laughed.

"I'm going to get some punch. Do you want some?" Harry asked Cho.

She smiled at him. "Sure, thank you." He returned her smile and walked over to the refreshment table.

"There you are, Potter. We were looking for you."

Harry looked up from the punch bowl. Cormac was smirking in his very expensive looking set of robes. Hermione stood next to him, looking off. He didn't have to find her gaze. He knew that she was staring at Ron. "Yeah, we were waiting for our dates. We got a table," Harry explained.

"It looks wicked in here. Good work," Cormac said, pouring punch.

Harry wanted to tell Cormac that it was actually Ron who had worked so hard to make the dance fun for him, but he decided against it and simply nodded. "Hermione, you look really pretty," he said instead.

Hermione finally turned to him and smiled. "Thanks, I decided to forget the gel this time." She wore a dark plum colored dress. Her hair was down and fluffy. She did look gorgeous, but her features told it all. She didn't care about how she looked at all.

"Well, um, let's go to the table," Harry offered.

"Wow, you look fantastic, Hermione," Cho said. Ron looked up from his hands and Harry noticed his jaw drop a bit. He simply stared at Hermione, and his eyes were massive. Hermione's cheeks turned pink.

"You look very handsome, Ron," she said softly.

Ron stood up. "Thanks, you-you look so beautiful." Hermione smiled at him tenderly. He returned it and they both looked happy for the first time all night.

"Oh, I think it's nice that we both decided to wear purple, Hermione!" a voice squeaked.

Harry turned around and it was his turn to drop his jaw. Lavender had on a soft lavender dress. It was corset style so her bust was easily noticeable and plump against her dress. It was also strapless. Her hair was held back by a headband making her breasts ever more visible. It was a bit tacky in Harry's opinion, but being a sixteen-year-old bloke, he couldn't take his eyes off her.

Lavender flipped her hair unnecessarily and walked over to Ron. "You look so sexy, Won. These are great robes. How do you think I look?"

Ron's eyes quickly moved from Lavender's chest to her face. "You look absolutely gorgeous."

Lavender giggled and jumped a bit. "Thank you! I worked really hard on this." She turned to the group. "Cho, Ginny, Hermione, you all look great." Ginny pretended not to hear her and Cho

smiled forcibly. A fast song started to play. "Oh, well, let's go, Won Won," Lavender ordered, taking his hand and leading him to the dance floor.

"Wow, that was umâ€¦" Dean trailed off.

"Disgusting," Ginny finished.

"Are you blind? She looks great," Cormac said, looking after her.

Harry snuck a glance at Hermione. She was clutching her drink with her lip bit. He couldn't stand looking at her. So, he turned to Ginny. Dean whispered something in her ear and she laughed.

He sighed and realized that he didn't have to be miserable. He turned to Cho. She was tapping her fingers on her knee. He smiled. "Wanna go dance?"

She turned to him. "Really, you want to dance?"

He laughed. "That's why we're here, yeah?"

She chuckled. "I'd love to."

He took her hand and led her to the dance floor. Harry gave one glance at Ginny and Dean snogging at the table and realized that he couldn't worry about it. He wouldn't let himself get upset. The less he thought about Ginny, the more fun he had. He danced with Cho and had a good time. Cho looked amazing and he remembered how much fun she was. They finally took a break and sat down. He was burning up.

"I think I'm going to splash some water on my face," Cho said.

"Okay," he answered with a laugh. She kissed his cheek and walked away.

"You two seem to be hitting it off," Hermione said. She wasn't smiling.

"I'm having a good time. She's nice," he said.

Hermione nodded. "I'm happy for you. Ron seems to be having a good time, too."

Harry looked to the dance floor. He was holding Lavender, and her face were pressed against his chest. She had the biggest smile on her face. "I'm not so sure. He looked a lot happier when he saw you. Did you notice his expression?"

She sighed. "Thanks, Harry, but you don't have to lie to me."

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

She looked back to Ron for a moment. "Nothing, justâ€¦enjoy your night and good luck if you're still going to talk to Ginny." She quickly got up and walked over to Cormac who was talking to a group of guys. She tapped his arm and whispered something in his

ear. He smirked and nodded. Cormac took her hand and led her out of the hall.

"Shit, I didn't think that she was serious with him," Ginny said.

"She's not. I'm not sure what she's doing," Harry explained honestly.

She took a seat next to him. Her face was flushed. She yanked the tie out of her hair. "Urgh, I give up. It's like a bag of bricks on my head." She shook her head and let her lovely hair run wild around her. She was even more perfect.

"I like it better down. You look incredible," Harry said.

She grinned. "Thanks."

Once again, they were connected. His heart raced and all he could see were her eyes. It was now or never. "Do you want to dance? It's a slow one," he asked before he could stop himself.

"Yes, I do," she said. "I wanted to get one in with you before the night was over."

He thought that his heart would explode. He stood up and held out his hand. She took it and he slowly led her to the dance floor. He didn't know what to do with his hands. He put them on her hips. She placed her hands on his neck. They were so warm. She moved closer to him and rested her head on his chest. Harry felt at home. He gripped her hips tighter and closed his eyes. They swayed to the music. It was the perfect time. He wanted to tell her. It was the perfect time to say it. They were close, relaxed, and in their own world.

"Ginny," he said softly.

"Yes," she said, pulling away a bit.

He looked into her eyes. She looked a bit nervous. The dragonflies grew and fluttered rapidly in his stomach. "A-are you enjoying yourself?"

She chuckled. "You don't have to worry. You're a fine dancer."

He bit his lip and realized that he couldn't tell her. He just couldn't ruin it. The thought of her dropping her smile and saying no to him was too much. "Good," he managed to say. Ginny put her head back on his chest and they continued to dance. He was torn between enjoying it and hating himself for being such a coward.

The song ended but Harry didn't want to let go. He reluctantly removed his hands. Ginny pulled away. She seemed to be in a daze. "Thanks for the dance, Harry," she said.

"No problem, maybe we can have another one?" he said.

She smiled. "I'd like that." She walked away from him.

Harry looked around. Cho was back at the table. He walked over to her. "Sorry to keep you waiting," he said.

She waved a hand. "Oh, please, I'm okay. You seemed to be enjoying yourself, unlike Ron."

"What do you mean?" he asked, looking around. Ron and Lavender weren't in sight.

"He asked where Hermione was and I told him that she went off with Cormac. I saw them on my way back from the loo. He seemed a bit upset by it, so he took off with Lavender. I hope I didn't start anything," she said softly.

He tried to hide his worry. Both of his best friends were off with people they didn't want to be with and were pretending not to think about the person they truly love. "No, it's okay."

"I don't know. Ron seemed really hurt. It's obvious who he wanted to go to an empty classroom with," Cho cheeked. Harry gawked at her. She smiled and rolled her eyes. "I'm in Ravenclaw. I know things."

"Is it that obvious?" he asked.

"To everyone but the right person, I guess," she said. She was looking at him in the same way she did in Hogsmeade.

He couldn't read her. "I guess so."

She tucked hair behind her ear. "Do you want to get out of here?"

Harry wasn't sure what he wanted. He took a glance at Ginny. She was standing very close to Dean in the corner of the hall.

"Sure." They didn't go too far. They went to an empty staircase and sat next to each other. Harry wasn't sure of what to say or do. He rubbed his hands on his knees. He had a lot of his mind. "So, are you having a good time?"

"Yes, I'm glad that we came together. It's been really fun, Harry," she answered. "What about you?"

She was near the window. The moonlight lit up her dark eyes. "I've had a really good time." They were quiet. Harry continued to rub his palms on his knees. He wasn't sure about anything. There was uncertainty with everything and now Cho. He didn't expect to have fun. He didn't think that he ever could with her. He was sure that his feelings for her had only been a flash of attraction. They continued to sit in silence.

Cho moved closer to him, putting her hand on his knee. "Harry," she whispered.

He looked to her. Her eyes were so massive and dark. They were almost black. Harry touched her face and realized the tiny freckles on her nose. Her breath was sweet and warm. He learned

forward and kissed her. He was frozen at first. He wanted to pull away, until he felt her lips press against his. She was kissing him back. She squeezed his knee, and he wrapped his fingers into her hair. Cho's tongue brushed against his mouth. He parted his lips, letting her in. The kiss was slow. Harry didn't think about anything. He could feel her hand on his leg and her tongue in his mouth, but his mind was empty. He stopped kissing her and pulled away.

Her eyes were still dark and massive. She was smiling. Harry realized that he was smiling as well. For the first time, he understood her feelings completely. It was easy because he felt the same way. Cho licked her lips. "Harry, I like you."

"I like you, too," he answered truthfully.

She nodded. "Good, because I actually consider you one of my best friends, and I think I always will. You and me—friends."

His smile grew. "I couldn't agree more."

Cho leaned forward again, only this time she pulled her arms around him for a hug. Harry held her back. They knew at that moment that their breakup was not a mistake. The mystery was over. She was warm, she was soft, but the world didn't disappear. Harry wasn't completely safe. Holding Cho and snogging her was nothing compared to holding Ginny. Ginevra Molly Weasley was the only woman for him. The only woman he wanted. He already knew that, but kissing Cho heightened his awareness.

She rubbed his cheek. "Well, I'm really tired. I think I'm going to head on to bed, if it's okay."

"Yes, of course, do you want me to walk you back?" Harry asked, getting up.

"No, it's okay. There's still plenty of party left to enjoy." She leaned forward and softly kissed his cheek. "Goodnight, Harry."

"Goodnight, Cho," he whispered.

She gave him one more smile before walking off. Harry sighed. He was ready to tell Ginny. He walked the halls thinking of how he would start. Nothing would hold him back this time. Suddenly, he heard crying. His heart stopped, thinking it was Hermione. It turned to ice when he realized the voice. It was Ginny. She was kneeling in the corner with her face in her hands.

He ran over to her. "What's wrong? What happened to you? Are you okay?"

Ginny looked up. Her face was soaked from tears. She sniffed loudly. "I'm fine, just go back to Cho."

"Stop it, okay. Tell me what's wrong?" he ordered.

She wiped her eyes. "We broke up. Dean and I aren't together anymore," she choked out before bawling again. She collapsed

against his chest, and he automatically adjusted to fit against her body. Ginny was free. He didn't have to hide anything anymore. He could possibly have her now. However, none of these thoughts mattered. He held her close and said nothing. He stroked her hair and kissed the top of her head. He let her weep on him. She needed him right now. She was hurting.

Ginny needed him as a friend, and he would be there for her.

Everything else could wait.

\*\*\*\*I'll end there. Sorry, if it wasn't so exciting, but with the Harry/Ginny, unfortunately, I have less magical writing skill. I still hope you all loved it. I did try really hard.

Okay, the deal with Cho and the kiss. I HAD to do it. Ever since Order of the Phoenix I feel like there's been this "what if" between Harry and Cho. Like, If Cho wasn't so upset over Cedric and if Harry didn't have so much going on, maybe things would have been different. I also think they thought the same thing. I wanted them to know that their feelings weren't mistaken and no matter how much they like each other and find each other attractive, the spark just isn't there and they are better off friends. I also want them to be friends in this story. I do really love Harry/Cho and I didn't want them just not talking or being friends.

So, if you're wondering what Hermione and Cormac are up to and where Ron and Lavender areâ€¦review and I'll reveal it! Lol

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 13

Thank you all so much for the reviews! Just as a reminder, this is Hermione's pov of the Christmas dance so I didn't pick up where Harry's night ended. I'm starting from before the dance to the end of her night.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"I swear, if I have to fold another bloody table napkin, I'll blow my nose in it first," Ron warned.

Hermione chuckled. "You wouldn't do that. Besides, if you would have paid attention to when McGonagall demonstrated the charm to fold these, you wouldn't be in this situation."

He grinned. "Well, you could just do them all yourself."

"This is our assignment so we are going to complete it," she said with a wink. Ron groaned and went back to neatly folding. It was the morning before the dance and the Prefects had last minute assignments to do. She gazed around. The Great Hall looked spectacular. She was sure the seventh years would appreciate it.



"All I know is that next year I'm going to give the most ridiculous requests so the Prefects will have to go through torture like us," Ron explained.

"I don't think this is torture. It's a nice gesture and is sort of relaxing." Hermione smiled at him. He wasn't really paying attention to her. He was frowning while trying to fold a napkin into a perfect triangle. His long fingers stumbled with the cloth. It was adorable. "Here, let me help you." She took his hand and placed the cloth in it. With her hands, she slowly folded the napkin. "See, it's not so hard. You just need to take it slow."

Ron shrugged. "You're just good at everything."

"I've had a lot of practice. My parents have dinner parties, and they like to use these as decorations," she explained.

He put the cloth down and leaned against the table. "So, are you going to spend the holiday with them?"

Hermione wasn't sure how to respond. She had thought for weeks about what she was going to do. Usually it would be an easy decision, but Ron's current relationship changed things. A part of her wanted to just stay at home. The idea of being alone with Ron was too much at times. However, the other part of her wanted nothing more than to be able to sit on the cozy couch and drink hot chocolate with him. Possibly play in the snow and accidentally walk under the mistletoe!

"Hermione, did you hear me?" Ron asked.

She snapped out of her trance. "Oh, sorry, um, I don't know. I haven't decided yet. My parents aren't planning anything special. It will probably just be my grandparents over."

He fiddled with the lace on the table. "That's nice! Just know that you're more than welcome to stay at my house. You know mum has a scarf or mittens for you. So, if you'd like to stay with me that would be great. I mean if you want to."

Hermione tried not to blush. "Okay, Ron, thank you." He nodded and looked away. "Is Lavender going to come visit or?"

"She's going to stay with some relatives. I won't see her until term starts," he answered. She tried to hide her smile. A weight seemed to lift from her shoulders. "What about Vicky? Is he coming by to see you?" he asked abruptly.

"Pardon?" she asked.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Oh, come on. All those notes you two pass to each other. Do you two have any plans?"

"No, not at all. I'm sure he'll be busy training or whatever," Hermione said. "We're just friends, Ron."

He didn't seem convinced. "Like you and Cormac are friends?"

She sighed. She didn't want to have an argument with him before the night even started. She planned on telling him about how she felt, and she didn't want to jeopardize her chances at success. "Do we have to go through this again? He's my date, Ron. He asked me, and I said yes. That's all. I promise you that is all. What does it matter to you anyway?"

He frowned. "It's Cormac. He's a bloody git, and tonight he's going to have his hands all over you and who knows what else."

A wave of heat went through her. His voice was stern, and he stared at her intently. "I'm not going to have sex with him if that's what you're getting at," she said quietly.

"Yeah, try telling that to him," he mumbled. Hermione opened her mouth but he cut in. "I don't want to talk about this anymore. I'm sorry, okay. Do whatever you want to," Ron rushed. He moved away from her and sighed. "Justâ€¦!"

"Just what, Ron?" Hermione asked.

He turned back around. "Nothing. Look, I think we're done here. I need to go see if Lavender has everything she needs for tonight. I'll see you soon." He didn't give her much time to respond. He walked away leaving her confused as always.

The rest of the day was a bundle of nerves for Hermione. She went over her plan with Harry and was ready to tell Ron the truth. However, it was always easier said than done and while she got ready for the dance, she was less and less sure it was a good idea.

"I'm so nervous!" Parvati said as she brushed her long black hair.

"Why are you nervous? It's just a dance," Hermione said.

"It's the first time I'll be public with Blaise," she explained. "I don't want there to be any trouble."

"I'm sure it will be okay. It's about you and him, no one else," Hermione said, thinking about Ron. She pulled up the straps on her dress. She went with a deep plum colored dress. It was right above the knees and had thin straps. She decided to wear her hair down this time. It wasn't worth the effort.

"You look great, Hermione," Parvati said.

"Thanks. I hope I don't look as tired as I feel," she joked.

Parvati smiled. "I'm sure Cormac and Ron won't notice."

She raised an eyebrow. "What does that mean?" Parvati shrugged and went back to her hair.

The door to their room opened and Lavender walked in. She still had her bathrobe on. "Oh, wow, you two look great. Patty, those earrings really bring out your eyes and Hermione, cute color."

Hermione tried her best to smile. There was no need to be rude to her. "Thank you, um, you're not dressed obviously!"

"Yeah, Lavender, why aren't you?" Parvati asked.

Lavender giggled and pulled the towel off her head. She dried her long, wet hair. "I'll get dressed later. First, I have to make my hair and make-up perfect. If I don't get it right, then I'll have to start again and I don't want to ruin my dress."

"You're going to make Ron wait all night?" Hermione asked.

Her smile faded a bit. "No, but I want to look good and I'm sure he'll appreciate my precision. I don't plan on disappointing him."

Hermione had to suppress an eye roll. Ron wouldn't care if Lavender's eye shadow wasn't completely faded into her brows. He would care if he had to wait all night. He was very impatient at times. There was so much about Ron that Lavender didn't seem to understand. "I guess that's a good plan," she mumbled.

Lavender raised her eyebrow and began to brush her hair. "It's good that you're finished. Cormac seems like the type of bloke who will want to dance all night."

"Hermione, it's mad that you're going with him," Parvati said.

"It doesn't mean anything. He asked me," she explained for the hundredth time it seemed.

"I'm surprised that you're not going with Harry. You two have a thing, right?" Lavender asked.

"No, we don't," Hermione said flatly.

Lavender smirked. "Hmm, okay, if you say so."

There were a hundred ways that Hermione wanted to respond. "I better get going. I need to check on the hall and see if McGonagall needs me to do anything. See you two down there." She gave herself one more once over and grabbed her clutch purse. She yanked the door open and walked out of the room. She couldn't understand how Lavender was able to get her so worked up. Hermione considered herself to have a very high tolerance for stupidity, but Lavender was the queen of daftness and always pushed her buttons.

However, some of her frustration cleared as she walked downstairs and into the hall. Everything was finally put together and it all looked magical. She smiled and walked over to McGonagall who was talking to Filch. "Professor," Hermione said.

McGonagall smiled. "You look lovely, Ms. Granger."

"Thank you. Is there anything else I can do?" she asked.

McGonagall smiled at her. "Well, do you mind checking all the refreshments for anything that isn't appropriate for tonight? I don't want anyone ending up in the hospital wing intoxicated. Do you remember the spell?"

"Yes, right away," she said.

Checking the punch bowls was tedious, but it gave her time alone to think about when she would tell Ron. It was about nine when people started showing up. By the time she was finished, the hall was beginning to crowd. She noticed Draco and his fellow Slytherns at a table. None looked excited and Blaise wasn't present. He was at a table with Parvati. Hermione smiled.

Someone tapped her shoulder. She turned around. Cormac was standing before her in a very dashing set of black robes. His hair was neat and perfect, and he wore a smirk. "Wow, Cormac, you look great," she said. Indeed, he did look good, but it just didn't hit her like it did other girls. She couldn't really understand what they saw in him. He didn't possess unique features that made her heart melt or skin flush with excitement.

"Thank you, that dress fits you perfectly," he said slowly as if his sentence came with a second meaning.

"I'm glad you think so," she said, unconsciously pulling up her dress.

They stood in silence. Hermione watched Neville take Luna to the dance floor. "Interesting couple aren't they?" he asked.

"They're great. I've seen it coming for a long time," she explained.

"Hmm, not as good as us though," Cormac breathed.

Hermione gave him a look. "What do you mean by that?"

Cormac ignored her. "Oh, there's Potter." He took her by the hand and led her over to Harry. On their way to him, Hermione spotted a table full of vibrant red. It had to be the Weasley's table. Sure enough she saw Ginny, Dean, Cho, and Ron. He was sitting alone, staring off. She wanted to walk over to him. Though she couldn't really see him in detail, she could tell that he looked amazing.

"There you are, Potter. We were looking for you," Cormac said as they walked to Harry.

"Yeah, we were waiting for our dates. We got a table," Harry explained, pouring punch.

"It looks wicked in here. Good work," Cormac said, pouring punch as well. Hermione didn't care about following the conversation. Her eyes couldn't leave Ron.

"Hermione, you look really pretty," Harry said.

Hermione finally turned to him. She smiled. "Thanks, I decided to forget the gel this time." She turned back to Ron's table.

"Well, um, let's go to the table," he offered. Cormac took her hand again as they walked to the table.

"Wow, you look fantastic, Hermione," Cho said.

Hermione smiled. She had to at least appear like she cared and not like there was a buzzing in her ears that wouldn't go away or a fire blazing in her stomach. She turned to Ron. He was dressed in the new robes that Fred and George had bought him. They were shiny, sleek, and made him look like a king. His red hair was fluffy and tamed. He looked so incredible. She wanted to snog his sexy little face off. He wouldn't stop looking at her, and his blue eyes were digging a hole in her chest. She felt herself blush. She had to break the ice.

"You look very handsome, Ron," she said softly. The words were crap and didn't begin to explain how he looked.

He stood up. "Thanks, you-you lookâ€¦so beautiful." Hermione smiled feeling her insides melt. He was such a gentleman.

"Oh, I think it's nice that we both decided to wear purple, Hermione!" Lavender's voice squeaked.

Hermione turned around and gasped. Lavender's dress was funny enough, lavender. The middle of the dress was very tight and corset style so her cleavage practically spilled over. She couldn't understand what Lavender was so worried about when it came to her hair. It was simply down with a hair band keeping it out of her face while keeping her breasts in perfect view. It was tasteless and over the top, but all of the blokes couldn't stop staring at her.

Lavender flipped her hair unnecessarily and walked over to Ron. "You look so sexy, Won. These are great robes. How do you think I look?" Hermione watched Ron. His eyes darted from Lavender's bust to her face. She mentally rolled her eyes.

"You look absolutely gorgeous," he answered.

Lavender giggled and jumped a bit. "Thank you! I worked really hard on this." She turned to the group. "Cho, Ginny, Hermione, you all look great." Hermione didn't say anything. She wasn't fooled by her fakeness. A fast song started to play over the music player. Classmates screamed and ran to the dance floor.

"Oh, well, let's go, Won Won," Lavender ordered, taking his hand and leading him to the dance floor. Hermione finally took her seat and sipped a bit of her punch. She actually wished that it was spiked so she wouldn't have to be fully aware of what was happening.

"Wow, that was umâ€¦!" Dean trailed.

"Disgusting," Ginny finished.

"Are you blind? She looks great," Cormac said, looking after her. Hermione frowned at him. He was staring at Lavender with his lip bit. More and more she wanted to leave. She turned back to the floor as well. Lavender had her arse rocking against Ron's stomach, and he clutched her hips. She wanted to gag.

Ginny laughed and Hermione turned to her. Dean was whispering something in her ear. Harry didn't seem too happy about it. He asked Cho to dance soon after. Hermione cleared her throat. Cormac looked to her and smiled. "Do you want to go dance?"

"Yes, please," Hermione said. He took her hand and led her out. The song was slow. Cormac put his hands on her arse. "Don't," she muttered.

He sighed and placed them on her hips. She put her hands on his shoulders. She didn't want to get too close to him. Cormac had far too many hands at times. "So, enjoying the dance?" he asked.

"Yes," she lied. They didn't speak to each other as they moved to the rhythm. She couldn't stand it. It was her second school dance. For the second time, she was spending it with someone she didn't really care for and the person she wanted was right in front of her, with someone else.

She couldn't breathe. She stopped dancing and moved away. "Can you please get me some water? I don't feel so well," she said.

Cormac rubbed his thumb against her cheek. "Sure thing."

As soon as he was out of sight, she went back to the table. Ginny and Dean were on the dance floor as were Harry and Cho. He has a smile on his face, and he seemed to be having a great time. Maybe there was hope for him yet. Hermione sat by herself and watched her friends have a good time. She didn't understand why she couldn't and why she always seemed to be the odd one out.

Harry and Cho finally came back to the table.

"I think I'm going to splash some water on my face," Cho said.

"Okay," he answers with a laugh. She kissed his cheek and walked away.

"You two seem to be hitting it off," she said.

"I'm having a good time. She's nice," Harry said. His face was flushed, and his already messy hair was even messier.

Hermione nodded. "I'm happy for you. Ron seems to be having a good time, too." She nodded to him and Lavender dancing. She was glued to his body.

"I'm not so sure. He looked a lot happier when he saw you. Did you notice his expression?" he asked.

She sighed. "Thanks, Harry, but you don't have to lie to me." She was tired of trying to see things on the bright side.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

She looked back to Ron for a moment. Her night was going terribly, and she didn't want it to get worse. If Ron and Harry could enjoy their night, then so could she. "Nothing, justâ€¦enjoy your night and good luck if you're still going to talk to Ginny." She quickly got up and walked over to Cormac who was talking to a group of guys instead of getting her water. She mentally nodded and tapped his arm.

He turned to her. "Oh, I was just getting your drink."

"Do you want to go somewhere a bit quieter?" she whispered in his ear.

His eyes seemed to light up. He smirked and nodded. Cormac took her hand and led her out of the hall. She didn't say anything as he led the way. "I knew you fancied me," he said. They finally reached a stairwell. He sat down on a stair, and she joined him. She studied her hands. She had to pull herself together. Cormac took one of her hands and kissed her fingertips. She tried to smile and enjoy it. "So, you and me, us."

"Excuse me?" she asked. She shivered as he kissed her palm, and his tongue dragged across her skin. It made her body burn. However, it wasn't in the electrifying, pleasurable way as when Ron touched her. No, this burning sensation hurt and made her feel unsafe.

He chuckled. "I knew that you were into me. I just didn't know if tonight would be the night."

"The night of what exactly?" she asked. She pulled her hand away and rubbed her hands together.

Cormac moved closer to her. "Oh, you play so hard to get. I've always liked that about you."

He was so close to her that she could smell his body heat. His lips were inches from hers. She closed her eyes and felt his mouth press against hers. His hand immediately went to her knee. She kept hers in her lap. Her body went stiff and cold as they kissed. Cormac's hand slowly moved higher up her thigh, and it left a burning trail of fear in its wake. She held her hands tightly. It was the only way to keep herself from smacking his hand away.

Cormac licked her bottom lip, but Hermione couldn't open her mouth. She just couldn't bring herself to do it. She pulled away. "Cormac," she said.

"What? You want to go somewhere else?" he asked.

Hermione looked at him. He was a handsome guy. He was talented and popular and had a lot of charm. However, none of it mattered to her. She didn't feel anything with him. Even if she snogged him all night and let him touch her, she knew that it wouldn't make a difference. There was only one man that made her feel good and only one man that she trusted with her body, and it wasn't Cormac.

"No, I want to leave," she said.

"Where do you have in mind?" he asked with a smile.

"No, Cormac, not with you. Thank you for being my escort, but the date is over," she explained.

He simply stared. "You're taking the mickey, right? You don't want to be with me tonight?"

"Or ever in that case," she added. He rolled his eyes and moved his hand higher up her leg, but she slapped it away. "Don't! I mean it."

He stood up. "You know what Granger; you're a real piece of work. Good luck finding whatever it is that you think you deserve." He gave her a scowl before walking away.

Hermione sighed and shivered again. She rubbed her lips, trying to erase all traces of him. She felt a lump in her throat. She had to get away. She walked the halls in silence. She didn't want to go back to the party, but she wasn't quite really to go to bed. She decided to go to her abandoned classroom until she figured out what to do next. She turned the handle on the door and walked in.

She heard moaning. She immediately stepped out until she heard the giggle. It was high-pitched and very distinguishable. It was Lavender. Hermione stepped back into the room and quietly closed the door. There was light that seemed to come from a wand near the bookshelf. She got on her knees and shuffled over to get a better look. The vision before her made her heart stop.

Ron was sitting on his cloak with his tie loosened. Lavender was straddling his lap and was snogging him roughly. Her fingers were tangled in his hair, and she moaned over and over again. Ron had his hands on her waist. Hermione needed to leave. She wasn't a creep, and she didn't want to see them but for some reason her legs wouldn't move and her eyes were glued to them. She bit her lip and tried to hide herself as best she could behind the desk.

Lavender pulled away from him and moaned. "Oh, Wonnies." She took his hands and placed them against her bust. Ron's eyes grew and he squeezed her. She giggled and sucked on his neck.

"N-not so hard," he said softly.

"Oh, oops, forgot. You don't like hickies," she giggled.



Ron gave her a small smile before looking off as she gnawed on his neck. He didn't seem to notice. His hands didn't move, and his expression didn't change. It was no different than how he looked at The Three Broomsticks that afternoon in Hogsmead. Hermione wondered where he was in his head. He certainly wasn't there with Lavender. Her hand went to his crotch. She squeezed him through his trousers. Ron jerked a bit and moaned. Hermione's body heated up. It was part from lust, anger, and jealousy.

"You like that, Won?" Lavender asked in his ear before licking it.

"Mmm," he answered with his eyes closed.

She giggled again and went back to kissing him. Her hand began to fiddle with his trousers zipper. Ron parted from her. "Wait, what are you doing?" he asked.

Lavender rolled her eyes. "Well, I can't touch you if your trousers are in the way, can I?"

He blushed. "No, guess not."

"Oh, you're so silly, love," Lavender said. She snogged him again. Her hand went back to his zipper.

Hermione turned away. She couldn't watch anymore. She couldn't watch Ron and Lavender have sex in her place of refuge. She couldn't watch the only man she wanted take another girl. She could feel her chest cave in, and her eyes swell with tears. She was so incredibly jealous. For once, she truly wanted to be Lavender. She wanted to be the one that Ron gave himself to.

"Wait, stop," Ron said. Hermione turned back around. He put his hand on Lavender's and moved it away from him. "I can't do this."

Lavender pouted. "What, do you want to go somewhere else?"

"No, it's not that. It's justâ€¦this is wrong," he said quietly.

Lavender kissed his nose. "Oh, you don't have to worry about me. I'm ready, and I really want to do this. I don't care where we are."

Ron didn't seem relieved. "That's great, but I'm not ready. I don't want to do this, anywhere."

She gawked at him. "Did I do something wrong?"

He rubbed his neck. "No, this isn't about you. I'm just not ready to take what we're doing any further." A wave of warmth came over Hermione. The grief that she felt melted away a bit. She had to put a hand over her mouth to keep from screaming. She closed her eyes and remembered why she was so in love with Ron.

Lavender flipped her hair. "Oh, so, you're not ready to go any further or just not ready to go any further with me?"

Ron frowned. "What are you saying?"

Lavender stood up and placed her hands on her hips. "I think you know what I'm saying. It has to do with you not wanting me."

He got up as well and fixed his belt. "I don't want to fight about this--"

"Well, that's too damn bad. I find it interesting that you don't want to go any further with me," she spat.

He shook his head. "Listen to yourself. You're angry with me because I don't want to have sex with you. How would it look if I was mad at you for not being ready? You're being unfair."

"No, you are being unfair. If you honestly aren't ready, then that's fine. I can wait, but don't tell me it's because you're not ready to do it. You're just not ready to do it with me!" Lavender had tears in her eyes. She sniffed and quickly wiped them away.

Ron sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Look, if you want to make this all about yourself like you always do, fine, but I'm going to bed." He picked up his cloak and headed for the door. Hermione gasped and hid herself further back.

Lavender grabbed his arm. "No W-Ron, you don't get to walk away from me this time. You have a lot to think about. I care about you so much, but I'm not stupid." She kissed his lips softly and sniffed again. "Goodnight, Ronald." She opened the door and exhaled noisily. "You forgot to lock it, baby," she said before leaving.

Ron looked after her and groaned. "Fucking shit," he whispered, stomping his foot. He touched his lips with his eyes closed as if he was thinking about something. He opened his eyes, nodded, and left soon after.

When the coast was clear, Hermione got from under the desk and stood up. She shook terribly. There was so much going on in her mind. Everything she thought about Ron's relationship with Lavender fuzzed over. She wasn't sure of what to believe. Her heart raced and she swore that she could hear it beating. Hope grew inside her. There was no way she could talk to Ron about her feelings that night but a small part inside believe she would no longer have to wait.

For once, Lavender might have been right about something.

\*\*\*\*I'll stop there!

Okay, let me explain some things. First, I considered for half a second about having Hermione really snog Cormac or enjoy him, but I couldn't do it. It's not in Hermione to do something like that. I'm not saying she cares about Ron more than he cares for her. That is so not true. It's just Hermione and Ron's coping styles are different. Second, I really hope you all don't think Hermione is some sort of stalker or pervert. If Ron and Lavender were

seriously going to do things she would have quietly left. But even as she thought they were going to shag, a part of her believed it wouldn't happen and that's why she stayed. Also, I wrote that scene with Lavender and Ron for a reason. It's very important that you all know what happened and even more importantly, that Hermione saw it. It will affect situations greatly. So, I hope you all liked it and if you want to know what happens next, you need to review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 14

Cheers you lot! I love all the reviews and sorry for the wait. My new job is sort of a pain right now but no worries, it won't keep me from this story.

Disclaimer: I do not own Mr. Potter

"She didn't say much. Actually, she really didn't say anything. She kept repeating that it was over but that's all, I swear," Harry said.

Hermione sighed and rubbed her eyes. "How long were you two sitting down there?"

He gave her a look. "It's not like I was bloody timing us."

"Hey, don't snap at her. Mione is just curious. I am, too. Ginny is my little sister, you know," Ron snapped back just as rudely.

She gave Ron a quick glance. He had a terrible expression on his face. It seemed to be a mixture of worry and annoyance. It was exam week, and the trio was trying to study as much and as often as possible. It was only now that they were able to talk about their nights at the dance.

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose and squinted before putting his glasses back on. "I'm sorry, but maybe you should ask her. I'm not hiding anything. That's all that happened. She cried, I sat there, and then she went to bed. I offered to walk her, but she wanted to go alone."

"I've tried talking to her. She doesn't want to discuss it," Hermione said regrettably. She wanted to help Ginny but for some reason Hermione had a feeling that Ginny was upset with her, and she knew why.

"I haven't even tried talking to Dean, the git. I'll end up punching his bollocks in first," Ron mumbled.

"Please, don't do that, Ron. It won't help. Besides, why do you automatically assume that it's his fault and not something mutual?" she asked.

He gave her an incredulous look. "Have you seen Ginny? She's absolutely gutted. He must have done something to her. I just don't understand it. They looked happy at the dance."

"I'm not so sure. They did seem a bit off all night," Hermione put in.

Ron glared at her. "And how would you know? You were with Cormac."

"I can say the same thing about you and Lavender, Ronald," she replied.

"Let's not argue. Things are tense enough," Harry tried.

Ron didn't seem to listen. "Well, unlike Cormac, does Lavender seem satisfied to you?"

His voice was harsh and dry. Hermione didn't like the anger behind his eyes. "No," she said quietly.

"Then I suggest you drop it," Ron said. He ran his fingers through his hair and pulled at the ginger strands. "Bugger this, it's obvious that I'm not going to get any studying done." He got out of the chair and packed up his books.

"Where are you going?" Harry asked.

"Dunno and I don't care," he answered. He threw his bag over his shoulder and left the library without another word.

Hermione looked after him. She hadn't seen him so upset in ages. "He's so angry."

"Well, he thinks you shagged Cormac," Harry said simply.

She turned back to him. "I didn't. I barely let him kiss me." Harry didn't look convinced. "You believe me, don't you?"

"Of course I do," he said, "but you made it look exceptionally convincing that you wanted to do something with him. The way you two ran off—I was worried."

Hermione felt the guilt and regret seep into her skin. "It took two seconds of him touching me to realize that I made a mistake. I know I shouldn't have left with him, but I was angry. I didn't think Ron would care."

"Oh, he certainly cared and the way Cormac is strutting around the halls doesn't help any," he explained.

She put her face in her hands. "This was such a terrible decision. I can't believe that I chose to go with him. I never wanted any of this to happen. Ron thinks that I let Cormac have me. I would never." Hermione thought that Ron would have said something to her the next day after the ball. She was so sure that what she saw between Ron and Lavender meant that it was over between them, but she was mistaken. Ron was moodier than usual and Cormac's constant smirks only added to the irritation.

"You're not the only one. Ron didn't do anything with Lavender. That's why she's so upset," Harry said with a small smile.

Hermione looked up at him. She forgot that he didn't know about what she saw. "Did Ron tell you that?"

"Yes, I asked him if they did anything that night and he said no. Lavender has barely spoken to him. I can't believe so much happened in one night. I can't believe Ginny and Dean aren't together," he said, his eyes growing larger with each word.

She studied him. "You don't seem too happy about it."

Harry heaved a sigh and shook his head. "From the moment they started dating, I've wanted it to be over. I would think of them splitting up and how happy I would be. I couldn't wait for this day, but, now that it has, I don't feel happiness at all. Dean looks like a victim of a dementor's kiss and Ginnyâ€¦I never wanted for her to hurt this badly. I know she cares for him, but I didn't know it was like this."

"She does care about him, Harry. You knew that," she said.

He simply shrugged. "If this is what has to happen for me to have a chance with her, then I don't know if I want it. I don't know if it's worth all of this." Harry looked away from her but Hermione knew what was behind his green eyes. It was shame. She knew it because she felt the same way. Maybe they had taken things too far.

Exams were a lot harder than Hermione expected. Her mind was everywhere but her work. However, she managed through it. It was finally time for relaxation and holiday break. She was in her room packing. It was the day before the train arrived to take them back. Lavender stormed into the room and flopped on her bed.

"I hate my life," she whined.

"What's wrong?" Parvati asked.

Lavender kicked off her shoes and flipped her hair. "I just got a letter from my parents. We are staying with my nan almost the whole bloody time. I won't be able to do anything else."

"Is there something wrong with your grandmother?" Parvati asked amused.

"No, but I want to go see Won and try to patch things up. This week has given me no time to really talk and be with him. I don't know how I'm going to manage the entire break without him," she sobbed. Hermione tried to hide her eye roll. She was so sick of Lavender and a break from her would be the best medicine. "I know you must be excited, Hermione."

Hermione turned to her. "Sorry, what was that?"

Lavender put her hands on her hips. "Don't act cute with me. I know you must be excited that Wonnies and I are having some

issues, and even more that you'll be staying with him while I'm not there."

"Lavender, you need to calm down. I've always spent Christmas with Ron. I don't see why that has to change just because of you. He's my best friend," Hermione explained.

She got out of her bed and walked over to her. "Well, I don't really care about any of that. All I know is that I'm on to you. Won is just too nice to see it, but I know you're stirring up something. Just remember that he's mine, okay. So, you can look and drool all you want to, but at the end of the night, you're sleeping alone."

Hermione snorted. "Do you think that I'm going to make a love potion or something and slip it to him while he's sleeping?"

Lavender shrugged. "It wouldn't surprise me."

"Come on girls, let's not fight, okay?" Parvati said.

"Oh, I'm not fighting. I'm just talking to Hermione. Dear, dear, sweet, Hermione," Lavender mocked.

"Shut up, Lavender. You have a lot of nerve judging me," she said.

"And you've got plenty of nerve carrying on that innocent routine. I know that you don't want Ron and me together, but that is something that you are just going to have to get over. So, whatever plans you're thinking about using over holiday, don't. Besides, I doubt it would make a difference anyway," Lavender said quietly.

Hermione's curiosity won out. "Why is that?"

Lavender smiled. "Well, word has it that you and Cormac hooked up at the dance. Once again Hermione, you're a scarlet woman."

Burning fury raced up her body. "Lavender, I think you better step away from me."

"Yes, come on, Lav. We still have some gifts to wrap, yeah?" Parvati said, pulling her away.

Lavender kept her gaze on her but followed Parvati to her bed. Hermione turned away and tried to focus on folding her clothes, but it was useless. She couldn't be the same room with Lavender. She had to leave. She stormed out of the dormitory and ran in the opposite direction. She could not leave things as they were. She had to fix it.

When she reached the 6th year boys dorm, she knocked loudly and repeatedly. Neville answered the door. "Hey, Hermione," he said with a smile.

"Hello, is, um, is Ron in there?" she asked.

Neville's smile widened. "Yeah, come on in." She smiled back and walked into the cluttered room. It seemed only Neville and Ron resided. She saw him sitting on his bed half-folding clothes but mostly staring into space.

"Well, I'll leave you to it," Neville said with a wink before walking out of the room.

She cleared her throat to let Ron know that she was in the room. Ron didn't respond. She sighed. "Ron."

"Yeah," he said, still not looking up.

"Can we talk, please?" she asked.

"Go ahead," he said, "but I don't know what we need to discuss."

Hermione slowly walked over to him and sat on Harry's bed. Ron finally looked up at her. He was a bit paler than usual. She didn't know where to begin. She thought about the night of the dance, and about what she had seen. It was eating her alive. "You do know I plan to stay with you over holiday, right?" she asked. Ron nodded but said nothing. She continued, "Is that still okay?"

"Of course it's okay. Why wouldn't it be?" he asked.

She rolled her eyes. "Please, don't act that way. I know that you're mad at me."

"Why would I be mad at you?" he asked.

"Damnit, Ron! Don't do this! I know you think that I did something with Cormac. The whole school does," she said, getting up.

Ron turned away and rubbed his neck. "I don't need details."

"I'm not going to give you details. I'm not giving you anything because there's nothing to tell! I didn't do anything with him, Ron. I promise you that I didn't!" she yelled, feeling a lump clog her throat. It wasn't supposed to be like this. What she did was supposed to help, not make things worse.

He shook his head. "You don't have to make promises to me. You're free to do whatever you want. You don't owe me anything. I'm-I'm not your boyfriend." His voice seemed to crack.

Hermione's chest hurt. She wanted to tell him that she knew about him and Lavender. She wanted to tell him that she could never let Cormac have her because she only wanted him touching her. She had to. It was now or never. "R-Ron I-"

"If anyone deserves an explanation, I reckon it's Krum," he interrupted.

"What?" she asked confused.

Ron shrugged. "He's your boyfriend, right? I mean you two pass all those notes back and forth. Whenever Harry brings up his name, you can't get that look off your face. He's the one that you need to talk to about this, not me." He pulled at the string on his blanket and avoided her eyes.

Hermione sat back on Harry's bed. Her heart caved in. Things were too far gone now. She couldn't tell Ron the truth. There were too many lies that would only worsen the situation. "I guess," she mumbled. She didn't know what to do or say. They sat in silence until Hermione couldn't take looking at Ron any longer. She left the room wiping tears from her eyes.

She roamed the halls realizing that she and Harry had made a mistake. All their schemes only complicated things. She felt so stupid. Hermione leaned against a wall and slid down. She thought about going home. She didn't want to be around Ron, but the idea of not seeing him was far worse. She was used to not having him; another holiday wouldn't make a difference.

"Can I join you?" someone asked.

Hermione looked up. It was Dean. "Oh, yeah, sure."

He sat next to her on the floor. "Taking a walk, eh?"

"Yes, I just wanted to clear my head. You?" she asked.

Dean shrugged. "Just wanted to be alone."

She looked at him. His expression was vacant. He seemed so drained, and she could relate. "Are you okay?"

He turned to her, and shook his head. "No, I'm not."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Hermione asked.

He twiddled his thumbs. "We just didn't get on. We were always fighting about something, and it was the same something. We tried. I tried to let it go, but it's hard to ignore something that's staring you right in face and makes your insides hurt, you know?"

She swallowed the lump in her throat. She knew what that felt like better than anyone. "You mean Harry?"

He groaned. "Please, don't get on my bollocks about it. I know he's your best mate and all."

Hermione placed a hand on his. "Dean, I won't. It's okay, go ahead."

He sighed. "It's just it's hard to compete with him. I know he and Ginny have this undying bond and that he saved her life and that he is always at her house. I know that they're really good friends. I know Harry is kind, brave, and loyal. I know all this shit that I hear from everyone all the bloody time!" Dean's brown eyes were massive, and he balled his fists.



Hermione didn't want to add to his frustration, but she had to know. "But—" she added softly.

He looked down before locking his eyes on her. "But she's my girlfriend, and I love her. I just want it to be about her and me. I know Harry hasn't always supported me with Ginny, but I don't care. I thought I had her. So, I got so jealous and angry when I'd see the way she would look at him and how they were always so bloody close."

"They're just friends, Dean," she tried.

"I'm not a tit, Hermione. I know she fancies him, but I honestly thought that she would let it go. I thought if I loved her hard enough, then she'd give her feelings for Harry to me," he said. "I just want her so badly, but it's as if I'll always be a step behind Harry. I don't hate him, but I wish he wasn't around. I wish that he didn't make Ginny feel so good. Does that make me selfish, Hermione?"

"No, that makes you human. That makes you in love. I can understand that—" always feeling behind." Hermione turned away, once again thinking about Lavender's words, how she was so pretty, how she was casual like Ron, and how Ron kissed and touched her so delicately.

"Ginny told me that she needs a break. She needs time to think, but I'm worried. She'll be spending all holiday with him," Dean said.

Hermione felt so terrible. She wanted Harry to be happy, but she didn't realize how unhappy it would make Dean. Maybe Harry was right. As much as she wanted Harry to find his love, she knew that Dean didn't deserve all the pain. "I'm sorry, Dean," was all she could think of. "I do know that no matter what, Ginny does love you. This is hard for her, too."

He nodded. "I keep telling myself that. Things just happen so fast; you barely have time to realize what you're doing. I didn't want us to break up, but if Ginny needs to think, then she should. I need to think as well. I need to get over this jealousy thing because if I get her back, I don't want to fuck it up again." He got up from the floor. "I still have so much to do before the train gets here. I think I'm going to head to bed. How about you?"

"I'll stay here for a bit," she answered.

Dean smiled. "Thanks for listening."

"No problem. We're friends, too," she answered. He gave her one more smile before walking off. Hermione couldn't watch him. He reminded her too much of herself. She and Harry had done it to him, and she had a feeling that because of their actions, she would end up just like him. Hermione pulled her legs against her chest and hugged herself. Nothing made sense anymore, and she felt like a monster.

The next morning, Hogwarts was louder and busier than usual. Everyone was packing up and saying goodbye. Hermione sat in the Great Hall, waiting for Harry, Ron, and Ginny to show up. She hardly got any sleep the night before.

Harry came into the hall and sat next to her. "You ready?"

"I don't know. What is there to look forward to?" she asked.

"At least we can get away from this for awhile and figure out what we're going to do. If there's anything we can do," he said.

"Yeah, anything that won't result in anymore heartache," she muttered. Surprisingly, Ginny and Dean came into the hall together. Hermione watched carefully as Dean gave her a small box. She took it with a smile and hugged him. She whispered something in his ear that made him grin. He kissed her forehead and gave her hand a squeeze before walking away. Ginny walked over to them.

"You okay?" Hermione asked.

Ginny gazed at the box. "I'm okay," she answered quietly.

Harry rubbed her arm. "That's good to hear." Ginny didn't look at him. She kept her eyes on the box. Time passed on. Harry didn't take his eyes off Ginny. She decided to make herself some toast. She needed something to take her mind off things.

"It's about time," Harry breathed. Hermione looked up and saw Ron walking over to them. "What took you so long? When I left you were getting up."

"Leave me alone. I went back to sleep for a bit, that's all," Ron mumbled.

Ginny smiled a little. "Well, let's go. I want to eat whatever mum has ready for us."

"Mmm, couldn't agree more. Maybe we can convince her to make pudding." Ron said. He gave his sister a tender smile that she returned. Hermione couldn't help but smile herself. Ron cared about Ginny so much as was such an amazing big brother.

The group got up to walk to the loading dock but Lavender ran up to them. Her eyes were a bit puffy. "I forgot to give you this," she said to Ron, holding out a rather large box.

He put his stuff down and took it. "Thanks, I haven't wrapped yours yet."

Lavender smiled softly. "It's okay. Just send it to me."

Ron returned her smile and they stared at each other in silence. He scratched his head. "Well, see you when term starts."

"Yes, see you," Lavender answered. She slowly walked closer to him and held her arms out. Ron embraced her. They held each other for a second before pulling away. Lavender quickly kissed his lips. It wasn't her usual sloppy snog. It was brief and sensual. "Bye," she whispered.

"Bye," he answered back. Lavender bit her lip. Hermione knew she would soon cry. She gave him a wave before running off.

"What was that all about?" Harry asked.

Ron shook his head. "Let's just go." The group picked up their things and headed for the carriages. Hermione took a deep breath.

Things were bad enough; she hoped the holiday would make them better.

I know, it's a really shitty way to end the chapter but I did not want to go too far in this one. Now, if it seemed sort of quick paced, jumpy, and boring, I apologize, but I needed to get some of these thoughts and feelings out of the way before I start the "holiday chapters" as I'm going to refer to them as because they're really the driving forces of the story.

I almost skipped writing this chap all together, but the main reason for it was to display the feelings and tension between Ron and Hermione leading up to her staying at his house and how Hermione and Harry feel about what they have done so far. Also, and very importantly, I needed Hermione to have that talk with Dean.

The reason for it is that Dean is sort of a blurry mirror image of what Hermione is afraid she will become like with her relationship with Ron. Her fears and emotions are very similar to Dean's and it is important that she knew what was going through his mind because it will dictate how she acts over holiday. Also, once again, I just really love Dean's character and I like writing him in and his emotions. So, I hope you enjoyed it and if you are ready for the first of the juicy, "holiday chapters" you had better review!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 15

Thank you all for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry walked into the kitchen of the Burrow. He looked around and immediately felt relaxed and happy. The Weasley's were the best people he knew, and their home was his home. He felt safe, welcome, and most importantly, loved. "Well, why don't you dears get settled and I'll make lunch. Harry, you are with Ron in his room, and Hermione, you can room with Ginny. I have cots in there. I think the boys may stay for Christmas this year, and I want to make as much space as possible," Mrs. Weasley explained, coming in the door after him.

"That's fine, Mrs. Weasley," Hermione said politely.

Mrs. Weasley smiled. Ginny certainly got her looks from her. She turned to Harry. "Don't worry, Harry, we'll get you nice and fed before you go back to school. Ron tells me that you're eating, but I just don't see it."

Ron sighed and rolled his eyes. "Mum, he's not starving himself."

"Thank you, Mrs. Weasley. I appreciate it," Harry said chuckling.

"Come on, mate," Ron said, leading them to the staircase.

Harry watched Ginny and Hermione stop on the second floor and go into her room. Ginny didn't look pleased and neither did Hermione. He knew that there was something going on. Ginny probably thought that Hermione had shagged Cormac, too. They reached the fifth floor, and Ron opened the door. Harry watched his head and stepped over the clutter. "I thought you told your mum that you cleaned before we left."

Ron dropped his bags and flopped on his bed. "I did clean up."

He shook his head and sat on his cot next to Ron's bed. He wasn't sure what of to say. While he was glad to be away from school, the extended period of being around Ginny would only make him more nervous. He turned to Ron. He was gazing at the floor, but his eyes were unfocused. "Ron, are you okay?"

He blinked several times and looked up at him. "Oh, yeah, I'm fine." He didn't look at him for too long. Harry knew Ron so well that it only took one look in the eyes for him to know what was really going on. There was a sort of uncomfortable silence that wedged between them, but a knock at the door defused it.

"Come in," Ron said, still avoiding Harry's eyes.

The door opened and Hermione walked through. She smiled slightly. "Thought I'd come in here. Ginny wants to take a nap."

"A nap?" Ron asked. Hermione closed the door and sat next to Harry. Harry noticed Ron frown a bit.

"Well, I think she just wants to be alone more than anything else. You saw how she was on the train ride back. She hardly said a word," Hermione explained.

"I didn't think she would take things this badly. Dean must mean a lot to her," Ron said quietly.

Harry could not stand the shame eating his insides. He stood up. "I'm gonna go see if she's okay."

"Maybe you should just let her be," Ron said.

"I'm not going to bother her. I just want to see if she needs anything," Harry said. He didn't give them time to respond. He

walked to her room and exhaled deeply before knocking on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again. "Ginny, come on, it's me," he said softly.

He could hear her bed creak. She opened the door slowly. Harry had been around Ginny since he was twelve, but looking at her still affected him. She was so beautiful. "Do you need something?" she asked in a small voice.

"No, I wanted to see if you needed anything," he answered.

She ran a hand through her hair and the red strands flowed back into her face. "No, I'm okay, thanks."

Harry sighed. "Ginny, I just want to help. I know you are upset. You don't have to act so strong all the time."

She laughed dryly and opened the door so he could come in. "That's a bit rich, coming from you."

"Cheers," he said sarcastically, walking in. He leaned against her small dresser.

Ginny sat on the bed and hugged a pillow. "So, is there something in particular that you want to talk about?"

Harry shrugged. "Not really, well, maybeâ€¦" She looked at him as if asking him to continue. He cleared his throat. "Well, I guess about the breakup."

She shook her head. "I don't want to talk about it and especially with you."

He gaped at her. "What is that supposed to mean?"

She didn't look at him. "I can't talk about Dean with you. You won't care."

Harry walked over to her and sat. She moved away slightly and turned away. "Why wouldn't I care? Of course I care, Ginny. You're my friend. Ginnyâ€¦look at me."

Ginny turned back to him. Her eyes were wet. "What is it, Harry?"

"We are friends, aren't we?" he asked.

She sniffed and rubbed her nose on her sleeve. "You know we are."

"Then why won't you let me be here for you? Why are you shutting Hermione and me out?" He asked.

Ginny rolled her eyes. "Like I can learn anything from Hermione right now. She's got her own issues."

"You think that she slept with Cormac, don't you?" Harry asked.

"I don't really care what she did. All I know is that Ron is completely broken up about it," she explained.

Harry wanted to smile. Ginny tended to give Ron a hard time, but he knew that she loved him to pieces. "Well, don't you think that Hermione could have felt the same way about things?"

She shrugged. "Don't give me that, Harry. I'm not stupid. I know that Ron fancies her and she has a thing for him, no matter who she dates. She's toying with my brother's feelings. and I don't like it. I mean Ron isâ€¦Ron so I can understand his blindness, but I expect more from her."

"I guess you're right," Harry said.

Ginny smiled. "Is this really what we're going to do? Are we going to fight about Ron and Hermione?"

"No, I don't want to fight about them. I don't want to fight about anything. I just don't want you to be upset," he said. He placed a hand on hers.

She pulled away. "Don't do that."

"Why?" Harry asked.

Ginny turned away again. "I just-I don't want it. It's great that you care but stop."

He felt frustration boil. He had no idea what Ginny wanted and what she felt. "Ginny, I can't just stop caring. You came to me remember? You came running into my arms and cried."

She stood up. "I'm bloody aware, okay? I know that I came crying to you. I know that once again, poor pathetic Ginny could only be consoled by Harry Potter."

"That's not what I meant," he tried.

"I don't care what you meant. Look, I just want to be alone. I-I need to think okay? Can you let me think?" she asked.

Harry turned away from her. After everything that they have been through together, he thought it would bring them closer and make them stronger, but it didn't seem to be that way at all. He couldn't reach her. He got up. "Fine, I'll leave, but just know that you can't use that line on me." He walked to the door and turned back to her. "I'm not Dean, Ginny. Stop treating me like I am." He opened the door and walked out, feeling defeated.

Lunch was terrible. Harry only ate because he knew that Mrs. Weasley wanted him to. He picked at his sandwich and swallowed painfully. His entire body ached. He was unhappy. Ginny was unhappy. Ron was unhappy, and Hermione was unhappy, and it all seemed to be because of him. It was his idea. He pushed for him and Hermione to do something, and their actions seemed to cause even more pain.

"What is with you lot? I'd think that being away from school would brighten up your day," Mrs. Weasley said.

"Mum, can I be excused? I'm not that hungry," Ginny said softly.

Mrs. Weasley looked at her daughter in such a concerned way. "Of course you may, sweetheart." Ginny got up from the table and walked away. "What is wrong with her?"

"Mum, why don't I help you clean up? I'll tell you about it," Ron said, getting up from the table.

"We can help clean up, too," Hermione offered.

"No, Hermione, it's okay," Mrs. Weasley said distracted. She quickly got up and followed Ron into the kitchen. Harry got up from the table as well and followed Hermione back up the stairs. They went to Ron's room.

"I can't take this," Hermione said, taking a seat on Ron's bed and holding one of his pillows. "What did Ginny say to you when you went to talk to her?"

"Nothing really. I don't think she wants me here," Harry confessed.

"I don't think she wants me here, either. She's barely spoken to me since we've arrived," she said.

He looked at his best friend. Hermione's face was so pained. He wanted to help her, but he couldn't even help himself. He hated feeling so powerless. "She thinks that you slept with Cormac."

"I didn't and I don't know how many more times I have to say it! Why does she care anyway? She told me that she thought I should get out more," Hermione defended.

"Yeah, but in her eyes you betrayed Ron. She's more angry that Ron's upset than anything else." Harry had to smile at that. Ginny's loyalty was one of the many reasons why he loved her so much.

"Well, Ron hasn't said much, either. He can barely look at me. Urgh! It's so frustrating. I know that what I did was wrong, but I really didn't do anything. They won't believe me. I didn't mean for this to happen. I didn't mean to make Ron or Ginny hate me. Maybe I should just go home." Hermione wiped her eyes and held Ron's pillow tighter. Harry walked over and sat next to her.

"Hey, hey, I know that you didn't mean to hurt anyone, and Ron doesn't hate you. He could never hate you. You know how he gets about things like this. Ginny also doesn't hate you," Harry said, squeezing her shoulder.

Hermione turned to him and sniffed gently. "And what about you, Harry? Do you hate me?"

He grinned. "I might consider it if you leave. I need you here. We have to figure this out together." He put his forehead against hers.

Hermione returned his smile. "Thanks, Harry, you're absolutely right. I can't run from this. We have to figure something out."

"Oh, sorry, I didn't know you two wereâ€¦um." Harry and Hermione looked up. Ron was standing at the door with his eyes wide.

Harry immediately moved away. "We were just talking, Ron. How is your mum?"

He nodded in a skeptical way and sat on Harry's cot. "She was pretty upset after I told her. Apparently, she's been writing Ginny for weeks asking how things were going between her and Dean, but she never gave a real answer. She asked me if Dean had done something."

"And what did you say?" Hermione asked.

He rolled his eyes. "I told her that I wasn't sure, but I think that it was a mutual decision. They haven't really gotten on in ages. Then she asked how things were going with Lavender." He looked away and rubbed his cheek.

"And what did you say to that?" Harry asked.

Ron didn't seem to hear him at first. "Things are fine," he said quietly, not turning to them. The three of them were quiet and lost in their own thoughts.

"Well, I hope you don't mind if I stay with you two. I don't want to disturb Ginny," Hermione said.

"Hermione, when have you ever asked permission to do something?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, no matter what we say, you'll just barge in anyway," Ron added cheekily.

Hermione threw the pillow at Ron and lightly swatted Harry's arm. "Both of you can shut it."

Ron and Harry burst into laughter. "Okay, Ron, get the snaps out," Harry said, trying to lighten the mood.

The rest of the afternoon was spent playing games and trying to ignore all the problems that the three of them had. It was bittersweet for Harry. He enjoyed being with his friends more than anything, but he was worried about Ginny. He hated the fact that she was in her room, alone and upset. He wanted to protect and keep her safe. He always had. There was something about Ginny that made Harry want to take care of her and make her happy. He couldn't feel complete knowing that she wasn't okay.

"Do you reckon dinner is ready?" Ron asked hours later. He was sprawled out on the floor. They were worn out from chess and cards.



"I'm not sure. Doesn't your nose usually tell us?" Harry asked. Ron kicked him.

"What time is your dad getting here, Ron?" Hermione asked from Ron's bed. She was laying on her stomach, and her head was near the edge of the mattress. She couldn't keep her eyes off him.

Ron, of course, didn't seem to notice. "I dunno. I know he's working later and later these days. Being the head of a department is a lot of work."

"He can handle it. Your dad is the only one for the job," Harry said with a smile.

He chuckled. "Yeah, he's also the only one who would want it. I don't think anyone else in the Wizarding World collects plugs. You should see all of the Muggle toys he's collected in the garage. Some of them are really fascinating, but most of them I barely understand."

"Maybe you should have taken Muggle Studies," Hermione said.

Ron frowned. "Like I need another class. Besides, why would I need to when both of you were raised by Muggles? Anytime I need to know something, I'll just ask one of you."

"That's very independent of you, Ronald," she said sarcastically.

He turned to her and smiled. "Thank you, Hermione."

"Oh, I wasn't being serious," she answered back.

Ron crawled over to her and got real close to her face. "I learned how to use a felly tone, didn't I?"

Hermione covered her mouth as she laughed. "It's a telephone, Mr. All Knowing."

He smirked and shrugged. "Eh, what are you gonna do with me?" he asked quietly.

Her cheeks went faintly pink. "I'm not sure yet."

They continued to grin and stare at each other. Harry watched awkwardly as his two best friends flirted and made lustful eyes at one another. They were so obvious with their feelings but somehow they just didn't connect them together. He slowly and quietly got up and cleared his throat. "Hmm, err, well, I think I will go see if dinner is ready."

"Okay, thanks, mate," Ron said, not taking his eyes off Hermione.

"Yep," Harry answered, walking backwards to the door. He grinned. It was the first time in a while that Ron and Hermione both looked happy. It was not a coincidence that it was because they were together. He left the room and was sure that they were still staring at each other.

Before going to the kitchen, he stopped on the second floor. He didn't knock on Ginny's door, but he put his ear up to the door to see if he could hear her crying. There was silence. He figured that she must have been sleeping. He walked down the rest of the stairs and heard Mr. Weasley's voice. He smiled and began to walk into the kitchen to say hello.

"Is that what Ron told you?" Mr. Weasley asked. Harry immediately held back and rested against the wall to listen.

"He said it was probably mutual, but I know better," Mrs. Weasley said.

"Oh, Molly," Mr. Weasley said.

"She's not over Harry, and it's eating away at her. Arthur, I'm worried. I know it's not Harry's fault, but Ginny has to learn to move on. I don't know how much longer I can take her being like this." Harry didn't have to see Mrs. Weasley's face to know she was upset.

"Ginny's a strong person. She will bounce back from this. Besides, it's not too late for her and Harry. Remember, it took me three years after meeting you to finally get the nerve to ask you out on a date," Mr. Weasley said.

Mrs. Weasley chuckled. "I was beginning to think that I'd have to do it myself. It must be where Ron gets it. Hermione has a lot more patience than I would of had."

Harry had to bite his lip to keep from laughing. Hermione would turn purple when she found out about this. He heard a loud sniff coming from the sitting room. He turned the corner and saw Ginny on the couch. Once again, she seemed to be crying. She gazed into the fire as tears streamed down her face. She was such a tough person and rarely showed her fear and sadness. Now, it seemed as if she couldn't keep it in no matter what she did. He didn't want to disturb her, but he couldn't stand seeing her so upset and not help.

"Ginny," he said quietly.

She jumped and looked up. "Oh, Harry, how long have you been there?" She wiped her eyes and sniffed loudly.

"Just a second or two. Sorry, I didn't mean to disturb you," he said.

"No, it's okay. Come and sit down," she said. Harry smiled gently and took a seat next to her. She continued to wipe and sniff. Her eyes were so puffy and red. "Look, I want to apologize for how I acted earlier. You're right. You're not Dean, and I shouldn't push you away."

"Hey, don't feel like you need to apologize. You're going through a lot right now. I just want you to know that I'm here for you. I care a lot about you, Ginny." Harry had to turn away from her eyes. He didn't know how long he would last.

Ginny smiled and wiped her eyes. "I just feel really badly. I have ever since it happened."

Harry turned back to her. "Do you want to talk about it?"

She took a breath. "It's funny really. Everyone thinks that it was something mutual or that he did something to me because I'm crying all over the place and he seems to be okay."

"He's not okay," he cut in.

Ginny frowned. "I know that, and it's my fault. Dean didn't do anything to me, and it was not mutual. I-I broke up with him."

Harry's heart seemed to pound against his chest. It was painful. "Why?" he asked.

She pulled at a loose string on the pillow cushion. "He wanted to stay together. Iâ€¦didn't. I need time and space from him. I know that it sounds selfish, but it's honest. I didn't think that it would be so hard, though. I miss him, and I do really care for him."

Harry tried his hardest to look interested and supportive. "I know you do, Ginny. He does, too."

She stared at him. "That night after I broke up with him, I ran off. I-I went looking for you, Harry. You were the one that I wanted to see and talk to first. I don't know why. I just did, but I couldn't find you. You ended up finding me. You always find me whenever I need you."

Her smile was so beautiful. Her brown eyes were soft, and her mouth was perfect. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to hold her. He wanted to tell her that he loved her. He wanted so much, but he was too afraid to go for it. He was too terrified of losing her. He swallowed hard. "I'll always find you, Ginny. I'm not going anywhere."

Her face flushed with color. She licked her lips, and Harry watched in a trance. "Good, I don't want you to leave," she whispered.

Harry was sure that his body was soaked with sweat. He moved closer to her. Ginny put her forehead against his. Harry touched her face and ran his thumb across her cheek. She leaned into his chest and rested against his neck. He held her tightly. He took in her smell and her warmth. He truly felt at home. He didn't want to let her go. There were too many emotions going through him. He couldn't keep them all in. "I love you, Ginny," he said before he could stop himself. Harry's heart stopped, and his head seemed to cave in. He held his breath, waiting for her response.

She only held on to him tighter. "I love you, too, Harry."

Harry closed his eyes and held on to her as tight as he could. He felt dizzy. Her words kept swimming in his head. He wanted to

know if her meaning of love matched his. He wanted to know if she meant as the friend she needed or as the girlfriend he wanted her to be, but that could wait.

All that mattered at the moment to Harry was Ginny.

\*\*\*\*So, I hope you all liked it! I giggled when I wrote the small flirtyness between Ron and Hermione, lol. I hope you all don't think my Ginny is too weepy. It is more than just her breaking up with Dean that is making her so upset. She has so much emotion and confusion and bloody hell, she's only 15 so, lol, I would be crying as well. As always, thanks for reading and up next is Hermione's first perspective in the "Holiday Chapters" so, if you want to read about her and what is going on with her relationship with the lovely Ronald Weasley, REVIEW!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 16

Thank you all for the reviews! I really love that you lot enjoy my story and I love reading what people have to say.

Now, while we're on the subject, I want to clarify something. I've noticed something that's been a minor or for some people, major concern. That is the development of Hermione/Ron and Harry/Ginny. It may seem like I'm giving more to Harry and Ginny's relationship or that things are "better" for them or things are moving "faster", but in all honesty, they aren't. Hermione isn't "behind" or anything like that. The circumstances are simply different for H/G and Hr/R. I'm not going to give the two couples story lines the same development so the timing for each couple will be a bit different. I don't see Harry/Ginny the way I see Hermione/Ron. I give R/Hr more time, more angst, more meaning, more heat, so, things will appear happen at a "slower" pace. Also, it's not like things and beautiful for Harry/Ginny now. I don't like giving hints, but it's not smooth sailing for them here on out, not even close. So, not to worry, Hermione and Ron are going to get there and it will be everything they deserve and hopefully everything you readers want. Besides, trust that I'm a R/Hr shipper for life and I love them more than anything!

So, with all that said, I think you all will enjoy this chapter.  
:D

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter

"Are you sure that you don't want to come?" Ginny asked.

Hermione turned another page of her book. "Yes, I'm sure. I finally have time off, and I want to catch up on my reading."

Ginny smirked. "Yes, because when I think of free time, I think of lovely books to read."

"You're so much like your brother," she said.

She stopped brushing her hair. "And speaking of my brother, do you think that you and Ron will be okay here all by yourselves?"

Hermione closed her book. "What does that mean?"

She chuckled. "Nothing at all. It was just a question." Hermione didn't believe her, but she nodded anyway. Ginny's grin faded a bit. "Hermione, I want to apologize for how I've been acting toward you lately."

"Don't apologize. I more than understand it. Breakups are hard," Hermione reassured.

"No, it's not really about that. It's aboutâ€¦Cormac." Ginny turned away for a moment.

She sighed. "I didn't do anything with him, Ginny. I don't have any interest in him. Besides, I'd tell you if I did."

"I know but whatever happened or didn't happen really upset Ron. I know what that feels like, and I couldn't stand seeing him so upset. Can you understand that?" Ginny asked.

Hermione wasn't sure what to say. She knew that it would not be wise to say going to the ball with Cormac was a part of her game. "Yes, I understand, but making Ron upset wasn't my intention. I didn't think that it would matter so much in the first place. He has a girlfriend."

Ginny gave her a look. "You don't actually expect me to believe that, do you? Come on, Lavender Brown? She is not his girlfriend."

Her statement made Hermione laugh. "Then what is she?"

She shrugged and tied her shoelaces. "I dunno, more like a filler, I reckon." She got up and grabbed her purse. "We should be back soon. Mum only needs to pick up a few things before everyone starts arriving in a few days. Harry and I will keep an eye on her."

"Good luck," Hermione said, giving her the thumbs up. Ginny grinned and headed toward the door. "Ginny, wait."

"Yes?" she asked, stopping just outside the door.

Hermione tapped her fingers on her leg. "A filler for what?"

Ginny rolled her eyes. "I'll let you figure that one out." She gave her a wink and left the room. Hermione tried to get back to her book. She really did want to read, but she did not want to be cooped up in Ginny's room alone. She took her book and glided into her slippers. She slowly walked downstairs. She made herself hot chocolate and entered the sitting room. It was the perfect place for reading. However, the room was already occupied.

Ron was on the floor in front of the fire, wrapping presents. Hermione leaned against the wall and grinned. He was so

concentrated on wrapping the gifts. He worked quietly and delicately. There was a side to Ron that most people did not care to notice. There was something so deep and precise about him. There was sensitivity and perfection underneath his humorous and moody exterior. Hermione knew that side. She had seen it time and time again. She was in love with that special part of him. She took another sip of her chocolate.

Ron looked up. "Hey, how long have you been there?"

"Not long," she answered, coming into the room and sitting next to him on the rug. "Wrapping presents I see."

Ron grinned beautifully. "Don't bother looking for yours. I wrapped it and hid it a long time ago."

She laughed. "That's just my luck."

"Well, you can help me with these." Ron gestured to unwrapped boxes.

"Sure," she said, taking a box. "Does it matter what paper I use?"

"No, whatever you think will look nice. I'm sure that you know a lot more about this sort of thing than I do," he said.

"Don't be so hard on yourself. You're doing fine," she reassured.

"Well, after the third try, anyone is bound to pick it up." He tied a ribbon and placed it on a box.

"I didn't know that you had so many people to give presents to," she said as she wrapped a box.

Ron sighed and ran a hand through his hair. The fiery locks heated up his pale fingers. Hermione was mesmerized. "I didn't realize it either. I have you, Harry, Ginny, my parents, my hundreds of brothers and Lavender. Hers is right there."

Hermione looked to where Ron gestured. It made her chuckle. It was easy to tell which one was hers. The wrapping paper was lavender as was the bow. It was a tiny box. It made her heart jump. "What did you get her?"

"Um, some earrings. Last time we were in Hogsmeade, she told me about how she lost a favorite pair. I knew the story was more of a hint than a real story. The ones I got her look just like them," he explained.

Hermione rolled her eyes and took a sip of her drink. Using guilt against Ron to make him do things was becoming more and more of Lavender's style. "That's very sweet of you."

"Hmm, I guess," he mumbled. They were silent. Hermione wrapped the presents and watched Ron. They were so close. She could smell his warmth. He looked so stunning in the firelight.

He looked up as she was staring at him. She immediately turned away and blushed terribly. "So, w-why didn't you go out with the others?"

"I wanted to get this finished, and I don't like shopping," he said.

When Hermione thought that it was safe to look up, she did. Ron was gazing into the fire. "I know what you mean. It's a gorgeous day for reading."

He turned to her and laughed. "Leave it to you to make a comment like that."

"Oh, hush it. There is nothing wrong with snuggling up with a good book on a cold day. It's no different from you wanting to go play Quidditch on a beautiful day in spring. Ah, that's my last one," she said, finishing the bow and setting the gift on the table.

"Thanks, I got done in half the time," Ron said cheery.

"You're welcome," she said.

Ron exhaled deeply and leaned against the couch. Hermione took a chance and did the same. He turned to her. "Hermione, I'm sorry."

"For what?" she asked.

He moved a little closer to her. "For the way I've been treating you lately. Well, for how I've been since the dance."

"Please, don't apologize for that," she said.

Ron placed his hand on hers. It was big, soft, and warm against her skin. She melted against his touch. While touches from Cormac and even Krum made Hermione feel frigid, a touch from Ron instantly relaxed her. Ron's touches had always made her feel safe and they felt so good. She wondered what her touches did to him, or if he felt anything at all. "No, I do. I had no right to get upset with you. Regardless of how I feel about Cormac, it's not my business or my place to tell you what you can and can't do with him. My opinion doesn't matter."

Hermione took her hand into his. She laced her fingers between his and squeezed. Ron chewed on his bottom lip. "That's the thing, Ron; I didn't do anything with him. Everyone thinks I did and I know that Cormac probably isn't helping to persuade people to the right idea, but it doesn't matter. I did not sleep with him. I-I barely let him touch me." For some reason her saying that to Ron made her body heat up. She could feel sweat on her back.

Ron looked at her. His bright blue eyes didn't leave her. "Really?" His voice was soft and gentle.

"Really, Ron, I didn't and I would never. You're also wrong. It does matter what you think. I would never date someone who would

come between us. You are and will always mean more to me than some guy. You're too important for me to lose." The words were honest, and she felt amazing telling him the truth for once. She looked him in the eyes regardless of fear. She wanted him to know.

He tightened the grip on her hand. "That's how I feel, too. I think that's why I got so upset. Cormac—he's just terrible, and he's terrible for you."

She smirked. "Oh, really, so, who is right for me?" Ron turned away and shrugged. "What, you have no opinion?"

He turned back to her. "You deserve—someone else. Someone better." He had a serious expression on his face, and his tone was just as serious.

Hermione could feel the sweat and heat between their held hands. She had to let go before she started shaking. She rubbed her palm on her leg. "Well, I could say the same thing about you, Ron. You ran off as well."

He kept looking at her. "Yeah, but we didn't do anything."

"And that's why she's mad at you?" she asked.

"Don't say it like that. We're just having some issues right now. Anyway, that's not the point. I want you to know that I didn't do anything with her. It's—it's important that you know that," Ron said, taking her hand back.

"Good, I'm glad you didn't, Ron," Hermione said quietly.

Ron slowly smiled. "I'm glad you didn't do anything with Cormac." Hermione returned his smile and squeezed his hand once more. It was perfect. Ron was perfect. The kitchen door opened. He immediately let go of Hermione's hand and got up.

"Ronnie, come see what I got for your father!" Mrs. Weasley said.

Ron grinned and held out a hand for Hermione. She took it and he helped pull her up. "Thanks," she said.

He smirked. "Anytime."

They went into the kitchen. The table was overcrowded with bags. "Wow, you got a lot of stuff, Mrs. Weasley," Hermione said.

"She couldn't stop. Harry and I tried our best to make sure mum didn't buy out all of Diagon Alley," Ginny explained.

"Or put us out on the streets," Ron mumbled.

"Oh, I didn't do that badly, did I Harry?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

Harry scratched his head. "Oh, um, no, not at all. Petunia usually makes three trips like this back and forth to the shops."



"See, I told you, dear," Mrs. Weasley said.

Ginny rolled her eyes and so did Ron. "So, what did you get dad?" he asked.

Ginny laughed. "You don't want to know." She searched for a bag and pulled out a TV the size of an apple.

"What the bloody hell is that?" Ron asked, taking it from Ginny and studying it.

Mrs. Weasley beamed. "Watch your language Ronald Weasley, and it's a teleâ€!"

"Television, Mrs. Weasley," Harry helped.

"Where did you find it?" Hermione asked amazed.

"In some weird Muggle shop that we didn't know existed," Ginny explained.

"Yeah, they have telephones, computers, TVs, microwaves, and every other electronic you can think of," Harry explained to Hermione.

"Well, I'm not sure about all that stuff, but I know about these. Arthur told me years ago he wanted to have one," Mrs. Weasley said excitedly.

"But it's so small," Hermione said.

"Well, I couldn't very well carry the thing. I had to shrink it. I'll change it back Christmas morning. Arthur will be less likely to find it this small," Mrs. Weasley said.

"What do you do with this?" Ron whispered to Hermione, gazing at the TV in his outstretched hand.

Hermione laughed and touched it. "It would take too long to teach you right now. Harry and I will explain when your dad opens it up." She made the mistake of looking up at Ron. He was staring at her. She was so close to his face that she could taste his sweet breath. She felt her knees shake.

"Well, we need to put all this away so I can start dinner," Mrs. Weasley said.

Ron turned away and tipped the TV in Hermione's hand. "Okay, mum."

Hermione finally exhaled when he walked away.

The rest of the day was nice. The guilt and shame that Hermione had felt over the past few weeks seemed to be dissolving. Time away from school and all the people who stressed her out seemed to be helping. However, her situation with Ron was still up in the air. Things were getting better. They were talking and were

closer than ever before. However, there was still this wall between them that Hermione did not know how to break.

"Maybe you should just tell him now," Harry said with a shrug. They were alone in Ron's room while he and Ginny helped hide presents.

"Well, thank you for your magnificent words of wisdom," Hermione said sarcastically.

Harry laughed, "Sorry, but that's all I have. Things seem to be going great between you two. What is wrong with saying it now?

"I don't know. I think that is the main reason why I am so afraid to say anything. Things are great at the moment, but what if I tell him and he reacts badly to it? I couldn't stand the idea of us not being the way we are now." Hermione leaned against the banister of Ron's bed and thought about how beautiful and warm everything was when he was around her.

"So, what is your plan?" Harry asked. He lay down on his cot.

"I'm not sure. I keep telling myself that he will say something, but I don't know. I guess that's hypocritical of me," she answered.

Harry chuckled. "Just a bit, Hermione."

She threw a pillow at him. "Oh, like you're so wise. What about you? Have you told Ginny yet?"

He sat back up. "Actually, I did."

Hermione's jaw dropped. "Really, you told her?"

"Don't get your hopes up. I just told her that I love her," Harry said causally.

She got up and sat next to him. "And what did she say?"

Harry smiled broadly. "She said that she loves me."

Hermione's heart skipped a beat. She wrapped her arms around Harry's shoulders and squeezed him. "Oh, Harry, I'm so happy for you. No wonder she's been so cheerful lately." She pulled away and realized that Harry wasn't nearly as excited as she was.

"Well, it wasn't exactly as romantic as it sounds. We were talking about her breakup with Dean. She was upset, we hugged, and I said it. I reckon she assumed that I was just saying it to comfort her, and I'm pretty sure she meant it as friendship. I didn't exactly clarify what I meant." Harry sighed and kicked at the floor. "Things are going so well. I'm afraid telling the truth will ruin anything. She loves Dean. She told me that. Even though she wanted to split up, she still loves him."

Hermione was not sure of what to say to Harry. She didn't have any comforting words for him because she felt the same way. No

matter what she wanted to say to Ron or what she wanted to do, he was in a relationship. He was with Lavender and even though it killed her, she had to honor it and support him.

"That may very well be the case, Harry, but she loves you. Ginny loves you and I think when she said it, she meant it as she has since she was twelve. She wants you," Hermione said. She smiled and rubbed his back. It seemed to do the trick. Harry smiled and nodded slightly as if he agreed.

It was hard for Hermione to get to sleep that night. She had too much on her mind. She turned over again and tried to fluff her pillow. "Having trouble sleeping?" Ginny asked.

"God! I didn't know you were awake, sorry," Hermione said, grabbing at her chest in fright.

Ginny chuckled. "Didn't mean to scare you. Don't worry. You didn't wake me. I can't really get to sleep."

"Me neither," Hermione said. She lit her wand and turned toward Ginny's direction.

Ginny lit hers and faced her. "Anything on your mind?"

"A lot actually," she said.

Ginny nodded. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Do you?" Hermione asked.

She sighed and sat up in her bed. "I don't know what to do."

"About what?" Hermione asked, sitting up in her cot as well.

"I feel better," she said.

Hermione gave her a look. "I didn't know that was a bad thing."

Ginny laughed. "No, I mean I feel betterâ€¦with Harry. He's been really great."

"He cares about you, Ginny," she said.

Ginny smiled. "I know but I don't think that I should be feeling this good. I told myself that I wouldn't get this way again. Everything I've worked so hard to build seems to be falling apart."

"Maybe it's supposed to. Maybe it's a sign that this is how it's supposed to be," Hermione explained.

She did not seem convinced. "I dunno. I miss Dean. He wrote me a letter, but I haven't written him back. I really care about him."

Hermione waited for her to continue. When she didn't she added, "I feel a but coming on."

"A major but. I think that I'm getting too close to Harry. He told me that he loved me the other day. I know it was just to comfort me, but it got to me. It's what I've always wanted to hear from him. I told him I loved him, too, but I know that he didn't think anything of it," Ginny said.

Hermione had to bite her tongue to keep from blurting out the truth. It was Harry's place to tell, not hers. "Maybe you should talk to him about it."

"And say what? I don't want to jump into this. I haven't even figured out what I'm going to do about Dean. He will be waiting for me to have an answer when we get back to school. I don't know what I'm going to say to him or to Harry." Ginny's eyes were massive. She looked so lost and lacked all the confidence that she normally had.

"I'm sure you'll figure it out. You can't leave them both unanswered," Hermione said.

Ginny rolled her eyes. "I can say the same about you."

"What is that supposed to mean?" she asked.

"Please, spare me. You may fool my brother with it, but that's one gene that I don't share with him," Ginny said. "I know that you fancy him. Why haven't you said anything?"

Hermione wasn't sure if she should play it off or if she should tell the truth. She searched for words but wasn't sure of what to say. "He's with Lavender," was all she could come up with.

"I'm sure if you told him that you'd rather it be you instead of her that he snogged, he would soon leave her," Ginny joked.

She didn't find it funny. "It's not like that, Ginny. Even if I did like him—I don't think he feels the same way I do—err—would. He seems to be very happy with Lavender. He bought her a gorgeous pair of earrings."

Ginny wasn't impressed. She made a fake gagging noise. "Whatever. It's just another material item. That doesn't mean anything, Hermione, and you know it. She would probably cry all over the place if he didn't give them to her. Why are you giving me all of this advice but not taking your own? Why aren't you going after Ron? I hope that you're not waiting on him. It's not going to work that way."

Hermione felt irritated. She knew Ginny was right, but she didn't want her to be. She didn't like the focus on her. "I think I'm going to make some tea to help me relax. Do you want some?"

Ginny shook her head. "No, I'm okay, thanks."

Hermione quickly got up and slipped on her slippers. She quietly walked down the squeaky staircase. She made her tea and walked into the sitting room. Once again, Ron was in there. He was snuggled up under his Cannons blanket and flipped through a

Quidditch magazine. She moaned gently. Ron really was a vision. "Hmm, this is worth taking a picture of," she said.

Ron dropped his magazine and swore. "Shit, Hermione, don't do that."

She covered her giggle and joined him on the couch. "Here we meet again."

"What are you doing up this late?" he asked, picking up his magazine.

"I couldn't sleep. I thought I'd make some tea to calm my nerves," she said.

Ron picked up his mug and chugged the rest down. "Brilliant minds think alike, I guess."

"And I see you that brought late night reading material," Hermione said, gesturing toward the magazine.

"I needed something to do and after our talk earlier, I thought that I would give your way a try. Sort of like a trade off," he explained.

Hermione frowned at him. "What trade off? I don't remember agreeing to anything."

"Well, if I read for fun, then you have to come play Quidditch with me sometime in the spring," he said.

"Ha! We'll see about that," she mumbled.

"Please, it's fun," Ron urged.

"And scary and awfully dangerous," Hermione added.

He rolled his eyes. "You're one of the bravest people I know. Besides, do you really think that I will let anything happen to you? I'll protect you, I promise." His words were once again sweet and gentle.

Hermione lost herself in his blue eyes again. They were so bright and open. His lips were so full and smooth. The freckles on his face gave him character and looked like specs of sugar on his pale skin. Ron was the sexiest bloke in the world and the most amazing person that she had ever met. He astounded her every time. She couldn't say no to him. He was her greatest weakness. "Well, as long as we don't play for too long, I guess it would be fine," she said, almost out of breath.

Ron smiled. "Sounds good to me." He opened his magazine and went back to reading as if nothing had happened. Hermione sipped her tea and tried to find comfort in the steaming liquid. The house was freezing. "Cold?"

"A bit. I should have put socks on," she said.

"The house gets really cold like this at night. I'm used to it," he said.

She nodded. "It helps that you have a blanket."

Ron shrugged. "I reckon." He then turned very red. "Um, do youâ€¦do you want to share?"

Hermione felt a bit of heat on her skin. "Share the blanket?"

"Or I could get you another one if you'd like," Ron quickly added, turning redder.

"No, no, that's a great idea. Yes, there's no need to get another one. I'll share with you, sure," she jabbered.

He grinned and pulled the end of the blanket off him. Hermione moved next to him and pulled it over her. It smelled like him. "Thank you," she whispered.

"No problem," he said.

She looked around, trying to focus on anything but how close she was to him and how her leg touched his. All she had to do was move her face and she could have been nuzzling his neck. "Maybe I should go get a book."

"We can share this, too," Ron said, pointing to his magazine.

Hermione laughed. "Thank you, Ron, but Quidditch isn't exactly what I had in mind."

He nudged her shoulder. "It won't hurt you. Besides, I need to teach you some things before your big game."

Hermione chuckled. Her insides danced, and her heart raced. She moved even closer to Ron so that their bodies touched. He put his arm behind her, and she settled against his chest. Even through his shirt, she could feel his warm skin. He smelled so good. She wrapped her arm around his back to get more comfortable. She had to bite her lip to keep from moaning. Ron put the magazine in his lap.

"Comfortable?" he said in a somewhat shaky voice.

"Yes, you?" she asked.

"Perfect," he said quietly.

Hermione couldn't look up at him. She was too afraid. "So, um, where do we start?"

"Huh? Oh, well, let's go to page one." Ron turned the page back to the beginning. The hand that was on the couch moved to her shoulder.

"I think I know some of the basics, Ronald. I'm not totally lost," she said, distracted by his hand on her.

"Yeah, I know but-wait a second." He moved his arm.

Hermione moved forward a bit. "Am I hurting you?"

Ron blushed. "No, not at all. I just need to adjust. You can go back to where you were." She settled back against the cushion. Ron moved his arm from behind her shoulders to behind her back. He wrapped his arm around her waist so his hand rested on her hip. "Is this okay?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, it's fine," she said just as quietly. Sweat dripped down her thighs. They were so close. She tried not to think about it. "I know what the positions are," she blurted.

"Yeah, what are they?" Ron asked in a husky voice. She could feel his heartbeat against her back.

"Um, there's the seeker, keeper, chasers, and beaters," Hermione said. The hand that was touching Ron itched.

Ron chuckled almost nervously. "That's great." He turned the page.

Hermione reached for her tea. She quickly took a sip, hoping that it would help her incredibly dry mouth. It didn't seem to. She sat back. Ron once again put his hand on her, however, in her maneuver, her shirt rose up a bit, so his hand touched the bare skin on her side. She froze. She did not know rather to pull her shirt down or leave it be. Ron's hand practically burned against her skin. Goosebumps pricked everywhere. She noticed Ron barely moved as well. Then, he slowly, almost painfully, moved his fingers. His gently dragged the tips of his nails across the side of her stomach and up and down. Hermione whimpered and jerked a bit. She couldn't help it.

Ron immediately stopped. "I'm sorry," he said hastily.

"No, don't be sorry, please, don't be sorry." Hermione finally looked up at him. His face was incredibly flushed, his eyes were massive, and a bead of sweat trickled down his face.

He licked his lips. "So, this is okay?"

It was perfectly okay in Hermione's eyes. In fact, it was the most right thing in the world. She was comfortable when it came to work and spells, but she was less confident when it came to sexuality and intimacy. However, with Ron it was different. Something so natural seemed to come out of her, and Ron made her feel so in control and secure. She had no problem with him feeling her body and the more she thought about it, the more she realized that she had always felt that way.

"It's more than okay," she answered truthfully. She lay back against him. Ron went back to caressing her side and stomach. It felt so good. Wherever he touched, her skin burned with pleasure. She was so wet and so turned on. The hand that was against him moved as well. She slowly went under his shirt and touched him.

His skin was piping hot and incredibly smooth. Ron made a tiny noise. It made Hermione burn even hotter. She wanted him. She wanted him more than anything. She could not think. Her head felt clouded with desire.

A stair creaked. Someone was coming down. Hermione practically flew away from Ron and to the other side of the couch. She gulped down her tea. Hr covered his lap with the blanket and flipped open the magazine.

"Mmm, well, I was wondering if you had gotten lost, but I guess you're okay."

Hermione looked up. Ginny was standing at the entryway with a wide grin on her face. Hermione opened her mouth to speak but blushed even harder than she already was.

"Do you need something, Ginny?" Ron asked rather rudely. She shrugged and continued to smile. He got up from the couch while holding the blanket in front of him. "Well, I think the tea helped. I'm going to sleep now. Goodnight." He gently pushed passed Ginny and gave Hermione a nervous smile. She returned it.

It was not until Ron was out of sight that Ginny finally let her laugh out. "So, I bet you're nice and tired now, too, right?"

Hermione was sure that if she were any redder, her face would bleed. "Goodnight, Ginny." She moved past her as well and went up the stairs. She turned to Ginny's room but turned around.

Ron was sitting on top of the staircase leading to his room. Hermione searched his face in fear, looking for any sign of regret in his eyes. He smiled and rubbed his neck. "Um, goodnight, Hermione."

Hermione returned his smile. She gently waved at him. "Goodnight, Ron, sweet dreams."

He bit his lip and nodded. "I plan to." Ron turned around and continued his climb to his room. Hermione leaned against Ginny's door and exhaled deeply.

She too had sweet dreams.

\*\*\*\*Okay, I will stop there! \*Please don't kill me!\* Hmm, don't you just LOVE the R/Hr tension? Aren't they just so hot, sweet, and perfect! Urgh! Anyway, thanks for reading and if you want to know what happens nextâ€¦like maybeâ€¦Harry getting a revelation out of his best mate who happens to have red hair about how he feels about a certain girl with brown hairâ€¦REVIEW!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 17

WOW! Thank you all so much for the reviews! I'm so happy that everyone is enjoying this and when I read those lovely reviews, they just makes me want to write more and write better and



better! Now, as a heads up, there's a lot of dialogue in this chapter and it's mostly from one person, but I think you lot will enjoy it. :D

Disclaimer: Harry is not mine, blimey

"So, I walk downstairs to see if mum had maybe moved the tea because she was taking so long and I find both of them, stiff and red-faced. Well, I bet Ron was stiffer than Hermione."

Harry once again burst into laughter and fell back on her bed. He loved hearing Ginny's side of the story. Ron and Hermione's versions were less descriptive and a lot less humorous. "What do you think they were doing?" he asked.

Ginny smirked. "I dunno, but it's a good thing that I came down when I did. Have they changed their stories yet?"

"No, Hermione keeps telling me to grow up and that nothing happened, and Ron quickly changes the subject." It was true. Every time Harry asked either of his mates about it, he could not get a straight answer. However, it didn't really matter to him. He was happy that something happened regardless of what it really was. He was even happier that it was something that he and Ginny could joke about in her room together.

Ginny wiped the laughing tears from her eyes. "Whew, that made my day."

Harry smiled at her. "Good, it's nice to see you smile and to hear you laugh."

"Really, I heard I laugh like a piglet," she said.

He raised his eyebrow. "Who told you that?"

Ginny rolled her eyes. "All of my brothers. They have always said that. Ask any of them. Giggly Piggly is what the prats used to call me."

"I didn't know that. What happened to make them stop?" Harry asked intrigued.

"A few bat bogey hexes did the trick. I dare any of them to call me that again," she said confidently.

Harry gazed at her. He knew that she was not lying. Ginny was tough and knew how to take care of herself. She was so strong and determined. However, there was a softer, less secure side to Ginny that he found more endearing. He was thankful that she was letting him see that vulnerable side. He knew how hard it was to let people see weaknesses first hand.

"Well, remind me not to call you that," he said.

Ginny patted his knee. "I'll give you one warning. You deserve that much."

Harry put his hand on hers and grinned. "You're so kind." They continued to stare at each other. The room suddenly seemed a lot smaller. It shrunk even more until it was gone and all he could see was Ginny's face. Once again, his mind seemed to part from his body, and he didn't feel in control. He moved closer to her. "I'm really happy that you're feeling better," he said softly.

She slowly tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. "It's because of you. You've really helped me take my mind off things. I can't help but feel better around you, Harry. Youâ€¦make me feel good."

While jeans kept Harry's body warm on cold days, they were bloody inconvenient when he had a major stiffy. He shifted uncomfortably. "Good, I want you to feel good. I-I like making you feel good."

Ginny bit her lip and closed her eyes for a moment. When she opened them, they were a bit unfocused. "Harry," she whispered.

It took all of his willpower not to groan with the way she said his name. "Yes?"

"Do you want to go on a walk with me? I know it's cold but-"

"I'd love to," Harry answered quickly.

Her brown eyes lit up. "Really?"

He got up. "Of course, um, just let me get my coat from upstairs."

Ginny smiled brightly. "Okay, I'll be here."

Harry practically fell off her bed. He giggled like a drunken man and slowly exited her room. He was sure that Ginny made a noise as he closed the door behind him. He sprinted up the stairs to Ron's room. He could not wait to walk around in the snow with her. It would be nice. They would be alone. Harry loved the way the white flakes looked in Ginny's flaming hair. He opened the door and froze. Ron was on his bed completely still. He looked toward the tiny window. He barely blinked and he seemed completely washed out. If Harry did not know any better, he'd say that a dementor had kissed Ron.

"Ron," he said softly, coming into the room. He didn't move. Harry walked over to him. "Ron," he said louder.

Finally, Ron came out of wherever he was and turned to him. "Yeah?"

Harry took a seat next to him. "Are you okay, mate?"

Ron rubbed his eyes. "Oh, I'm fine. Sorry, I didn't hear you. I was thinking about stuff."

"Like what?" Harry asked a bit worried.

Ron shrugged. "Just things, Harry. I do think sometimes."

"Don't be an arse, Ron. You know what I mean. You can tell me what's going on. That's what I'm here for," Harry said, patting Ron's arm.

He grinned at him. "I'm sure you have better things to do."

Harry opened his mouth, but then quickly closed it. For a second he had forgotten that he was supposed to go for a walk with Ginny. He wanted to go. He could easily tell Ron they could talk about it afterward, but he did not like the state that Ron was in and he was his best mate. Harry's first duty was to him. As much as he wanted to spend time with the love of his life, there were certain things about him that would never change. "Just give me a second."

He wasn't sure what he would say to Ginny as he walked back to her room. There was something that made the situation difficult. He quietly knocked on the door. She answered right away. "Are you ready?" she asked cheerfully.

Harry tried his best not to stare. She was bundled up in her coat, hat, scarf, and gloves. She looked adorable. He wanted to say yes so badly. "Actually, I can't go with you right now."

Her smile faded. "Is something wrong?"

He scratched his head. "No, not really, there's just some things that I need to take care of with Ron. I hope it's okay. We can go later if you want."

"I'd love to but mum, Hermione, and I are going to redecorate tonight. That's why Hermione went with her to the shop remember?" Ginny asked.

"Oh, that's right," he said awkwardly.

"Whatever. It's no big deal. Another time will be fine." She tried closing the door, but Harry put his foot in the way.

"Wait, Ginny, I'm-I'm sorry," he said.

She smiled and shrugged. "It's okay, Harry. Go take care of your business with Ron." Harry sighed and moved his foot out of the door. Ginny practically slammed it in his face. He wanted to fix things, but he had to take care of Ron first.

When he got back into the room, Ron was in the same spot. "Okay, what is going on? Why do you look so out of it?" Ron shrugged. "Is it because of what happened? I heard you had quite the night with Hermione," Harry cheeked, trying to make Ron smile. It didn't work. He sat next to him again.

Ron took a deep breath and turned to him. "You want to know what happened?" Harry nodded. "Okay, I was reading and she came in and joined me. We got under my blanket together, and I touched her stomach."

Harry blinked several times. He wasn't sure if that was new slang for shagging or what. "What does that mean?"

Ron's cheeks flushed with red color. "Well, it's complicated. She moved to get her teaâ€¦her shirt rode upâ€¦and my hand was right there. I-I didn't move it, and she didn't want me to." Finally, a smile cracked. Ron even shivered a bit.

Harry had too much respect for Ron to laugh at him, so he simply grinned. "I don't see why that would cause you to look like you lost your bollocks in a bet."

He ran a hand through his hair. "It was intense. I mean not one bloody thing happened, but it was the most alive that I've felt in a long time. Do you see where I'm going with this?"

Harry shook his head. "Not reallyâ€¦"

Ron rolled his eyes. "I was with Hermione. I was with Hermione Granger who is one of my best friends. The girl I am notorious for bickering with and making cry for something stupid I've said. I gotâ€¦" He looked around as if people were trying to listen in. He moved in closer to him. "Harry, I got a fucking stiffy from being so close to her, and it's not the first time."

That time, Harry was not able to keep his laughter in. "Ron, it's hardly a crime."

"Have you ever gotten a stiff prick from being close to Hermione?" he asked.

Harry scrunched his face. "Never. Of course I haven't, but that doesn't mean it's wrong if you do."

"Damnit, Harry, it does when I have a girlfriend! This isn't supposed to be happening to me. I'm supposed to be miserable because I'm not around Lavender butâ€¦" Ron trailed off and looked away.

"But you're not, right?" Harry said.

He turned back to him. "I can trust you, can't I? You won't go back and tell Hermione this?"

It is a common thing amongst best friends to share secrets. They automatically understand an unspoken code about not telling their information to others. It was no different for Harry and Ron. Since they were eleven, they had been sharing secrets. There were things about Ron that only Harry knew just as Harry told Ron things that he would never mutter to another soul, but it was complicated now. Hermione was his best friend as well and some of the things that Ron had told him, he had passed on to her. It was not to betray Ron's trust but only to help Hermione bring them together. However, over the past few months, it was getting harder and harder to keep up with the lies and the secrets. Harry didn't realize that it would all take such a toll on him.

"Ron, I won't tell her. You can trust me. How many times do I have to tell you?" Harry was finally able to say.

Ron nodded slowly. "Okay, it's about the night of the Christmas ball and what happened between Lavender and I."

Harry patted his arm again. "Go ahead, I'm listening."

He rubbed his palms against his knees and took a deep breath. "Lavender looked great to start off with. You saw her. Her tits were practically spilling over her dress and all that glitter didn't really help to hide them." Harry put a finger against his lips to keep from smiling. Ron continued, "Anyway, I knew she was doing it for me. I knew that she wanted to impress me. She is always trying to impress me, and I was certainly impressed but bloody hell. Even with her dress halfway down her chest, I couldn't focus. Even when we were dancing, I could not stop thinking about Hermione and how she looked in her dress. It's different with Lavender. She looked great and sexy and all but, well, you saw Hermione, she looked beautiful, like an angel or a princess or something." A grin grew on Ron's face. He looked off as if seeing a picture of Hermione in front of him. "Her hair was so fluffy and soft and she looked so classy. Haven't you noticed how Hermione is always so damn classy?"

"Um, yeahâ€¦all the time," Harry said.

Ron rolled his eyes and blushed even harder. "Fuck off, Harry. I did want to dance with her at least once. I wanted to prove that I'd matured since the last ball, but we never got the chance. I came back to the table only to find out that she ran off with Cormac."

Harry felt it was a good time to cut in. "She didn't do anything with him, Ron."

"I know that, Harry. That's not the point. I didn't know it at the time, so I was fucking angry. I couldn't believe she ran off with that knob doing who knows what. So, I took Lavender to an empty classroom. I wanted to take my mind off things. I didn't want to ruin my night. That's not so bad, is it?" Ron suddenly turned to him.

"Of course not. You worked hard on the dance. It's only right that you have a good time," Harry added.

He gave him a small smile and nodded. "Right, that's what I think, too. So, we're in the classroom on the floor, see? Lavender is on my lap. We were both hot and sweaty from the dancing, so, when we started snogging, it only got hotter." Harry tried to seem interested. He honestly did not care about what Ron did with Lavender but if it helped him, he would listen. "She was kissing me, touching me, moaning my name, just everything. I mean Lavender looked amazing, and it felt good. It really felt good if you know what I mean, Harry, butâ€¦I couldn't concentrate."

"What were you thinking about?" Harry asked curiously.

Ron sighed. "I was thinking about if Cormac and Hermione were in the same position Lavender and I were in and if she was enjoying it."

Harry figured that was coming. He felt terrible. He had supported and even loved the idea of Hermione going to the ball with Cormac. He had no idea that it would cause Ron so much pain and insecurity. "She didn't enjoy it, Ron. She doesn't fancy him."

"It doesn't matter. She went with him. I know I shouldn't care and it's not my business, but I can't help it and I couldn't stop it then, either." Ron stopped talking. He had a pained expression on his face.

"Ron, I get what you're saying, but don't you think it's a little unfair? How come you get to go with Lavender, but Hermione can't go with Cormac?" It was a fair question in Harry's eyes, and he wanted to know the answer.

Ron didn't look as if he knew the answer.

"Becauseâ€|becauseâ€|Lavender doesn't hate Hermione like Cormac hates me. Cormac has no respect for me and he loves making me miserable. I don't think it's like that with Lavender. Sure, they don't get along and Lavender could really keep her mouth shut sometimes, but she does have a good heart and she's justâ€|protective of me, like I am with Ginny. I think that's why I gave Dean such a hard time."

"And maybe why you gave Krum such a hard time as well?" Harry added.

Ron frowned at him. "Can we get back to it?"

"Certainly," he said with a wink.

Ron didn't seem like he wanted to smile, but he did. "So, Lavender is snogging me. She fucking grabbed me and started unzipping my trousers. I knew early on in our relationship that she wanted to have sex and when I saw her in that dress, I knew that she wanted it to be that night."

Harry searched Ron's face for a hint of excitement or pride. Anything that could measure up to how he looked when talking about touching Hermione's stomach. He couldn't find it. "What about you? Did you want it?"

He chewed on his lip a bit before turning to him. "Lavender was all over me. I was touching her, we were kissing, and I knew that she wanted me. She started to unzip my trousers, and I tried to enjoy it. I tried to live in the moment. I really did, butâ€|I couldn't."

"Ronâ€|" Harry started.

He shook his head. "There Lavender was, in my lap, but all I could think about was Hermione and how I couldn't wait for holiday to start so I could spend time with her. Lavender was sucking on my neck, and I hardly noticed. I was too busy thinking

about wrapping Hermione's gift and wondering about if she would really like it. My girlfriend wanted to have a shag, and I wanted to speed things along so I could maybe see Hermione before she went off to bed. I cared more about those possible thirty seconds with Hermione than I did about satisfying Lavender." Ron looked at him horrified as if he had just committed murder.

"Ron, it's okay, you can't help it if that's what you were feeling. There's nothing wrong with that," Harry reassured.

Ron stood up. "How could it not be? I was snogging my girlfriend who wanted to shag me, but all I could think about was Hermione! That's not even the worst part." Harry raised his eyebrows, encouraging him to continue. He took the hint. "After I told her to stop, she got mad at me because I told her that I wasn't ready. She thinks it's because I didn't want to have sex with her and not because I'm not ready to have sex." He sat back down.

Harry wasn't sure if he wanted to touch the subject, but he did. "Is that true?"

Ron looked away. He rubbed his palms against his thighs repeatedly. "I don't know. I mean it's not as if I have a lot of experience in that area, but it's not as if I don't want to. It's justâ€¦I didn't want to at the time, and I didn't want to with her. Lavender was so angry with me. She even bloody cried which I hate."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Lavender is always crying about something, Ron."

"It doesn't matter. There's something about a girl crying and especially when it's my fault that completely does my head in. I can't stand it. I felt bad. I really did, butâ€¦" Ron stopped again and put his face in his hand.

Harry touched his shoulder. "Hey, it's okay. Talk to me."

Ron slowly looked back to him. "A part of me didn't care. A part of me honestly did not care about how upset she was. I knew that as soon as our fight was over, I could leave. I could count down the days until I could come here and spend time alone with Hermione." He shook his head. "Shit, it always comes back to her. No matter what, it seems to come back to Hermione."

Harry was so proud of Ron. He could understand how it was hard for him to come to terms with his feelings and with all the pain and uncertainty that had grown over the years. It was a gift that Ron possessed. However, as happy as he was for Ron, he felt awful. Harry wanted to tell him about their game and about how Hermione really felt, but it was not his place. It was not a part of their agreement. It didn't help that Ron was in a state. He seemed to be in so much pain and confusion. He rubbed his back. "Mate, it's okay. You're not a bad guy or anything."

"I am a bad guy. It shouldn't be this way. I should not be this fucking stupid again. I've moved on or at least I thought I did."

I told Ginny to be strong. It's only fair that I do the same thing," Ron said in a shaky voice.

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

Ron gave him a look. "Come on, what do you think I mean? You don't actually believe that Ginny has spent all this time upset just because she left Dean, do you? We both have to move on."

Harry gawked at him. "How do you know she left Dean?"

Ron gave him a puzzled look. "She's my sister. We do talk. Anyway, that's not the point. The point is that I can't do this. I can't think about Hermione all the time while dating Lavender, and I certainly can't let things get out of hand, like they almost did on the couch. Shit, it's been so fucking hard. She is always on my mind. Even that morning, when I was saying goodbye to Lavender, I found a way to bring Hermione into my thoughts."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

"That's why it took me so long. I was talking to Lavender, trying to calm her down, promising her that I wouldn't cheat on her or forget about her over holiday. What does that say about me, that even as I'm promising my girlfriend that I won't forget her, I'm feeling excited because I get to leave with Hermione? It's even more pathetic because I know Hermione wasn't thinking about me or feeling excited to spend time with me. It doesn't matter, though. What does that mean that I don't care?" he asked.

Harry for once had an answer. He knew what Ron meant exactly. "I think you know what it means, Ron. It's just a matter of letting yourself realize what's really always been there. If all of this is so hard, maybe something is supposed to change." It felt like something Hermione would say. It always did the trick for him, and he hoped that it would work for Ron.

He smiled at him. "When did you get so much insight?"

"Well, while you've been so busy with Lavender the past few months, I've spent a lot of time in the library with Hermione. I've picked up on a few things," Harry said.

It made Ron laugh. "I hope you've only been reading in there."

"Trust me mate, that's all," Harry reassured. "So, what do you think you're going to do?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. There's too much to work out. Blimey, talking about feelings really tires me out. Right now, all I want to do is sleep."

Harry stood up. "Sounds brilliant, I'll probably go for a walk. I could use some air."

Ron smirked. "Yeah, I'm sure that's all you could use."



"You're so very clever, Ron," Harry said. He held out his hand. "Are you going to be okay?"

Ron shook it. "Yes. I'm okay, thanks for listening to me."

"No problem, I'm always here for you. You know that." Harry couldn't take Ron's pain away. He couldn't force him to see the truth, but he could listen and sometimes that's all a person needed. Harry so desperately wanted to talk to Ron about Ginny. He wanted his insight and advice, but he couldn't ask for it. He couldn't possibly tell his best mate how badly he wanted his sister. Nothing was worth his friendship with Ron, not even his happiness with Ginny.

"Yeah, I do, I appreciate it," Ron said with a smile.

Harry nodded and made his way to the door. He turned around, seeing Ron get under his covers. He smiled at his best mate. "You sure you're okay?"

Ron rolled his eyes. "Harry, you don't have to be my mother. I'm okay, I swear it. If not, then I will come find you. Now, go have fun, now!" Harry laughed and opened the door. "Wait," Ron added. Harry turned back around. He looked away for a moment before turning back to him. "Thanks, really, I needed that."

Harry smiled. "I could tell. I'm proud of you, Ron. I know you and I know you probably think that I consider you some sort of heartless prick or something, but I don't. You-you don't have one heartless bone in your body. If you start to think that, then I'll have to kick your arse." Ron laughed and rubbed his neck. Harry was never good at expressing his feelings. He was ever worse when it came to a Weasley. However, Ron seemed to get what he was trying to say. He lay back against his pillows. Harry quietly closed the door.

There was so much going through him. He was so excited and relieved yet confused and anxious. He wanted to tell Hermione everything. He wanted her to know she was not alone and that her soul mate was sleeping three floors above her but he couldn't. His loyalty to Hermione overlapped to his loyalty to Ron. He couldn't tell, not this. He still wanted his word to be good for something. Harry went down to the second floor and knocked on Ginny's door.

She answered. "Yes, Harry?"

He smiled. "I'm ready to go on that walk."

Ginny tucked hair behind her ear. "Well, that's nice, but now is not a good time. Mum will be here soon."

"We'll know when they get here. We can still go," Harry offered.

She didn't seem too thrilled by his idea. "No, really, I think I'll stay here."

"Ginny, what is wrong with you? You aren't mad at me, are you?" Harry could see fire in her eyes but it wasn't from passion. She was angry.

She tapped her foot. "No, I'm not mad, Harry. I just don't feel like bloody walking with you right now."

"What did I do?" Harry asked.

"Don't get like this. Don't get all defensive. If you can cancel on me, then I can do the same," she answered.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I knew it. I knew you were mad."

"Wow, gold star goes to Mr. Potter," Ginny cheeked.

"There's no need to act that way. I'm sorry, okay?" Harry didn't want to fight. He couldn't understand what the big deal was.

"Well, I'm sorry, too, but oh well, move on, I have," Ginny said softly.

"Now what does that mean?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Nothing. It means nothing. It's justâ€¦I wanted to do something with you, but you tossed me off."

"I told you that I had to take care of some things with Ron," Harry said.

She nodded. "Hmm, now, was this before or after we made plans?"

He wasn't sure of what to say. "Wellâ€¦after, but it doesn't mean that I didn't want to still go with youâ€¦I justâ€¦I justâ€¦"

"You just what, Harry? You had to forget me so you could go talk to Ron. I guess some things never change. No matter what, I'm just the kid sister to your best mate," Ginny spat.

His jaw dropped. "Ginny, that's not fair. It's not like that at all. Ron is my best friend. He needed me, and I had to be there. I'd think as his sister, you would appreciate that."

She stomped her foot. "Yes, Harry, of course I'm glad that you were there for Ron. You are always there for Ron. You always have been and you always will be butâ€¦what about me? I know there is this undying love and loyalty between you, Hermione, and Ron, and that you and Ron are the Dream Team. I love that about you, and I always will. It wouldn't even matter if I didn't. I have no choice. I've had to stand by and watch it since I was eleven years old!"

Harry couldn't take it anymore. "Shut up, Ginny! You are being fucking selfish right now. I'm so sorry I made you wait. I am sorry that I didn't drop your brother to go for a walk with you. Is that what you want to hear?"

Ginny frowned. "No, Harry, I don't, but I don't want your shit about how you care about my feelings. but you don't mind forgetting me. It shouldn't be that way."

"Then how should it be?" he asked.

She sighed. "Like this, I guess. You should walk away, and I should close my door. See you at dinner, Harry." She quickly closed the door in his face.

Harry leaned against it and slid down. He didn't know what to do anymore. He wasn't sure where his loyalty should stand. He didn't mean to upset Ginny so much. It had to mean something that she was so upset. After a while, he got up, walked downstairs, and went outside.

He really did want to go for a walk. He just wished it didn't have to be alone.

\*\*\*\*So, let's start from the beginning! I know most of this was Ron talking. I have a reason for that. The next couple of chapters are crucial and it is time Ron lets out what he's feeling. Plus, we haven't heard from him much in this story and I so desperately wanted to write his feelings. He is a beautifully deep person and I love his thought process. In addition, it's always sweet to hear what he has to say about Hermione. :)

Next, I hope you all appreciated the connection I had between Harry and Ron in this chapter. Not only because it's foreshadowing as to what happens to them in the future of this story but also it's my second favorite relationship in the HP series. Other than my love for the Ron/Hermione romance is my love for the Ron/Harry friendship. It's so emotional and powerful. I don't think it is touched on enough in Ron/Hermione love stories and it's so very important. I love writing them together.

Next, next, I have personal opinions about Harry and his relationships with people. I think he would pick Ron over Ginny any day, lol, nothing against her, but Ron and Harry are best mates and nothing comes between them. Nothing is worth his friendship with Ron, that's canon. JK wrote that herself and really hit on it in Half Blood Prince when Harry was battling himself and if he should go for Ginny. Fucking things up with Ron is not worth it to him. So, with that said, I hope you are aren't upset that he ditched his "date" with Ginny to be with Ron.

That brings me to my last point. Ginny getting upset with Harry about it was something I was fussing over for a while. I was either going to have her be totally okay with it or have her be upset. Looking over my material for the upcoming chapters, it works better if she's angry about it. Also, Ginny is really insecure no matter how high strong she likes to seem \*rolls eyes\* and I easily see years of jealousy and resentment because Harry kinda always picked her last until he realized his love for her. I know, I could be very wrong about Ginny but as I said, I'm not going to lie and say I'm her biggest fan or that I know her character inside and out, lol. This is my take on her and I'm

keeping it that way. In the next chap, you'll get more insight on her, so, if you're wondering why I had her be like that, it will be explained.

Okay, end of my rant! Next chapter is the Christmas one and wouldn't you know itâ€¦it's HERMIONE'S chapter! That can only mean a few thingsâ€¦presentsâ€¦snowâ€¦Ron...food, lol, maybe not in that order but you get what I mean! So, if you want to know what happens, you know the drillâ€¦REVIEW!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 18

First, thank you all for the reviews! Now, I think I need to say this to clear things up. I'm a MEGA Ron/Hermione fan. I have been writing them for ages and I've been a fan of their relationship since the first book came out. So, my dedication to them is unmeasurable. I only want them happy and together in the end. So, please, know that they will be okay in this story. I know it seems like it's taking "forever" but for this particular story, I don't want them to just get together just like that. I have no problem with that concept at all but for this story, it won't work. I want things to build and grow. I want the pressure and the emotion between them. It took seven books for them to finally get together. Seven years of tension, love, passion, lust, fear, ect building up to one moment, so, that's sort of where I'm going with this one. I'm sorry if some people are unhappy with how "long" it's taking but it's not like I'm just pissing around. I'm letting things build, but they WILL get together. I promise. Things just take some time. Thank you. :)

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter

"Well, I think that's everything," Mrs. Weasley said.

"It looks amazing, Mrs. Weasley," Hermione said with a smile.

"Thank you, dear," Mrs. Weasley said.

"She's right, Molly. Your cooking could cure anything if given the chance," Mr. Weasley said before kissing her sweetly on the cheek. Hermione grinned. She loved the relationship that Mr. and Mrs. Weasley shared. They argued and tended to see things differently quite often, but it was obvious that they loved each other more than anything, and they were still playful and so in tune to each other, even after so many years. It proved that two very different people could successfully have a loving and lasting relationship. She would never tell them, but Hermione looked to them for strength whenever she doubted her success with Ron because they too were so different.

"Thank you, darling. I want to have everything ready for tomorrow. The boys will be arriving, and I want enough food for everyone," Mrs. Weasley said, checking the pudding again.

"I can't wait to see how everyone is going to fit in here," Hermione said.

"You and me both," Mr. Weasley mumbled.

Mrs. Weasley swatted his arm. "Oh, you'll see. Fred is bringing Angelina, and Bill is bringing Fleur. It's only a couple more than usual." She looked around the tiny kitchen frantically. Hermione wanted to ask if Percy was coming, but she didn't want to upset Mrs. Weasley. From what she knew, Percy was still a bit frigid with the family, but he promised to make an appearance.

It was Christmas Eve. All day Mrs. Weasley had been cleaning and going over things. She did not trust anyone else to do it. Hermione sat with her and Mr. Weasley in the kitchen helping her to go over the arrangements. It was her mistake for coming down for hot chocolate. "There you are, Hermione. I wasâ€¦mum, are you okay?" Ginny asked, coming into the room.

"Oh, she's fine, just nervous about tomorrow," Mr. Weasley explained.

Ginny rolled her eyes and put her hands on her hips. "Mum, all the food is ready. The house is spotless. The rooms are in great shape. Everything will be fine. Besides, it's only family. We've all seen this house in total madness before."

"Ginevra Weasley!" Mrs. Weasley started.

Ginny shrugged. "What, it's true. I remember when there were nine people living here, and we were all sharing one bathroom. Dad, you remember."

Mr. Weasley looked from his daughter to his wife. "Would anyone else fancy some tea?"

Hermione couldn't help but laugh. Ginny joined her. Mrs. Weasley was not as amused. "If anything goes wrong, then I'm coming after you all first."

"Fair enough," Mr. Weasley said, getting up. "Come on, Molly. You need to get some rest. We all do." He rubbed his wife's shoulders and she sighed. She got up and followed her husband upstairs.

"Goodnight, sweethearts," she said unenthusiastically.

"Goodnight," Hermione and Ginny said together.

"Your parents are great," Hermione said.

Ginny sat in the chair next to her. "Yeah, they're fantastic. They drive each other mental sometimes, but it always works out. Do your parents get along?"

"They get along very well. They knew each other for ages before dating, but I've never seen them in love like your parents," she explained.

"What do you mean?" Ginny asked.

She shifted in her chair. She didn't talk about her life much to people and especially about her family. Whenever she entered the Wizarding World, her old Muggle life took a distant backseat. "Well, I know they love each other, but I don't see them giggly and flirty like your parents."

Ginny chuckled. "I'm surprised that they didn't have more kids. My parents have always been like that."

"You're lucky to have grown up in such a loving home with so many people," Hermione said with smile.

She didn't return it. "I reckon so, but sometimes it's wasn't so great. Not having money and having so many siblings all wanting the same thing was a lot to deal with, and it got lonely."

Hermione's jaw dropped. She couldn't understand how that could happen. "How?"

Ginny looked away. "I don't know. I mean everyone rather paired off. Me being the youngest and the only girl, I clung to mum, but still I wanted to play with my brothers. I wanted to be included. Ron always did his best to make sure that I was a part of things, so after he left for school, I was gutted. We always sort of stayed together."

"But you joined him the following year," she said.

"He was best mates with Harry by then. So, not only was Ron totally engrossed in him, but also there was no way I could be a real friend to Harry or anything else for that matter because I would be seen Ron's kid sister. I had a permanent mark on me before Harry even got a chance to get to know me." Ginny closed her eyes for a moment and sighed. "Hermione, do you ever get jealous?"

She frowned. "Jealous of what?"

Ginny shrugged. "Of Ron and Harry and how they're one force and even one person at times."

Hermione understood completely. Yes, she was a part of the Golden Trio as people came to know them as. Together they fought and laughed together, but there were times when she felt out of the picture or that Ron and Harry were sharing something that she could never be a part of. Rather because they were blokes or because they had a lot in common, they were closer than she felt she could ever be with either of them. "Yes, I do, but that's natural. I love my relationship with them, and I love their friendship."

"Don't get me wrong, I do, too. I love Ron, and I'm glad that he has a friend like Harry and it's obvious Ron is a good influence on him, but sometimes I want Harry to myself, and I don't want to be seen as a kid sister or a backup. Urgh, I'm such a bitch." Ginny covered her face.

"No, no, you're not. Ginny, it's okay. I know how you feel. I get that way sometimes, too," she confessed. Sometimes she did just want to talk to Ron or spend the day with him alone. There were aspects to Ron that Harry understood better than she did and no matter how many times she would nag Harry about doing something, he wouldn't, but one request from Ron and Harry was on it.

Ginny uncovered her face. "Only, not about Harry, right?"

"No, not about Harry," Hermione whispered.

She smiled slightly. "Well, if it makes you feel any better, I think Ron feels the same way when you and Harry are together."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "He has no reason to."

She shrugged. "I can understand it. You and Harry do seem to--"

"We would be as cute together as you and Ron would be," Hermione rushed.

Ginny shivered and stuck out her tongue as if tasting something disgusting. "Fine, fair enough. We should get to bed. We're starting early with the presents."

Hermione followed Ginny upstairs feeling excited and nervous about the next day.

Ginny was right. Mrs. Weasley awakened her and Ginny very early in the morning. After breakfast, they opened gifts. Harry gave her a lovely new leather journal and from Ginny a pretty bracelet. Hermione was nervous as Ron opened his present. It was a glass chess set that had his initials embedded in the center of the chessboard.

His blue eyes lit up, and his jaw dropped. "This is wicked! It must have cost a fortune."

She shook her head even though he was absolutely right. "Oh, it wasn't that much. Do you like it?"

Ron walked over to her and hugged her. He smelled like the handfuls of cookies he had stuffed in his mouth at breakfast. "I love it. It's brilliant. Thank you so much, Hermione."

She melted as he smiled at her. He was so gorgeous. "You're welcome, Ron."

He rubbed his neck. "I hope you don't mind if I wait to give you your gift."

"That's fine, I need to show your dad how to work the TV anyway," she answered. They continued to smile at each other. They had not brought up what happened on the couch since it happened, but it didn't seem to bother either of them. In fact, being around Ron was a bit easier for Hermione.

By the middle of the morning, Ron's brothers had shown up. It was nice having the house loud with laughter and stories. Percy even came. The twins, Angelina, Charlie, Ron, Harry, Ginny, and Hermione decided to go out to the field for snowball fights. "Alright, the veterans versus the novice," George said.

"What does that mean?" Ron asked.

"It means the real grownups against the babies, Ronniekins," Charlie answered. Ron rolled his eyes.

"That sounds good to me. We'll be faster and stronger without old bones on the team," Ginny said smugly. Hermione noticed Harry smile at her so affectionately. She knew that he was greatly attracted to her confidence. He could rely on her when he felt weak.

"Please, I don't know why I'm a veteran. I'm not that much older than the lot," Angelina said with a frown.

Fred came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist. He kissed her cheek. "You're old enough. Besides, you have to be on my team. We lay and play together." Angelina lightly pushed him away but grinned just the same.

"Can you save that for later?" Charlie asked.

"No point in telling them that. You should see them at the flat. I'm seriously considering moving out," George said.

"Piss off you two. I'm just holding up a Weasley male tradition. We always slobber on our significant others. Shit, look at dad, Bill, ha, even Ron, eh?" Fred said.

"Shut up," Ron said, turning red.

"Maybe we should get started," Harry said.

Hermione realized early on that a snowball fight with a bunch of crazy Quidditch players wasn't such a good idea. She was far too cold to concentrate, and she didn't have the competitive edge that her teammates had. However, it was nice to play and have fun. She especially liked Ron blocking snowballs that came at her. He was a magnificent keeper. Hermione ran and hid behind a tree. She leaned against it and tried to catch her breath.

"Nice hiding spot," Ron said, coming behind it as well.

"Yes, Charlie is mad out there," she said.

He chuckled. "He's out for blood. I see Fred couldn't care less though, look."

Hermione followed his eyes. Fred and Angelina were snogging against the side of the shed. She smiled. "They're lovely."

"Yeah, Angie is great for Fred, and he'll never do any better. I don't think anyone else could put up with him," Ron said.



She looked at Ron. He was staring at his shoes. "How do you think George feels about it?"

He frowned. "I dunno. I thought about that too when Fred first said that he was dating her. They always do things together. This time Fred finally pulled ahead. I don't think he minds it. Fred is happy, so George really doesn't have a choice. It has to be a bit upsetting at times, though. Like George seeing Fred laughing and snogging on the couch while he's left doing inventory."

"Yes, I can see that," she said softly. Ron wasn't looking at her. He was looking toward Fred and Angelina. It gave her a perfect view of his face and how his skin blended in with the snow because it was so pale due to the cold. His freckles appeared colored on and his sapphire eyes popped. He looked like an angel with vibrant red hair as his halo. Ron honestly had no idea how perfect he was.

He turned back to her. She quickly looked away. "Hey, do you want to go inside? I doubt that they'll miss us."

Her heart fluttered. "Okay." He smirked and led the way into the house. His remaining brothers and parents were in the kitchen, sipping hot drinks and talking.

"Oi, are you kids finished yet?" Bill asked.

"Let 'em play, Billy," Fleur said sweetly.

"No, I think they'll be at it for a while. Hermione and I are just going to go up to my room," Ron said. She tried not to blush.

Mrs. Weasley beamed. "Okay, Ronnie, your father will let you know when we'll eat dinner, right Arthur."

She nudged his shoulder. "Oh, yeah, of course, have fun," Mr. Weasley said with a wink. Hermione was not sure what thought Mr. and Mrs. Weasley shared, but they both grinned widely.

"What do you think that was about?" Hermione asked as they walked into his room.

Ron shut the door. "I really don't want to know. Sit on the bed and close your eyes."

Her heart began to race. "W-what?"

He rolled his eyes. "Just do it, Granger." She nervously took off her coat, hat, and gloves and obeyed. She sat on the bed and closed her eyes. "You don't have to be so tense," he added.

"I don't like not knowing what's going on," she said.

Ron laughed. "I know you don't." She could hear him opening his trunk and walking close to her. Harry's cot squeaked. Hermione's heart raced even more. She was usually a well-kept woman but at

the moment, all she thought of was that when she opened her eyes Ron could be laying on Harry's bed, naked, and waiting for her to ravish him. She bit her lip and thanked God that Ron didn't have the power to read minds.

"Okay, you can open your eyes," he said.

She opened her eyes slowly. In front of her was a wrapped box. It didn't look like any of the other presents he had wrapped. The wrapping paper was gold with golden lace and a bow that was actually a red rose. "Is it mine?" she asked.

"Yes, go ahead and open it," Ron said.

She didn't really want to. It was wrapped so beautifully. She took the box and smelled the rose. It was fresh. "You did a gorgeous job with the wrapping. You're better than you led on."

He blushed and sat on the edge of the cot. "Thanks."

She gently tore the paper off. She pulled the tape off the box and took the gift out. She sat it in her lap. It was a medium-sized wooden box. The wood was dark, smooth, and shiny. She opened it and gasped. It was not just a wooden box. It was a music box. A ballerina spun slowly as soft music played. She was marvelous. She wore a white tutu and her brown hair was tied neatly in a white bow. She held her pose with a smile. The inside of the box was white velvet with a round mirror behind the ballerina. Hermione swallowed hard. She didn't know what to say. She was in shock. It was the most amazing thing that she had ever seen.

"It's a music box. You can wind it up and she'll keep spinning and the music will keep playing." Ron wound up the turner on the back of the box.

Hermione laughed. "Yes, I know."

He rubbed his neck. "Oh, right, you're Muggleborn." He sat next to her. "You hate it, don't you?"

She gawked at him. "No, no, I love it. It is so incredibly beautiful, Ron, thank you."

Ron let out a low whistle. "Excellent. I was hoping that you'd like it."

Hermione examined the box. She traced her fingers over the ballerina and the velvet. It was so elegant and different from anything anyone had ever given her. She usually got practical gifts. She rarely got things of beauty or individuality. In fact, Ron was the first to ever get her something so beautiful. "Where did you get this?" she asked.

He grinned. "I told you that my dad has a garage full of Muggle things like this. I was looking through his stuff, saw this, asked Harry what it was and how it worked, and he and dad helped me clean and fix it up. It's apparently an antique. Then I asked

mum and Ginny if, well, girls liked these sorts of things as presents."

She was impressed and moved by all the hard work he put in. "That seems like a lot of trouble. When did you find the time?"

Ron waved a hand. "It wasn't any trouble. I did it last summer. I've had to wait this whole time to give it to you. I really want you to have this."

"Really?" she asked.

He gazed at the box. "Yeah, I saw it and I knew right away that it had to be yours. She-she reminds me of you."

Hermione chuckled. She certainly was not a professional dancer and she would never be that tiny. "Why?"

He glanced at the ballerina and smiled before turning back to her. "Well, she's focused, she's skilled, and she's absolutely beautiful. She's just perfect...like you."

A lump clogged her throat. She could feel the burning in her eyes. She closed her eyes, letting the warmth fill her. She opened her eyes and didn't even stop the tear that escaped. "You think I'm perfect?"

Ron didn't blush. He didn't fidget. He looked her deep in the eyes. "I always have." His words were incredibly gentle and deep. Hermione looked into his eyes and everything else blurred away into nothingness. She could feel her body and the pounding of her heart, but she was not connected to it. She didn't need her heart. Ron kept her alive. She clutched the box tightly. She didn't know it was possible, but she fell in love with him all over again. All the reasons why she wanted him and needed him in her life flooded over her.

They were silent. The only sound came from the box. It was something to focus on.

"The-the song is pretty," she whispered.

He looked at the ballerina. "Do you want to dance? We didn't get to at the ball or the one before that. Maybe this time we can actually go through with it."

"You want to dance?" she asked. She could not believe all of this was coming from Ron Weasley.

His ears went pink. "Well, we always end up miserable when music and dancing are combined, but maybe we'll get lucky this time."

Hermione laughed. "You've got a point there." She stood up, and Ron did as well. She pointed her wand at the box and magnified the music so they could hear it better.

They stood in front of Ron's bed. She put her arms on his shoulders and he put his on her waist. They slowly swayed to the

music. Her legs shook. Ron was right in front of her. She was dancing with him without interruptions. She moved closer and placed her head against his chest. He held her closer and wrapped his arms around her waist. He held her tightly. She listened to the strong rhythm of his heart. She had never felt safer or more relaxed in her life. Ron was her knight. He kept all the bad feelings away. She held on to him tighter. She could not keep her emotions in. She had Ron, and she didn't want to let him go. She didn't want to lose him in any way. She couldn't imagine what she would do if he wasn't in her life.

Hermione didn't know where all the fear was coming from but it overwhelmed her. More tears fell down her cheeks. "Ron," she choked.

Ron held her body firmly. He held her so tightly that her feet left the ground a bit. He kissed the top of her head. "You're okay. I've got you," he whispered.

She took deep breaths and pulled herself together. Hermione was thankful that she didn't have to find words to express what she felt. He understood her without her having to explain anything. Even if he caused her pain, he was right there again to make her better. Ron Weasley was her life and her reason. No matter what happened, that would never change. Hermione couldn't let it change.

She pulled away a bit. "Sorry," she said, sniffing.

He smiled gently. "It's okay, don't apologize. I know my dancing is horrible."

She swatted his arm. "Oh, it's not that at all and you happen to be a great dancer."

Ron delicately wiped her tears away with his thumb. She shivered against his touch. She wanted to take his thumb and kiss it. She wanted to kiss all his fingers and slowly make her way up to his face. She wanted to snog him deeply. Forever if he asked her to. She wanted to make love on his bed while the snow gently fell outside. She wanted so many things that she couldn't have. She had to keep her focus on something else. She looked around. There was a box next to his bed.

"Hey, is that another gift?" she asked.

He sighed. "It's from Lavender."

"Aren't you going to open it?" Hermione asked.

He let go of her. "Yes, I should." He walked over to the gift and sat on the edge of his bed. He opened it slowly revealing a blue slender box. Inside was a silver bracelet. It had the word "KEEPER" carved in.

Hermione was actually impressed. "Wow, now that must have cost a fortune."

"Yeah, it's a bit blimey," Ron said. He ran his fingers across it stunned. Suddenly, a chess set did not seem as romantic as she thought.

"Are you going to try it on?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I'm not that keen on jewelry."

Hermione knew that. Ron thought any jewelry would look out of place on his pale and freckly body. She even remembered back in third year when she, Ron, and Harry were talking about one of Ron's cousins getting married and he said he would even highly reconsider wearing a wedding band because it would look out of place. Hermione knew it had less to do with how it looked on him and more about how jewelry meant money, and Ron wasn't comfortable with expensive things. Lavender didn't know that, and Hermione did not expect her to. That would mean that she actually took the time to get to know Ron and understand him as a person. However, it was still a nice gift.

"Well, it's nice of her. She seems to really care for you." Hermione didn't know why she was talking in such a way. She had always found Lavender annoying and selfish but she was that way because she wanted Ron all to herself. Hermione could understand that. Being around him so much lately made her realize that Lavender was simply smitten by Ron. She couldn't honestly blame Lavender for wanting Ron. Hermione wanted him, too.

Ron looked at her. "I know she does. I care about her, too. She's not as bad as everyone thinks she is."

Hermione sighed. "I know, Ron, I'm sorry." She sat next to him and took the bracelet. "She may actually love you."

He put the bracelet on his side table. "I think she does." He did not seem happy about it.

She frowned. "Why do you say it like that?"

Ron swallowed hard. "Because I don't love her."

Hermione didn't realize that she was holding her breath. She let it out in shaky puffs. She didn't know where Ron's new-found confidence was coming from. He was looking right at her again. "D-do you think you ever will?" She didn't really want to know the answer. She just wanted to keep herself busy. Ron continued to look at her. He shook his head slowly and said nothing. "Then why are you with her?" She didn't mean to make her question sound as harsh and demanding as it did, but it was something that she wanted to know. It was the cause of most of her pain and frustration.

Ron finally turned away. He looked toward the window. "I don't want to be alone anymore," he said quietly. Hermione leaned against the bedpost. She felt guilty for never telling him about how she felt. Once again, they were quiet. Hermione closed the music box. She didn't want to hear the song anymore. He turned back to her. "So, what did Viktor get you?"

She rolled her eyes. "He didn't get me anything. He's far too busy to worry about getting me a Christmas gift."

"What a prat," he mumbled. "I don't know why you bother with him."

"You're not the only one who doesn't want to be alone, Ron," she said softly. He looked as if he wanted to say something. The door opened.

"Mum says it's time to eat," Mr. Weasley said.

Ron stood up. "Good, I'm starving." Hermione stood up as well and followed him downstairs.

It was hard for her to enjoy her meal or the conversation. Too much had happened in Ron's room. Her body and her mind were on overdrive. She felt so tired yet wired. After dinner, everyone wanted tea and pudding. Hermione excused herself to Ginny's room. She tossed and turned on the cot. She couldn't get to sleep. There was a knock on the door. She thought it was Ginny or Harry wanting to know every detail.

"Yes," she said dryly.

The door opened. To her surprise, it was Mrs. Weasley. "May I come in?"

Hermione sat up. "Of course, is everything okay?"

"Yes, dear, everything is fine. I just wanted to see if you were okay. You seemed out of it at dinner," she said, sitting next to her on the bed.

"Oh, I'm fine. I guess the snowball game wore me out," she explained.

Mrs. Weasley gave her a look. "I've been around awhile, Hermione. I can tell by now when something is up. Did Ron give you the music box?"

"Yes, he did. It's beautiful. I love it so much," Hermione said.

Mrs. Weasley smiled. "I'm glad to hear it. You have no idea how fussy he was over it. He wanted it to be perfect. He was so excited about giving it to you, yet so nervous that you wouldn't like it. I don't think I've ever seen him like that over a gift for someone. What did he get Lavender?"

Hermione fiddled with her pillowcase. "Some earrings and I'm sure she'll love them."

Mrs. Weasley did not seem very pleased. "I'm sure she will, too. Hermione, I want to tell you something. I know my family very well. I know Ron, and I know Ginny. I'm their mother, and I can tell when they truly believe in something and when it's just a cover up."

"Mrs. Weasley, I don't follow you," Hermione confessed.

She took her hand. "It's going to be all right, Hermione. The pain that you are feeling will not always be here and neither will the uncertainty. Ron is a lot like his father. He's very hands on and has to see something from every angle imaginable before he can understand what's right in front of his face. He's a good boy; he just takes some time. He can be slow to warm up to something but when he does, he doesn't let it go for anything. I think he's rubbed some of that on to Harry. Poor boy is the same way."

Hermione laughed and wiped the tears from her eyes. She was so tired of crying. "What about me?"

Mrs. Weasley rubbed her cheek. "I think you're a lot stronger than you realize, and I think you're going to be just fine. You all will. It's terrible now, but don't let it ruin everything. There's plenty of dessert left and I think you should join us, when you're ready." She leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "I'm glad you're here, Hermione. I'm glad you are in my son's life."

Hermione smiled and felt a bit better. "Thank you, Mrs. Weasley. I'm glad I'm here, and I think I will come down for some pudding." Mrs. Weasley rubbed her arm, got up, and left the room. Hermione got out of bed and looked herself in the mirror. She dried her eyes fixed her hair a bit. She nodded to herself. She would be okay.

She picked up her music box and headed downstairs. She wanted to show everyone and hear Ron talk about all the effort he put into it.

She wanted to hear about all the effort Ron put into the gift for her.

\*\*\*\*Okay, I'll stop there. I could go on forever but the chapter has to end somewhere, lol. I know there is a lot that happened. I hope you all enjoyed it. I got goose bumps and teary eyes at certain parts. First, I just want to highlight the cuteness between Fred/Angelina! I loved them so much \*sighs\* Anyway, Ron and Hermione are so beautiful and destined. I hope you all weren't expecting them to get together or hook up in the chapter. I seriously considered them snogging or something but I truly thought about it. As much as they want to, it would not be Ron and Hermione.

Yes, Lavender is not right for Ron. He doesn't really even love her BUT she still is his girlfriend and he would never cheat on her. Also, Hermione would never want to be "the other woman" even though she doesn't like Lavender, she wouldn't disrespect her like that and do things with her boyfriend and she wouldn't want Ron as much knowing he'd be okay with that. So, I think it's better this way, if you disagree, I'm sorry, but that's the way it is. Plus, when they actually DO get to that point where they can do things, it will be even more heated and beautiful because

of all the waiting and wondering and if you're thinking "but Rose, will they EVER get together?" answer is YES OF BLOODY COURSE THEY WILL!" lol, it just takes a bit of time. Besides, I only have one more Holiday Chap and then it is back to school, where it all happens. After this next chapter, the plan truly unfolds and things finally come out. HOWEVER, you cannot get to that until you've reviewed THIS chapter, so please do so if you want the next chapter posted!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 19

Thank you all for the reviews!

Disclaimer: If you think it's mine, stop right now!

Harry sighed and rubbed his eyes. He put his glasses back on and continued to scribble. When they returned to school, he wanted to start his team on a new training schedule. He had to really push them if they were going to win the championship.

"What are you doing down here?"

Harry looked up. Hermione stood before him. "I'm rewriting my training program. I don't think I work us hard enough."

She sat next to him on the floor. "Wow, I never thought that I'd hear that come for you."

"Me neither. I think Oliver rubbed off on me a little too much. I just want us to be as good as we can be. I want us to win. It's my first year as a coach, and a lot is riding on me," he tried to explain.

"Are you sure that's all this is about?" she asked.

"What are you getting at?" he said dryly.

She smiled gently. "Are you sure that you working so hard and alone are all about Quidditch or maybe what's going on with Ginny?"

Hermione was the smartest person Harry knew, but sometimes he thought it was more than that. He actually believed that she could read minds. "Why aren't you in Ravenclaw?"

She rolled her eyes. "So, I'm right?"

"Partially. You're right that I'm trying to find a distraction, but you're wrong about me and Ginny. Nothing is going on between us." Harry put his quill down and looked into the fire. Ever since their argument, he and Ginny had kept their distance from each other. Yes, they talked and got along, but the heat between them seemed to cool down. He hated it.

"Harry, it's going to be okay," Hermione said.



"No, it's not. She hates me. She actually thinks that I don't care about her or that I don't want to spend time with her. She has no idea. I justâ€¦I couldn't leave Ron the way he was. I just couldn't do it." He was so frustrated about the entire situation. He had bad timing no matter what.

She rubbed his arm. "I know, Harry. You told me this. Ginny doesn't hate you. I know where you're coming from, but you have to try to see it from her side. She didn't know what the situation was. All she knew was that you left her behind to do whatever with Ron."

Harry groaned in frustration. "I didn't-"

She held up her hand. "I know that, Harry, but Ginny doesn't. She's really insecure when it comes to you. She's not as confident as you think. She's afraid that you will never see her as more than Ron's little sister. She hates being second best, and she thought you didn't care."

"I did care! I wanted to be with her, too. I don't see her as just Ron's little sister. I know in the past it seemed like I didn't care about her. It wasn't because of that. I was too scared to admit that I had feelings for her. I feel like shit for that, but it's not like that anymore. There are some things that I just have to do. I had to be there for Ron. When he needs me, I have to be there no matter what," he said.

Hermione smiled. "And I love that so much about you, Harry. I'm glad that you were there for him. Are you really not going to tell me what happened?"

Harry thought about it. A part of him really did want to, but he wanted to be faithful to Ron. "Sorry, answer still stands."

It was her turn to sigh. "Oh, fine, Harry!"

He grinned. "Well, it's good to know that things are at least going great between you two."

"This has been the best holiday of my life. I don't want it to end," she said quietly. "I don't want things to change and go back to how they were before we came here. I feel like we're so close to something."

He tried his best to seem happy. Granted, he was very pleased to see Hermione happy and that she was closer to Ron than ever before, but a tiny part of him growled with jealousy. He had never felt further apart from Ginny and he knew that when they got back, she would reconnect with Dean. So, while Hermione's door was wide open for possibility, Harry couldn't even see a crack of light for his future with Ginny.

"You never know. I don't think things will be the same. Too much has happened," Harry tried.

Hermione gazed into the fire. "We only have a few days left. I want to enjoy them while I can. He's still with her, you know."

"And Ginny is going to run back to Dean," Harry whispered. He hated the feeling that he was no further then when he started. He hated that everything in his life was so complicated, and that he had to learn the hard way. He wasn't a complainer but for once, he wanted a break. He wanted real help. He wanted his mother to explain to him how to really charm a girl. He wanted his father to tell him how he was able to confess to his mother that he loved her. He wanted his parents. He needed his parents. It was another thing in his life that he would never have. He took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes. He didn't want to cry. He felt weakness come over him as tears forced themselves out of his eyes.

"Oh, Harry, come here," Hermione whispered. She put her arms around him, and he held her back.

He rested his head against her shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"No, don't apologize. It's okay, Harry. It hurts. I know it does," she said softly.

"I don't know what to do. I try so hard to be assertive and strong butâ€¦but I'm still only a person. I can't fucking do this. People are always bloody telling me how great I am or how powerful I am. I wish they could see me now. I'm a joke," he confessed.

She pulled away. She had a fierce look on her face and her eyes were damp. "Now, you listen to me, Harry. I don't ever want to hear you talk about yourself like that again. You are not a joke. You are not weak, and you're not stupid. I honestly have no idea what all this must be like for you, but I can tell you that I know you better than you know yourself right now. You are the bravest person I have ever met or will ever know. You don't give up and you don't give in. I'm proud of you Harry, and I love you very much. So does Ron. Ginny loves you, too. She loves you Harry, and she needs you just as badly as you need her. You can do this. You are better than this."

Harry sniffed and wiped his eyes. "Hermione, I-"

"Don't start it, Harry. Now, go upstairs and talk to her. You can't fix this if you don't talk to her about it. Do you understand me, Harry James Potter?" Hermione snapped.

He couldn't help but chuckle. Whenever she used his full name, he knew that she was serious. "Yes, I understand."

Her features softened. "Good, so go talk to her. I'm sure that she has some things to say that you'll want to hear as well."

He smiled at her. Hermione was incredibly wise and amazing. She always knew what to say and what to do. He could easily understand why Ron was completely in love with her, but it never hit Harry in the same way. He saw Hermione as the closest thing he'd ever have to a loving sibling. "What would I do without you?"

She kissed his forehead. "Fail potions class."

Harry snorted and wiped away the few tears that remained. "I love you, Hermione."

She put his glasses back on his face. "I love you, too, Harry. Now, go talk to Ginny and tell me all about it later. I'm going to stay up and read down here."

He stood up. "Okay, wish me luck."

Hermione shook her head. "You don't need it."

Harry rubbed his hands together all the way to Ginny's room. It was late and he hoped that she wasn't sleeping. He quietly knocked on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again. "One second," she said from the other side. Harry ran his fingers through his hair but realized that it was a bit late to try to fix it. When she answered, Harry swallowed hard. She wore a pink nightgown. It fit her perfectly. Harry had never seen it before, and his body reacted to it. She was the most gorgeous girl that he had ever seen.

Ginny rubbed her shoulder. "Do you need something?"

Harry had to remind himself how to think and form words. "Oh, err, no, um, I'm fine. I was just wondering if I could talk to you for a moment. I mean if I woke you up it's okay."

"No, it's fine. I wasn't asleep. Come on in," she said. Ginny opened the door wider so he could step through. He leaned against her dresser, and she stood in front of him. "I'm not sure when Hermione will be back."

"She's reading on the couch, so, it could be hours," he cheeked.

Ginny chuckled. "Nothing is better to her than a good book. Well, almost nothing."

Harry smiled. "Yeah, I think we both know what that is." Ginny smiled timidly and looked away. He felt like a tit. He knew that he had to say something. "Ginny, I'm really sorry."

She looked back to him. "Please, don't apologize."

"I need to. I know what I did was wrong but--"

"No, what you did was right. What you did was you, Harry. Ron needed you, and you were there for him. You wanted to be there for him. That's just how you are," Ginny explained.

"But I should have said something to make it sound better," he said.

She shook her head. "No, you shouldn't have. You did what you had to do. Harry, I'm the one who needs to apologize. I'm really

sorry for how I treated you. You didn't deserve it, and I had no reason to get so angry."

Harry moved off the dresser and walked a bit closer to her. "I did want to go on a walk with you."

She bit her lip. "I know. I was justâ€¦jealous."

He shrugged. "Jealous of what, Ginny?"

Ginny sighed. "That once again, Ron got to have all of your attention."

Harry's heartbeat picked up. He felt heat cover his body. "It's not that simple. He needed me."

She kept her eyes on him. They were so brown and large. "I know that, see, you'll never understand."

"Actually, I think I do," he said quietly.

She moved a little closer to him. "And how is that?"

He wasn't sure of what to say. He could feel his racing heart in his throat. He shook a bit. A million different emotions and explanations came at him at once. He chose the easiest one to say. He chose the truth. "You give Dean all of your attention."

He could see color rise on her face and neck. She frowned. "Don't bring him into this."

"Why not? He is a part of this, and it's true. Don't judge me when you're doing the same thing." Harry hated getting defensive and short with her, but the constant gloom overpowered him. He couldn't take it anymore.

Ginny stomped her foot. "How dare you? It hasn't always been this way. You've always picked someone else over me. Hermione, Cho, Ron, Parvati, basically anyone with a pulse."

Harry's jaw dropped. "Are you mad? Parvati? I asked her to one dance, and I barely spoke to her."

She laughed harshly. "That is probably because you were drooling over Cho the entire night, and it looks like some things haven't change."

He rolled his eyes. "Oh, please, don't go there. I don't see why you are complaining. You seemed happy to go with Neville that year and even happier to be with Dean this year!"

Some of the anger in Ginny's eyes faded away. "Well, I wasn't! Not really," she whispered.

"And why is that?" Harry asked.

Ginny moved even closer to him. "Don't act stupid. You have known for years that I've fancied you and that I've wanted you, but you

never gave a shit. If anything, you found it amusing, your best mate's kid sister star struck over you."

Harry growled in frustration. He was so tired of people telling him what he thought and what he believed in. "Damn it, Ginny, that is not what I thought, and that's certainly not what I think now! Regardless of what everyone likes to say, I have never just seen you as Ron's sister. I have always felt something different with you. Iâ€¦I was just too scared and confused to realize it." He couldn't really breathe. The closer he came to the truth, the harder it became.

Ginny put her hands on her hips. "Scared of what? Scared of what people would say? Scared of being embarrassed?"

Harry couldn't believe that was what she thought. She honestly had no idea what he wanted and what he had always felt. He didn't blame her. No one really knew. He kept it all in and hidden away. However, Ginny brought it out of him. He could not hide from her. "I was scared of being happy, okay! I was scared of having you only to lose you again. Voldemort took you once to get to me. I don't want that happening again. I can't and I won't lose you that way. I don't know what I would do if something should ever happen because you were being used to get to me. I would rather just not go there. I'd rather you be okay. I need you to be okay." The tightness in his eyes was back. All that he had perfected over the years seemed to disappear. It felt both liberating and terrifying.

Ginny's lip trembled. "But I'm not okay, Harry. Not when you ignore me and pretend about what you feel. I'm not scared. You are worth the risk."

Harry's entire body warmed over. She gazed at him in such an affectionate way. She was so beautiful. "That's easy for you to say. It's not your battle."

She reached out and touched his hand. "But it is! You are a part of me, Harry. It's my battle, too."

As much as he loved feeling her, he moved his hand away. "It shouldn't have to be. You shouldn't have to be burdened."

"It's not a burden. It's a risk, and I am willing to take it. You've never trusted me enough," Ginny whispered.

Once again, the truth seeped out of him. "It's not very easy for me to trust people, Ginny. Things never have been easy when it comes to my feelings. It's even worse now. I don't know what to do or say to you. It all seems too late on my part."

"Why?" she asked

"You love Dean, don't you?" Harry already knew the answer. He just wanted confirmation to please the parts in his brain that told him otherwise.

Ginny looked away. "Yes."

A pang hit his chest. He swallowed the lump in his throat and let out a shaky breath. "Do you love me?"

She looked back up at him. Ginny wore a confident and strong expression. She looked that way when she sure and ready about something. "Yes."

The sound of his heart in his ear was replaced by a ringing. He sort of felt as if he was floating. His hands and knees shook terribly. "See, there's our problem becauseâ€¦I-I love you, too. I want you, but you chose Dean."

Ginny closed her eyes, and her brows came together as if she had a headache. When she opened her eyes, they were damp. "I had to move on, Harry. I couldn't wait on you forever."

He nodded, hating himself. "I know. I'm sorry."

She roughly wiped her eyes. "Well, sorry isn't good enough! Damn you! How dare you do this to me now! How dare you wait until I'm happy with someone else to casually tell me that you want me?"

"Happy? You don't seem very happy to me!" Harry shouted. He was angry with himself, and he took it out on her. He knew that it was wrong, but he didn't have anything else.

Ginny picked up a pillow from her bed and threw it at him. Harry ducked and it hit her dresser, knocking things over. "You don't know anything about my relationship. Dean is a great person. This is not his fault. It's mine! Stop fucking assuming that you know every bloody thing about me!"

Harry kicked at the floor. So much fury ran through his body. It was incredible. "I will when you do the same! Shit, if he is so bloody spectacular, then stay with him! Tell me to fuck off and leave you alone. Tell me that you want me to go! Fucking tell me!" He felt fire run through him. He was so angry and devastated. He looked at Ginny. She was fuming with rage just as he was. He felt electricity between them. She looked so sexy and heated. He was torn between wanting to yell at her and wanting to snog her.

Before he knew it, Ginny jumped into his arms and planted her lips firmly against his. She wrapped her arms around his neck and moaned. Harry held her tightly. He stuck his tongue as deeply as he could into her mouth, making them gasp. He tripped back until he hit the dresser. He turned around and pushed her against it. He couldn't think. He did not want to. He kissed all over her, tasting her warm mouth and sucking on her wet tongue. Ginny groaned and nibbled on his lips. She tasted so sweet. A shock wave of pleasure broke throughout his body. He tingled everywhere.

Harry ran his hands up her thighs. Her skin was soft and burning. She hopped on the dresser and spread her legs. He pushed against her. She finally broke out of the kiss and whimpered. He gazed at her. Her face was red, and she licked her lips repeatedly. He

could not believe what was happening. He let go of his brain and let his body move. He softly sucked on her neck. Ginny tangled her fingers into his hair. He let his hands reach all the way up her thighs. He gently brushed his knuckles against her knickers.

Ginny's legs shook. She pulled on his hair and moaned. "Harry."

Hearing her moan his name sent a wave of heat directly to his groin. He bit his lip and with all of his courage, he pressed his pointer and middle finger against the fabric. It was so damp and steaming. Ginny rocked her hips and crushed her mouth against his. She took her free hand and gripped his hardness through his jeans. It was his turn to moan. He snaked his fingers underneath her knickers. He almost came as he felt her thick, warm juices. He caressed and massaged her. Ginny bit his bottom lip and whimpered repeatedly. She unzipped his jeans and reached her hand in. The moment her hand gripped his cock, Harry groaned. His body shook. Everything came undone. He pulled away.

"Ginny," he panted. She stroked him. Harry wasn't sure how long he could stand. He knew that his knees would give in. Ginny pulled her hand away after another stroke. She slowly reached under her gown and took her knickers off. Harry watched, mesmerized. His heart pounded so roughly that it hurt. He kept his gaze on her as he pulled the button on his jeans and with shaky hands pulled them down. Ginny bit her lip. Her brown eyes were so alert and massive. It reminded him of the first time he had seen those eyes when he was twelve. He couldn't think about that, though. Ginny's expression had been of excitement and fear. He didn't want to think about her being afraid or how terrified he was now.

"Iâ€¦I don't haveâ€¦" His voice trailed off. He knew what he wanted to say, but he couldn't bring himself to. Something did not feel right.

Ginny nodded slowly. She reached into the top drawer of her dresser and pulled out a tube filled with clear liquid. She handed it to him. He noticed for the first time how badly she was shaking. "Drink it all." Her voice was incredibly gentle.

Harry took the tube and examined it. He had never seen one up close. He didn't want to think about how or why Ginny had some. He popped off the lid and chugged it down. It tasted terrible, but the taste quickly went away. He went back to staring at her. Ginny swallowed hard. Her once red face was now pale. She opened her legs and leaned back against the wall. Harry moved as close to her as he could. She wrapped her legs around his waist as he slowly pulled down his boxers. He looked into her eyes. He had thought about this moment time and time again. He could not understand why it felt so differently from how he imagined it. Ginny leaned forward and kissed him lightly. It was his cue to go.

Harry placed his hands on her hips and slowly entered her. He was lucky that he was kissing her because he groaned so loudly that he was sure it would wake everyone up. Ginny whimpered in his

mouth and arched her back. She held on to him tightly and pushed against him.

It was the greatest feeling that he had ever experienced. He was inside of Ginny's body. She was warm and hugged around his hardness beautifully. It was everything that he had ever desired and more. A current of pleasure shot from the top of his head to his toes. He pumped into her over and over. He went faster and harder with every sound that she made. He wasn't sure of what he was doing. Ginny moaned, whimpered, and held on to his body for support. Harry continued to suck on her neck, and she softly moaned into his hair. He tried to hold on for as long as he could, but lack of experience, fear, and excitement took over. He could feel the pressure reach his cock. A blinding light came over him, and he gave a powerful thrust. He came and it was powerful. He jerked inside her body and whimpered against her neck. Ginny softly cried out and shook. She rocked her hips repeatedly and pulled on his hair.

Harry continued to pump until he finished his spasm. His heart rate finally slowed down and his mind cleared a bit. He was so exhausted, and he tried his best to control his breathing. He had sex Ginny Weasley. He had finally fulfilled his wettest fantasy. However, as he finally opened his eyes and peered at Ginny, he knew that something was wrong, and he knew she felt it, too.

Ginny's face was washed out, and she breathed heavily. Her eyes were so big and unfocused. She was not smiling. In fact, she barely moved at all. He peeled away from her and pulled up his clothes. He picked up her knickers. She took them and quickly slipped them on. She hugged her legs tightly against her chest and looked at him. It hurt. The expression wasn't of satisfaction. It wasn't of love or hope. It was of fear. Harry felt exactly what Ginny looked like. It was then that he finally realized what they had done.

"I should go," he whispered.

Ginny held her legs tighter. "Yes, you should go."

Harry swallowed another lump that was in his throat. Ginny turned away from him. He turned around and quickly left. He leaned against her door and closed his eyes. He felt terrible. He just wanted to sleep; however, he knew that Hermione was waiting on him. So, he rubbed his eyes and adjusted his clothes. He walked downstairs.

She was on the couch reading. She looked up. "So, that took a while. How did it go?"

Harry had a choice. He could tell her the truth. He could reveal what had happened but looking at the happiness in her eyes, Harry could not bring himself to. He didn't want Hermione to hate him. He didn't want her to be ashamed like he was. "I think we're going to be okay," he said as best as he could.

Hermione grinned widely. "That's wonderful! See, I told you. A nice talk was all you needed."



He chewed on his nail but immediately took his finger out of his mouth. It tasted like Ginny. "Yeah, look, I'm really tired. Talking wears me out. I think I'm going to head in."

"You sound like Ron," Hermione said.

Another pang hit his chest. He didn't want to think about Ron. "Yeah, goodnight, Hermione." He didn't give her time to say anything else or realize that he was not okay.

He ran up to Ron's room and rushed in. Ron was sleeping on his stomach. He faced Harry's bed and looked at peace with his mouth slightly open. Harry sat on his cot and gazed at him. He was too terrified to think of what Ron would do if he found out. He would probably never want to speak to him again. Harry didn't want that. He couldn't have it that way. He quietly took off his clothes and tried to get comfortable in his cot.

Harry felt so cold. He had told Ginny that he loved her, he knew that she loved him, too. He had snogged her and had sex with her. It was everything that he dreamed about for so long, but it wasn't right. It was not supposed to be this way. What they had done was never a part of his plan. He turned over and put a pillow over his head. He couldn't stop thinking about Ginny and how she tasted, what it had felt like pushing against her, and cumming inside her. He didn't want to think about how she had potion, and how she didn't cry or wince from pain. It was not her first time.

The thought made his heart ache. As hard as he tried, he didn't get any sleep.

"Come on, mate! I can't believe that I have to be the one to tell you to hurry up," Ron said.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, I'm coming," Harry said, trying to keep up. He sighed and yanked on his luggage. He was tired, cranky, and not ready to go back to Hogwarts.

Mrs. Weasley went down the line giving them their usual hugs, kisses, and words of advice. She got to Harry and gave him a wet kiss on his forehead. "Now, remember to rest. It's important that you sleep and eat regularly. You look so peaky, dear."

"I know, Mrs. Weasley. I will, I promise," he said. Mrs. Weasley kissed him again. Harry couldn't exactly look at her. He felt too guilty.

"Mum, we have to go," Ron said, pulling Harry away and to the train.

"Oh, you're just like your father, Ronald," Mrs. Weasley fussed.

Ron laughed. "I love you, too."

Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and Harry boarded the train. Harry didn't feel connected to the usual chatter and laughs.

"Here's an empty one," Hermione said. She opened the compartment door and sat down. Ron, of course, sat next to her. Harry closed his eyes for a moment before taking his seat. Ginny slowly sat next to him. He looked at her and noticed that she turned away as he looked up. They had not spoken since it happened. They could barely even look at each other. It was the most uncomfortable experience of his life.

"What is with you two?" Hermione asked. She looked terribly concerned.

"Mione, we have to go back to school. No one wants that," Ron explained. Harry tried to smile. Ron didn't know and neither did Hermione. They still cared about him. He was thankful that Ginny hadn't told.

"Hush it, Ron. Harry, are you okay?" Hermione asked. She was searching him for any clues.

Harry put up his wall and looked toward the window. "You should listen to Ron more often, Hermione. When is the trolley coming around?"

Hermione sighed and sat back in her seat. She turned to Ron. "Did you remember your assignment sheet? You need it for the next Prefects meeting."

Ron rolled his eyes. "You must be taking the piss. We aren't even there yet and already you're back on schedule."

Harry let the normality sink in. It was nice to find stability. Hearing Ron and Hermione bicker and flirt was something that he could depend on. He slowly looked over at Ginny. She stared out the window with her knees tucked into her chest. It must have been her way of finding stability. He wanted to hold her. He wanted to apologize and make things right. She was so beautiful. Even when she was distant, she was perfect.

A wave of pleasure went through him. For a moment, he was able to find bliss in what they did. He knew what Ginny felt like. He knew what she smelled like and what she tasted like. He could hear her moans in his ear and feel her body. He could taste her skin and see the moment when she lost it completely and bucked under the pressure of heat. However, the pleasure quickly went away and was replaced by coldness and pain.

Everything was out in the open now but nothing was right. He had not meant for things to go so far. As much as he had always wanted her, he did not want their first time to be like that. He wanted something special. He wanted to show her how much she meant to him, not rush everything and muffle their pleasure. She didn't deserve a quick shag against a dresser. It didn't matter, it had happened and it couldn't be undone. Ginny shifted and ran a hand through her hair. Harry sighed quietly. He thought about how he never wanted his or their first time to be so disconnected, but he knew in his heart, that it wasn't really her first time, and it made everything even worse.

Hermione laughed and Harry turned to her. Ron was showing her something that was in a magazine. She giggled and he beamed. His blue eyes were so light, and he seemed so happy. Hermione's cheeks were rosy from laughter, and her smile was warm and genuine. Harry had never felt more alone or detached from his friends before in his life.

He leaned against the seat and closed his eyes. The game was over for him.

Harry had played and he had lost.

\*\*\*\*\*Okay, that's the end of that! Yes, I know, I know, there is a lot to talk about, so let's talk. I think it's important that you all know what I'm thinking just as I do with you lot when I read the reviews, so, let's start from the top and work our way down. \*take a deep breath and exhales\*

First, I realized writing this, that I love writing Harry. If you haven't noticed, all my stories that I have posted here are about R/Hr and are from their perspectives. When I first thought of this story, I didn't expect to have so much Harry or to enjoy him as much as I do, but I bloody do! I love him as a character and I love bringing up the things that were touched on but not really brought out in other works and the books. I think there's a lot more to Harry than some care to notice and I so enjoy writing it. With that said, I actually really do enjoy Harry and Hermione's friendship. Word here is FRIENDSHIP. It's important and it's beautiful. Harry loves Hermione and Hermione loves him. I don't have a problem with them being close and affectionate, but it's all PLATONIC. It's all how brothers and sisters would treat each other. That's as far as I go. That's as far as it should go.

Second, the fight with Ginny and what happened after. Months ago, when I first thought of this story, there were a few key moments that I had to have in it. No matter about any re-writes or new ideas, there were some things that would happen regardless of where this story went, this is one of them. I knew from day one that I wanted this fight, those feelings, them shagging, and the aftermath. So, it's not like I just randomly put that in there. Reasons, I can't say them all without giving away the story, but it has to do majorly with how I see Harry and Ginny's relationship. I was shocked to be honest, when they randomly got together in HBP. I didn't expect it and I didn't totally agree with it. However, I've come to accept and respect it as much as I can. I find Harry and Ginny's relationship very physical, very intense when it comes to power and strength, very fast paced, and so on. Therefore, for them, I can see them having sex just like that. Shit, if Ron hadn't walked in on them in Deathly Hallows I swear they would have done it then! Lol. So, I tried to make it that way in my story. All of a sudden all these feelings of love and desire coming over them and them just doing it. I think it's canon. Sorry if you don't agree.

Third and this is in relation to number two, if you think that "now Harry and Ginny will get together and everything will happen before Ron/Hermione" can I just say, STOP THERE! Sure, I would

rather have and write R/Hr getting it on, lol, but not now. Their relationship isn't like that and them as individuals aren't like that. Like I said in a previous chapter, they aren't behind or anything.

Fourth, this isn't to say that Harry and Ginny don't love and respect each other, I just think they are more "act now, think later" and Ron and Hermione are more "think, take in, feel, wonder, act" I'm not bashing H/G or them as characters. I love them in my story; it's just honestly how I feel and how I feel I should write them. And like I said earlier, it's not smooth sailing for Harry and Ginny now, obviously. I mean, we didn't get any real notice that Harry wanted Ginny until book six and he also started dating her in book six. For Ron and Hermione, we knew \*or at least I hope everyone knew\* that they wanted each other from book one or two, but they didn't get together until book seven, so, the timing is canon as well.

Lastly, the reaction Harry and Ginny had to the sex. I think I should clarify that it is not as if they do not love each other anymore or that the wonder and wanting is over. Not at all, it is just, they never imagined their first time being so rushed and out of context. They are ashamed because they feel like they let each other down and did not give what the other deserved. It does not mean that they don't love each other anymore, it's about the sex and how they shouldn't have had it. And yes, Harry is upset that it wasn't Ginny's first time, not because he only wants her as a virgin, but because he knows now that she shagged Dean and Harry finally realizes that she has deep feelings for Dean and it's a bit hard for him to take. He's sort of been in denial about Ginny's feelings for Dean until now. Oh, Mr. Dean Thomas. I told you lot he matters! They forgot about him and now they have to deal with seeing him and the betrayal they bestowed on him. That is why Harry is upset. He feels bad for Dean as well.

So, I hope I cleared things that needed clearing. If not, I will address the issues in the beginning of the next chapter as best as I can after reading what you all have to say. However, to even get the next chapter, you must review! It's so important that I get those reviews. It helps and means a lot :D so, Cheers and review! I really hope you all liked it. I tried as hard as I could for you all!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 20

Thanks for the reviews! So many great reviews convinced me to update sooner this time. \*hint hint\* lol

Okay, I just want to say this. It means so much that everyone always has such nice things to say and that you all stand behind my decisions for this story. It means the world to me. I really do try my hardest for everyone. Next, I want to clear up that Ron will be in the story a lot more now and even more after...some stuff happens, so, not to worry. Trust me, I want the King around as much as everyone else but like the ever-growing theme of this

story...all in good time. I just need to take care of a couple of more things and then we're all set. ;)

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter

Hermione did not want the train ride to end. Something felt different. It was almost as if she and Ron were clinging to each other. Their conversations and stares were more in tune and intense. She didn't want to miss a beat of him. She held on to every word of his and every smile. It was beautiful. However, it wasn't completely enjoyable. She kept glancing over at Harry. He wore the same miserable expression the entire trip. In fact, he had worn the expression for the past few days. She then looked to Ginny. She stared out the window, holding her legs close to her chest. She was paler than usual and seemed completely lost. Hermione had to talk to Harry about what was really going on.

"Finally," Ginny spoke for the first time since boarding the train.

She looked toward the window. The train stopped, and she could make out the platform and carriages leading to the school. A small pit formed in her stomach. As happy as she was to get back to her schoolwork, she didn't want to go back to being away from Ron. She did not want to back to viewing him from a far, and she certainly did not want to go back to seeing Lavender all over him.

Ron turned to her. "We're here," he said quietly. She smiled as best as she could. They left the train and Hermione looked around at the familiar faces. She surprisingly saw Neville and Luna snogging severely. It made her smile grow.

"It must be nice for Neville. He couldn't stop talking about how he'd miss her over break while we were packing," Ron said in her ear.

"I can understand that," she answered.

"I'm going to go ride the carriage with them," Ginny said. Hermione noticed Harry frown at the ground.

"Are you sure?" Ron asked.

Ginny gave him a small smile. "I'm fine, Ron. Besides, I missed her, too." She didn't give him time to answer. She practically ran over to them and joined their carriage.

"What is wrong with her?" Ron asked, looking from her to Harry.

"I don't know. She's looked all out of sorts for days now," Hermione answered. "Harry, what do you think?"

Harry finally tore his eyes from the ground. He shrugged. "I dunno."

She was about to tell him that she knew that he knew something but was interrupted by a hideous squeal. She turned around just

in time to see Lavender drop her bags and fly into Ron's arms. Her body collided with his, sending him back. She locked her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck. "Oh, I missed you so much, Wonnie! I love and I mean LOVE the earrings! I'm wearing them now!" she shrieked.

Ron patted her back. "I'm glad, really. I, um, the bracelet is great."

Lavender unhooked herself. "Yes! I knew that you would like it. It was practically screaming your name at the shop." Hermione rolled her eyes. Lavender Brown was clueless when it came to all things Ronald Weasley.

"Can we go now?" Harry asked.

"Good idea," Hermione added. She led the way as Lavender locked her arm with Ron's and giggled hysterically. They boarded the carriage. Hermione took a seat next to Harry and watched Lavender talk a mile a minute while Ron sat and grinned at her. She felt anger boil.

"Have room for one more?" Hermione turned. Dean was standing near their carriage.

"Of course there's room!" Lavender said. "Harry, scoot over."

Hermione was sure that he was going to retort but to her surprise, he obeyed. Dean took a seat next to him and whatever color Harry had completely drained from his face. He sat on his hands and looked down. "So, how was everyone's holiday?" Dean asked.

"Oh, it was so boring. My nan likes to talk every second she's awake, and I missed my Won Won terribly," Lavender said, putting her head on Ron's shoulder. She kissed his neck.

Ron slowly put his hand on her knee and gave it a small squeeze. "Mine was okay," he breathed. Hermione bit her lip. Her holiday had been the best she ever had and for some small reason she thought Ron had similar feelings.

"Yeah, mine was okay, too," Hermione answered.

Dean nodded, not really seeming to care. He kept his focus on Harry. "What about you?"

Harry looked him in the eyes for one second before turning away. "It was fine."

Dean nodded once more. "So, where is Ginny?"

"She wanted to ride with Luna and Neville. I'm sure you'll see her at dinner," Ron said, giving Dean a sympathetic look.

"She missed you," Harry added, still not looking at Dean. For a moment, Hermione thought that she saw light in Dean's eye. She felt her pit grow. She had no idea what was wrong with her

friends, and she was not sure if Harry was being sincere or was trying to hide something.

By the time they got to Hogwarts, Harry looked as if he would pass out. Hermione was itching to talk to him. However, on top of her curiosity was annoyance. Lavender would not stop giggling and touching Ron, and he would not stop smiling and going along with it. She didn't know where the new-found anger was coming from. Hermione thought of other things. She could still hear the strong rhythm of Ron's heart, smell his sweet scent, and feel the soft, steaming skin of his stomach. She wondered if Lavender ever gave two seconds to actually take in Ron's presence or if she really did spend all her time blabbing and snogging him.

They joined the rest of the school in the Great Hall. It was the most uncomfortable experience of her life. Harry sat beside her, slowly shrinking into himself. Lavender kept kissing and pinching Ron. Dean kept looking from Ginny to Harry. Ron kept smiling, and Ginny barely moved. She barely spoke. Hermione kept her focus on her food. She was not really hungry, but it kept her from feeling rage.

Luckily, after dinner, she and Ron had to patrol the halls and help show the transfer students around. "What is wrong with Harry?" Hermione asked afterward. She and Ron were walking back to the Common Room.

"I have no idea. Believe me; I've tried getting something out of him all week. He won't talk about anything. Shit, he barely looks at me," he explained. He stopped walking and sighed. He looked so defeated. Hermione knew how much Harry meant to Ron and that he took personal responsibility of taking care of him.

"Something must have happened. Do you think it's his scar or any more dreams?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No, I think if it was something like that, then he'd tell us. It has to be something else. Whatever it is, I wonder if Ginny has anything to do with it. She looks worse off than he does. I thought her seeing Dean would help but, it actually made her worse. I don't know how to help her. She won't talk to me. They never fucking talk to me. I'm his best mate and her brother. Why won't they talk to me?"

He walked back until he hit the wall. He slid down and put his face in his hands. Hermione walked over to him and sat. She had never seen him outburst in such a way about them. She placed a hand on his shoulder. "Ron, whatever is wrong, it's not your fault."

He looked at her. There was worry in his blue eyes. "It doesn't matter. I'm supposed to be able to do something. I hate feeling so useless. Being here always makes me feel like this. There always seems to be something going on, and I can't help. I just want to help."

She smiled and felt her love for him grow even more. As long as Hermione had known Ron, he was always the one to make the

situation lighter. He always gave support and tried his hardest to make things work out. He was such an amazingly good person. He wanted nothing more than for the people he cared about to be okay. Ron was a born protector. "Ron, you are not useless, and you help out more than you know. If you really want to help Harry and Ginny, then just be there for them. Let them know that you will be around if they want to talk. I know how frustrating this is. I feel the same way, but we can't force them to speak to us. We just need to be ready for when they are, okay?"

She put a hand against his cheek. Ron grinned and she loved how his lips stretched. She felt the corner of his mouth against her fingers. "Okay, you're right. Bloody hell, you are always right."

Hermione chuckled. "Well, I'm not always right, but I do try my best."

Ron took her hand and laced his fingers into hers. It felt so good. Even his simplest of touches meant the world to her. "And somehow your best is always good enough." His voice was soft, and he looked her clearly in the eyes.

Hermione wasn't sure what came over her, but she leaned forward and put her forehead against his. "You like my best?" Ron's eyes widened and red stained his cheeks. She felt a blush of her own. She knew that she was flirting, and she knew how forward she was being. It was completely unlike her, but she was fed up with the jealousy and anger. Seeing the way Lavender acted around him and how she treated him made her regret ever wanting to be her. Never again. Hermione wanted Ron to want her as herself and not some offspring of Lavender.

Ron licked his lips and Hermione watched, squeezing his hand even tighter. "Y-yes, I like your best. I like it a lot."

She closed her eyes, letting the pleasure seize through her. "Good. I can give you more of it, if you want me to." Hermione could have sworn Ron made a tiny noise from the depths of his throat. He pulled on her hand a bit, making her open her eyes. She should not have. Ron's face glazed over in a glowing red color, and his eyes were massive. He was also wearing the sexiest smirk known to man. It should have been illegal what went through her mind and all the things that she wanted to do to him.

"Hmm, I think I'd love that. Don't hold anything back. I won't." Ron raised an eyebrow to heighten his already seductive expression. He had won. Hermione could not compete with him. She couldn't think of anything to come back with. She already felt as if she would melt into a puddle or explode in her knickers. He let her hand go and stood up. "Ready to go?" he asked, still smirking.

Hermione stood up as well and gripped her skirt. It was either that or push him against the wall and have her way with him. "Yes, classes tomorrow," she was able to get out.

They walked back to the Common Room in a comfortable silence. Luckily, the room was almost empty by the time they returned.



Hermione did not want people thinking something had happened by the satisfied looks of their faces. She stopped at the stairs. "So, um, goodnight, Ron," she said.

He rubbed his neck and nodded. "Yeah, I'll try."

They smiled at each other. She didn't know why she felt a little nervous. He gave a shaky chuckle and walked up the stairs. She finally let her breath out and sat on the couch. Their exchange was nothing like she had ever experienced before. She had flirted with Ron, and he flirted right back. She knew that she should have been upset with herself. She should have felt obligated to keep things completely platonic between them, but the truth was that nothing about how she felt for Ron was platonic. She was tired of pretending that she did not want him just because he was with Lavender.

All her life Hermione had put others before her. She always tried to be neutral and perfect but she wasn't. She was a seventeen-year-old female who was madly in love and in lust with her best friend. It was not a crime, and she was tired of making herself believe that it was. She wanted Ron more than anything, and she wanted him to know it. She wanted to challenge what he supposedly felt for Lavender, and she wanted Lavender to know that she was not afraid. What she and Ron had shared over holiday was too great for her to let go. She would never let go or give up. It was finally time to turn up her game and make her first move onto Ron. She didn't want to depend on Harry or Ron for that matter. She was capable of making her own advances and tonight proved it.

Hermione cleared her throat and walked up to her room, still smiling. Lavender and Parvati were on Lavender's bed, talking about their holidays.

"Oh, Hermione, we were wondering when you'd get back," Parvati said with a smile.

"Sorry, Ron and I had some trouble with a few first years who didn't want to go back to their houses yet," Hermione explained, kicking off her shoes.

Lavender gave her a look. "That's nice. You know, you didn't really tell me how your holiday was. Okay isn't really an answer."

Hermione raised her eyebrow at Lavender. "You want to know how my holiday was?" She picked up her bag and joined them on Lavender's bed. "It was fantastic. It was the best one that I have ever had. All of Ron's brothers came, and they're all lovely. We had snowball fights in his yard. That was really fun. You're right, Lavender, Ron is excellent as a keeper. He didn't let one snowball hit me. He also got me this." Hermione pulled out the music box from her bag. She opened it. The music filled the room, and Hermione let the memory of that day warm her up.

"Wow, this is absolutely beautiful, Hermione. Can I see it?" Parvati asked.

"Sure you can, but be careful. It's an antique, and Ron went through a lot to fix it up for me," Hermione explained. She glanced at Lavender. She was flushed and wore a pout. She stared at the music box with an odd look in her eyes. Hermione tried very hard not to look smug. "Do you like it, Lavender? You are the queen of things that are cool and cute. Does it pass the test?"

Lavender's head shot up. She gave a fake smile, but Hermione could see the red in her eyes and her jealousy oozed out of her. Hermione was delighted. She wanted her to know for once, what it felt like to see someone share something with Ron that she could not be a part of. The more Hermione thought about it, the more she realized that it was more than every date in Hogsmeade and stupid snog the couple had ever shared because this was from the heart. This was one hundred percent Ron and his effort.

"Yes, it does. I mean, of course it does. Wonnies got it for you so of course it's special," Lavender practically spat. She kept her eyes on Hermione, and she stared right back. Normally, she'd turn away, afraid that Lavender would see her feelings but now she could not care less. Hermione wanted Lavender to know.

"So, who wants to hear about my holiday? Blaise actually came by," Parvati said after some time.

It was then that Lavender finally looked away and smiled brightly at her. "Yes, Patty, I'm dying to know."

The three of them talked all night. Lavender kept shooting Hermione dirty looks and Hermione kept challenging her gaze, all while holding tightly to her music book.

Hermione was not afraid of Lavender Brown anymore.

Being back at school was a lot harder than Hermione thought it would be. Things had gone back to normal and it was everything she feared would happen. She felt that the holiday had changed everything in her life but somehow everything was the same. Expect for small things. If Lavender had ever been clingy and annoying before, it was nothing compared to what she was now. It seemed as if all her free time was spent with Ron and being attached to him somehow. It angered Hermione to no end. What made it worse was that both Harry and Ginny seemed to be falling apart. Harry barely spoke and seemed so distant. Ginny rarely showed up to meals and always seemed to be five seconds behind everything. It was almost too much for her to take. Ginny and Harry refused to say anything.

It was her free period and Hermione decided to take a break from studying. She went into a loo to wash her tired face. However, when she opened the door, she noticed a small figure huddled in the corner. The girl was trembling and had long, red hair.

"Ginny," Hermione breathed, running over to her. She grabbed her shoulders. "Ginny, what happened? What's wrong?"

She jumped and moved away from her. She stood up and roughly rubbed her eyes. "Oh, shit, how long have you been here? I thought that I locked the door."

Hermione flung her arm at the door, holding her wand out. "There, it's locked now."

"I should go. I should be in history or something," Ginny mumbled.

"No," she said, grabbing her arm, "you're not going anywhere until you tell me what's wrong."

Ginny snatched her arm away. "Just leave me alone, Hermione. I'm fine."

She examined her pale face and blotchy eyes. She looked thinner than Hermione had ever seen her. "You are not fine. You don't eat, and you never speak to anyone. Even Luna asked me if I knew what was wrong with you, and she's your best friend."

She rolled her eyes. "Oh, so, you're keeping journal entries on me or something? Can't you mind your own business?"

Hermione sighed. Ginny had no idea how much she was like Ron when she was angry. "Believe it or not but you are my business. You're my friend, and I care about you. I know that something is wrong. You can tell me whatever it is."

She shrugged. "There's nothing to tell." She pushed past her and headed for the door.

"Well, will you at least talk to your brother? Ron is giving himself a hard time because he feels like he can't help you. So, if you are truly okay, then tell him that he has nothing to worry about. He doesn't deserve to feel this way if you are so well put together." Hermione tried to sound as harsh as she could. It was the only way to get through to a Weasley. They were terribly stubborn.

Ginny stopped walking. She lowered her head. "I can't talk to him. He'll hurt Harry."

The tiny pit that had surfaced when she returned to school grew. "Why would Ron hurt Harry?"

She leaned against the door and shook her head repeatedly. "It's not Harry's fault. It's mine. I can't tell Ron that. He'll be disappointed in me for breaking our promise."

Hermione slowly walked over to her. "Ginny, what are you talking about?"

She looked at her. "Ron and I promised each other that we would stay strong but I didn't. I was weak. I was so weak like I knew I would be."

Hermione swallowed hard. A painful lump developed in her throat. Ginny's despair was moving. "Please, talk to me. I promise that whatever it is will not leave this room, and I will listen to you. I swear it."

She bit her lip and looked away as if contemplating it. "I slept with Harry."

They were silent. She stared at Ginny and she stared at her. It took several minutes for the words to process in Hermione's mind and when they did; it pierced her body and shattered everywhere. "W-what?" she asked, practically out of breath.

Ginny ran a hand through her hair and held her stomach with the other hand. "We had sex, Harry and me. It was a few nights before coming back here. He wanted to talk about our stupid fight about him leaving me to be with Ron."

Hermione gasped. She remembered that night. She had told Harry to talk to her. It all seemed so clear. Harry never told her how it went, and he did appear very vacant when she saw him. "How did it happen?"

She blushed. "Well, I'm sure you know how but we were arguing and then it just happened. I couldn't take it. He was yelling at me. I was yelling at him. I was so irritated and so I turned on." Ginny closed her eyes for a moment, turning even redder. "Harry was practically smoking with anger and the funny thing is that I have never found him more attractive. He was so sexy. I couldn't hold it in. All holiday there had been this thing growing inside me and it finally burst from me. I jumped in his arms and snogged him. I couldn't think clearly. He pushed me against my dresser and we fucked right there, against it." She moaned and shivered.

Hermione felt her ears burn. She had never really talked about sex with anyone before and hearing Ginny describe her experience with Harry was both shocking and slightly exciting. "Um did, I mean were you two safe?"

Ginny opened her eyes and laughed for the first time in weeks it seemed. "Of course we were. I had some potion, and I made him drink the whole thing. Bloody hell, I can't believe that's all you have to say. I thought that you'd be mad at me."

"Why would I be mad at you?" she asked.

Ginny gave her a look. "Because I shagged Harry and I don't know if I'm safe." She trailed off.

Hermione rolled her eyes and sighed. "Ginny, I don't care that you had sex with Harry. At least, not in the way that you are thinking. For the thousandth time, I do not fancy Harry. Even in the smallest amount possible I don't." She wanted to laugh. All she had been thinking about since Ginny's description was her own hot and passionate sexual experience with Ron that she so desperately desired.

Her smile faded. "Well, it didn't solve anything. It made everything worse."

"How?" Hermione asked.

"As much as I've always wanted Harry, I never wanted my first time with him to be that way. I don't want him to think that I'm easy or that I will just shag against a wall for anyone. It is not like that. It's justâ€¦Harry brings this animal out of me and I can't control it. I must sound completely barmy." Ginny rubbed her temples.

Hermione chuckled gently. "No, you don't." She knew better than anyone what it felt like to have a burning fury inside. She never considered herself very forward or sexual. but Ron brought it out of her. He was walking sex and she knew that she could trust him and for some reason she knew that he wouldn't think ill of her. He brought out her wildest fantasies and sensations to their full capacities. No one else could ever make her feel what he could, and she didn't want anyone else to be able to.

"It happened so fast that I couldn't stop it...but I honestly wouldn't have wanted to even if I did have the chance. Harry's hands were all over me, and it felt so fantastic. He knew exactly what to do. When he was inside of me," she let out a shaky breath, "it was as if my entire body was on fire in the most pleasurable way possible. Of course, he's an incredible lover like I always imagined he would be. It seemed to last forever, but as soon as it was over, I regretted it, and I know he did, too. He must know that I wasn't a virgin when we did it. Damn, I had the fucking potion right there. I bloody gave it to him. He has to know now that I've slept with Dean."

Hermione mentally groaned. She couldn't imagine what Harry was going through. She tried her hardest to keep from telling Harry about it, but now he knew and she couldn't help it. "I don't think he cares," she lied.

Ginny gave her a look. "Of course he cares. He must think that I don't love him as much but I do. I love him more than anything and that's why I was able to let him have me. Being with Harry reassured everything that I have ever felt for him since I was eleven, but now it's useless. I can barely look at him, and he can barely look at me. Then there's Dean. He's looking for answers that I can no longer give me. I'm such a slut." She banged her head against the door and slid down.

Hermione sat next to her. She did not know what to do. "Ginny, you are not a slut. It's not as if you cheated on Dean."

"But I love him and I gave him the impression that I might get back together with him." Ginny wiped her damp nose on her sleeve. "All his fears and predictions came true. He was right. I did just let Harry have me, and I wanted him to. I wanted Harry to take me. I needed it and it felt so good, but it hurts now. He loves me and he wants me, but I don't think I can be with him and I doubt he even still wants me."

Hermione felt her heart break. She couldn't believe this was what Ginny thought Harry felt for her. "Listen, I know Harry very well. You are not just some girl to him. He doesn't want you only for sex. The man is totally in love with you. He loves you so much, and I know that he's hurting, too. Not because you had sex with Dean, but he probably feels like he let you down. He will never say it, but I know that Harry is a romantic at heart. He didn't want your first time with him to be like that either."

Ginny seemed to cling to her words. "You-you think so?"

"Yes, I can't imagine what you must be feeling but don't think that Harry doesn't want you anymore. He's not that type of person. He's just as confused as you are." Hermione took Ginny's hand and tried her best to seem strong. Inside, her entire body hurt with grief.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, Hermione. I don't know what to say to Dean or Harry. I brought them both into this and now they both expect something out of me. Looking at Dean hurts so much." She frowned and twisted a piece of her hair between her fingers. "I know how much he cares about me. He is such an amazing person. He's smart, funny, kind, gorgeous, and so passionate. He's perfect—but just not for me. I thought he could be, but spending all holiday with Harry was unbelievable. I have never felt that with Dean and feeling Harry inside me was beyond anything that I've ever felt with Dean. I just hate that I had to experience it all to really assure myself."

Hermione felt so terrible for Ginny but at the same time loved herself. She loved the fact that she knew from day one that Ron was the only man for her. She loved that she did not have to really date anyone else or give her body away to figure it out. She belonged to Ron, rather he would ever take her or not, and she was okay with that fact. She also took a moment to thank her lucky stars that Ron had said no to Lavender when she wanted to have sex with him the night of the ball. She only hoped that he kept to his word since then.

"Maybe you should tell Dean that. Make him understand every word that you just told me," Hermione said.

"No, no, I can't do that. I can't tell Dean anything. I can barely be in the same room with him. It's too painful, and I'm not ready to go there. I'm not ready to let it out. I know that I'm a coward, but I'm too scared. I am so scared, Hermione. I have never felt this terrified before. Besides, I don't want Dean going after Harry and I can't have Ron finding out," Ginny explained.

"You don't actually believe that Ron would seriously injure Harry do you?" Hermione asked.

"I don't know. I wouldn't put it past him. Anyway, it's not just that. I don't want him to worry about me so much. Anything that I do wrong or anything that happens to me, Ron takes fault for. It's always been that way. I want Ron to be okay and worry about himself. He cares too much about others but not enough

about himself. His heart is too bloody big." She smiled slightly and Hermione joined her.

"Well, you have to talk to Harry. If not Dean, you owe Harry that much. You two have to reach some sort of ground. Of course, it's only when you're ready, but don't ignore this or think that it will go away. It won't." Hermione stood up and held out her hand. Ginny took it and rubbed her eyes one more time. "What are you planning on doing now?"

"I'm going to take a nap. I am so exhausted. I haven't been sleeping much," Ginny confessed.

"And you'll be at lunch, right? You have to start eating regularly," she said.

Ginny chuckled. "Yes, mum, I will."

She smirked. "Good, I have work waiting for me in the library. Are you sure that you're going to be okay?"

"Yes, I'll be fine. I'll see you at lunch," Ginny answered.

Hermione nodded and left the bathroom. She walked down the corridor until she could no longer see people. She put her head against the wall and stomped her foot. She finally let her own tears fall and cried for her friends. When she got back to her table at the library, she saw Harry sitting. Her stomach flipped. A sensation of anger hit her. She walked over and sat down. "What are you doing in here?"

Harry looked at her. "I was in Divination. I told the professor that I wasn't feeling well, and I knew you'd be in here and at this table. It's the only one with more books on it than a self."

She tapped her finger on the table. He was out of it and looked as if he did not intend to tell her anything. "I ran into Ginny in the loo."

His green eyes widened. "Yeah?" he said. His voice was oddly high-pitched.

"Yes, and she had a lot to say after I got her to stop running away from me," Hermione started.

Harry sighed. "Hermione I-"

"Why didn't you tell me, Harry? How dare you not tell me that you slept with Ginny? I cannot believe that you would keep something like this from me," she rushed.

Harry's face flushed with color. "I-Iâ€¦I'm sorry. I justâ€¦couldn't tell you."

"Why and please don't tell me it's because you thought I'd be jealous. That's the excuse Ginny gave me," she said half-seriously.

He frowned. "Of course you wouldn't be jealous. It's not like that. I justâ€¦I justâ€¦"

"You just what?" Hermione demanded.

Harry looked away for a moment. "I didn't want you to hate me."

Her jaw dropped. She moved her chair closer to him. "Harry, why would I hate you?"

His let out a low breath. "Because I wasn't strong enough to fight my urges. Because I fell through on our agreement. Because I'm a tosser and what I did to Ginny was wrong. I'm not that kind of person, Hermione. I never thought that I was."

Once again, her heart broke. She couldn't stand seeing Harry in so much pain. He didn't deserve it. "Harry, I could never hate you, and I can't judge you for not being able to hold back. I know how much you love her and how badly you want her. I also understand that you would never treat her as if she was just sex to you. She thinks that you don't want her because she wasn't a virgin. She blames herself for what happened. She's still completely in love with you."

"Did you know that already?" he asked quietly. "Did she tell you that she had sex with Dean before?"

Hermione couldn't lie to Harry. "Yes, she told me."

He slammed his fist on the table. "Why didn't you tell me? Don't you think that it was something I should have been aware of?"

She looked around the library and put a finger to her lips. "Harry, you have to be quiet, and I didn't tell you because I didn't want to see you upset and feel discouraged."

"Well, I am bloody discouraged. She must really love Dean. I know Ginny doesn't just shag blokes she doesn't care about. I had no idea that things were so deep between them. I ruined everything. I ruined Ginny, Dean, and myself. Fuck, this is all my fault." Harry covered his face with his hands.

Hermione rubbed his back, not sure of where to go with the conversation. "This isn't your fault. It's something Ginny wanted and it's something you wanted, right?"

He looked at her and blushed. "Yes, I wanted itâ€¦"

She looked away. It was a bit weird talking to Harry about sex. She now understood why Ron got so strange even hearing about Ginny snogging someone.

"Harry, you have to talk to her. You two have to work this out. I care about Dean's feelings, too, but right now you need to worry about yourself and your relationship with Ginny. You have to repair the damage," she explained.



Harry frowned at her and rolled his eyes. "It's not that easy. Damnit, Hermione, you talk as if all I have to do is apologize to her and everything is okay again. It doesn't work that way. What we did is major. What I feel, what Ginny feels, and what Dean will feel when he finds out is not a simple fix. I can't even imagine what Ron will do to me if he finds out."

"Harry, Ron is not--"

"Will you stop it? Stop talking to me as if I am completely thick. I'm not a fucking child and this is not an easy fix. I'm not like you. I'm not perfect and I can't just brush off my feelings. You have no idea how hard this is for me. You have no idea how hard this has always been for me!" Harry snapped.

Hermione stared at him blankly. "I have no idea? Are you saying that I have no idea what pain you are going through? Are you completely mad? Harry, I don't know how long you have been asleep, but this is not easy for me. Not in the slightest! I have loved and wanted Ron from day one and seeing he over the years has only made my feelings grow along with the pain. You think you have it bad. I agree, it is horrible but at the end of the day, Ginny is not with Dean, so no matter what he feels, you and Ginny technically did not do anything wrong."

"Hermione," Harry tried.

She ignored him. "It is not that easy for me. Ron has a girlfriend. He is dating Lavender bloody Brown! He's with the posh princess herself, and I have to respect her. She gets to treat me however she fancies but I still have to respect her and believe me, it's harder than it looks! If Ron had kissed me...if he had touched me the way Ginny touched you, I don't think I would have been able to hold back. Do you know how scary that is and how awful that makes me feel? Even worse, that I don't think I would care. I honestly would not care that he was with Lavender because I want him so much. Think about that Harry, before you toss me off and tell me that I don't know how you feel! I'm certainly not perfect."

With that, Hermione packed up her things and headed out of the library. She was fuming so roughly that she could not walk straight. "Wait, Hermione, I'm sorry," Harry called, running up to her and grabbing her arm.

She stopped walking and snatched her arm away. "Don't you dare tell me that I can't understand what you're going through."

He nodded. "I know. I'm so sorry that I said those things. You're right. I just don't know what to do. This is eating me alive. I can't even enjoy that Ginny loves me and may want to be with me. I can't live in the fact that she trusted me enough to let me have her. All I can think about is how badly she must hurt, how much I fucked up Dean, and if Ron will find out. It's too much to deal with. Please, Hermione. I need you so much right now. Please, be on my side."

Any anger she felt melted. She looked at Harry and saw how desperate and in panic he was. She smiled gently. "Harry, I'm always on your side. I really do want to help you. It's what I'm trying to do. I don't want you like this." She then punched him in the arm.

"Ow!" Harry whined. He rubbed his arm. "Okay, I deserved that."

She clicked her teeth. "Too right you are, Harry."

He grinned. "What should I do?"

She thought about it for a moment. "You have to talk to Ginny. I told her the same thing. You both believe things that aren't true, and you have to get everything out. It's a start."

"I know. I can't stand us not talking. At this point, if she wanted to tell me that she wants me as just a friend, then I'll take it. I just want to be around her without her running away." Harry gave a heavy sigh.

"She doesn't know what to say. You'll have to make the first move. Make her feel safe. Women like that. Even tough ones like Ginny," she cheeked.

Harry let out a small laugh. "I think I can manage that."

"About Dean, you two will have to deal with that situation as it comes." Hermione looked away for a moment, still remembering her talk with Dean. She knew that he would be devastated, but she didn't want to think about it.

"And what about Ron?" he asked quietly.

"He's not going to find out from me, and I don't think this is something he needs to know. Maybe in time it will be okay, but not now," she explained.

Harry leaned against a wall. "Believe me; I don't ever want him finding out. I don't even care about him kicking my arse. I just don't want him to stop trusting me. This game of ours has really put a strain on me, Hermione. I'll be honest; I absolutely hate lying to Ron. It takes a lot out of me, and he can tell that something is off. He knows me so well that I have to look past him when I speak. Otherwise, it'll all come out of me."

Hermione completely understood. She did not like the idea that she was sneaking behind Ron's back and especially with Harry but they were too far into things now. As much as she disliked the idea, there was nothing more important than keeping their operation a secret. "I know what you mean. We should probably ease on the plans for now. What is most important for you is securing your friendship with Ginny."

"I agree. I never realized how important it was to me. Shit, I want things to go back to normal. Even back when I had to watch her happy with Dean. I'll take that over this any day," Harry said.

She grinned. "I can understand why you'd think that, but I don't honestly believe that is what you want. Even with all of this, you know that Ginny loves you, that she wants you, and you did get to share something very beautiful with her. I envy you that." She felt her ears burn again.

Harry smiled. "Don't worry, I'm sure yours will be a lot better than mine and Ron won't be able to stop telling me about it for ages."

Her blush grew. "I hope so," she said honestly. She walked over to him and hugged him. Harry squeezed her back. She held on as tightly as she could. She wanted him to know that he was not alone and that she would always be there for him.

She pulled away and for the first time really saw Harry for the man that he was. He was not made of steel. He was flesh and feelings. He was not perfect and neither was she.

Whatever would happen with their game, they made a silent promise to each other to remember that no one was perfect and that they could and would make mistakes.

\*\*\*\*WOW! This chapter came out like nothing I expected it to and I could not be more grateful! I'm really proud of this one. I know it is rather long but I had to get all these things out.

First, with Hermione's "new attitude." I think it is needed. Hermione has a very strong, sassy, confident part of her that is not just reserved for her work. I do not want her so mute and scared around Lavender. She needs to put the girl in her place. She also needs to be more direct with Ron. I loved the flirting between them. I think it's very Hermione/Ron. It's fun making her more flirty and confident around Ron too. I also believe he wants to be more confident and flirty but isn't quite sure if it's okay. He certainly has a sexy and confident side and when Hermione lets hers out, he feels comfortable letting his out as well. I think he feeds off her attitude. I don't buy the idea that Ron is all daftness and doesn't know how to be sexy and seductive. lol, not at all. Obviously, he's "Ron" so it's not like he's 100% smooth and mac-daddy but he still can create some heat and especially for Hermione.

So, I hope everyone enjoyed the chapter. I sure did! Please, you must review if you want the next chap! This is when everything starts and finally comes together. The moments are on the way, so if you want it, you gotta review so I will know to continue!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 21

Cheers for the reviews! I updated earlier again. You lot held up your end of the deal by sending me those lovely reviews so I will uphold my end. I am thankful for you all! Oh, big hugs to everyone. I mean it! :D

Disclaimer: I don't own Mr. Potter

Harry never considered himself to be claustrophobic, but being back at school certainly made him feel that way. He felt so guilty, and he thought that it was visible on his skin. He tried to take in Hermione's words of comfort. She was his only ally in it all, and he was grateful to have her. However, Harry was still on edge. At the table, he had to see Ginny who still couldn't really look at him. He had to see Dean who constantly wanted answers and then there was Ron. Being around Ron was just as hard as being around Ginny or Dean. The pressure of keeping it all in around him was too much at times. For half a second Harry considered telling him the truth. He feared that Hermione would hate him, but she didn't. She was still by his side. For a minute, he let himself believe that Ron would yell at him, probably punch him, but then listen and try to understand his side.

However, he quickly sobered up. He couldn't tell Ron. He could not tell Ron that he had betrayed his promise to leave Ginny alone and not hurt her. Besides, if he told him about Ginny, the truth about his feelings for Cho and his game would have to be revealed, and he couldn't have that. Therefore, he bit his tongue. "Harry, are you even listening to me?"

"Huh?" he asked. He looked up from his hands.

Ron was standing in front of him with his arms crossed over his chest and of course, concern written all over his freckled face. "I've been talking to you for five minutes now. Did you hear me at all?"

"Yeah, of course. You're standing right in front of me," Harry answered quickly.

He clicked his teeth. "Okay, then what did I say?"

Harry rubbed his palms against his knees and babbled for several minutes before giving up with a heavy sigh. He closed his eyes. "You're right. I'm sorry. I haven't been listening."

Ron nodded and sat next to him on his bed. "Harry, I'm worried about you, mate. You have been like this for ages now. What is wrong with you?"

He couldn't look at him. "Nothing is wrong with me, Ron. I guess I just haven't really recovered from holiday."

"That's shit, and I'm not stupid enough to believe it. You were like this even before we came back. Harry, whatever is wrong, you can tell me. Remember the conversation we had in my room...about Hermione and Lavender? What you said to me, well, it goes on my end as well. I'm your best friend, and you can talk to me about anything. I'm here for you, mate. It's me, Ron." He smiled gently and patted his arm.

Harry finally turned to him. He felt his heart warm and melt some of the ice that had developed over it. Ron had always been like a

brother to him. He honestly loved him like one. He knew that Ron was kind and would always be there for him, but there was a point where Harry knew Ron's loyalty with him would cross into his loyalty to Ginny, his actual family. Though Ron's eyes were bright now, once Harry told him what he had done, they would darken. Harry wouldn't risk it. He only had Ron and Hermione in his life, and he couldn't lose them.

"I know, Ron. I know you're here for me. I dunno...I'm just feeling a bit off. The holiday was nice but I reckon...I thought a lot about my family. I thought about my parents and Sirius. I wanted them around. I miss them, as mad as it sounds." Harry was able to look Ron in the eyes for the first time in a while. His words were not completely false. Sure, he was speaking out of context, but he wasn't lying. He had thought about his parents more often than usual and Sirius was always on his mind.

The concern in Ron's eyes disappeared and was replaced with remorse. "Why didn't you tell me? No wonder you've been a ghost around here. I'm so sorry, Harry."

He waved a hand. He didn't want Ron apologizing. It was too much. "You have nothing to be sorry for."

Ron rubbed his neck. "Yeah, I do. I never know if you want to talk about your family, so I don't ask. Hermione is better at things like this than I am, but i'll listen if you want to talk about it, Harry. You can't let all this build up. I know that much. I'm not the best with words or coming up with brilliant things to say but after almost losing Ginny and dad, I reckon I can understand a bit of what you feel."

Harry felt the warmth leave him. Both Ginny and Mr. Weasley's near death experiences had been because of him in some way. The closer the Weasley family got to him, the more he seemed to hurt them. "To be honest, I really don't want to talk about it. It's a feeling that comes over me and then it passes. It's just taking a bit longer this time. I am fine, honestly. I'll feel better once I get out onto the field."

Ron smiled. "That's right. You've got another one of those one-on-one sessions, yeah?"

Harry nodded, not really feeling like playing Quidditch or training anyone, but it was something to distract him. "Yes, and I should probably get ready." He stood up and went straight to his trunk to grab his gear.

"I'll be in the Common Room or the library if you need to find me," Ron said.

Harry snorted. "Why would you ever willingly go to the library?"

He reddened a bit. "Hermione might be in there. I haven't seen her much."

"We haven't seen you much, mate. You practically spend every second with Lavender," Harry said, feeling annoyed. He was sure

that his best mate would have pulled himself together by now and realize that Lavender Brown was more harm than good.

Ron rolled his eyes. "I don't want to talk about it. Just remember what I said." He left the room without another word.

Harry pulled loose bristles from his broom. Actually, being outside was a greater feeling than he thought it would be. It was cold, but the fresh air felt good. He looked through the practice equipment and picked up a quaffle, feeling the hard smoothness. It was nice. Quidditch was something he could depend on. It always took his mind off everything.

"So, what are we working on today?"

The voice made Harry drop the ball. He turned around. Dean was standing before him. "What are you doing here?" Harry asked rudely.

Dean gave him a look. "Same reason that you are here. It's my training session."

Harry turned to the board. Sure enough, Dean's name was set for the date. He had forgotten that he made the schedule. It was long before sleeping with Ginny and long before he couldn't be in the same room with Dean without feeling terribly uncomfortable. "Oh, sorry, that's right."

He nodded and walked over to him. "Are you okay?"

Harry was bloody sick of everyone asking him if he was okay. "Yeah, I'm fine. Let's just get up there." He exchanged the quaffle for a bludger, mounted his broom, and zipped into the sky.

He had about ten seconds to control his composure while Dean raced to him. He took several deep breaths and shook his head. Dean joined him. "What are we going to work on?"

It was hard looking at Dean. It made Harry think of Ginny and his actions with her. It made him remember her body and it felt so incredible to relive the experience. "A-actually, your game is fine. We can skive off if you want to."

"You have to be taking the piss. All season you have done nothing but point out all the things that I do wrong, but suddenly my game is perfect." Dean searched his face.

Harry put up his wall. If he was going to play it off, then he had to act normal. He laughed. "I'm only joking. You're right. You have actually been weak with your returns. I just wanted to see if you would say yes. I can't have any slackers on my team if we're going to win the cup."

Dean smirked. "I don't give up that easily, Harry."

He knew that all too well at this point. "Good. Now, when you hit the bludger, it's as if you are so concerned about getting it

away from the chasers that you hardly think about where it is going. You can't be sloppy. You've improved your aim but following through is still a problem."

Dean shrugged. "I know. I get so nervous and worried that our chasers will get hit." He looked away. Harry knew which chaser in particular he was referring to.

"Well, they know the dangers. You have to trust that they will be okay and focus on your job. Nothing else matters on game day. I'm sure that our chasers care more about you knocking the opponent's players out of the way than you being able to say you made sure the ball didn't graze them. Our chasers are tough." Harry tried not to make the conversation sound personal, but it came out that way.

He looked away. "So, what do you want me to do?"

Harry wasn't sure if it was a double-ended question. "I'm going to bewitch the bludger so that it will come at you, but I want you to make the return at the top of the hoops. I don't want it going through the hoops, or hitting the bottom, or around. I want you to hit the top of the hoop, as if it is an opponent. It's the best way to keep your vision clear of what you're supposed to be aiming for."

Dean nodded. "Okay, I can do that." For the next forty minutes or so, Harry watched as Dean executed his task. He cheered him on and corrected him when mistakes were made. Dean took it all in stride. For those minutes, the problem with Ginny did not exist. Their ongoing battle was not real, and they were friends again.

"Time! That's enough for now," Harry said, catching the bludger and taking off the spell.

Dean flew over to him and wiped his forehead. "Shit, that was pretty good, yeah?"

"It was bloody damn good. See, it gets easier after some time," Harry explained, wiping his own sweaty brow.

He took off his gloves. "Can I ask you something?"

"What's that?" Harry said.

He paused. "What's the matter with Ginny?"

The question hit him like a bludger to the head. "I don't know," Harry said.

Dean sighed. "Harry, don't do this. I tried asking Ginny, but she won't talk to me about it. I was hoping that past all the shit, you and I are still friends and you'll have the decency to tell me what is going on. She may be my ex right now, but I'm still here and I still care."

Harry shrugged. "Well, that's great, Dean. Shouldn't you be asking her though? Why would I know anything?"

He rolled his eyes. "Because if there is any person who is going to know what is wrong with Ginny, it's you. Harry, I have a feeling you know what's going on."

Harry felt sickness develop in his stomach. He clutched his broom for stability. "Well, if you haven't noticed, Ginny and I aren't really speaking either. We-we really didn't spend a whole lot of time together over holiday. She really missed you and spent most of her time in her room." It was half-true. When he hadn't been flirting with her, talking to her, or pissing around with her, Ginny was in her room and mostly alone. Hermione had been too busy with Ron to stay in Ginny's room for long periods of time. Once again, it was out of context but not exactly a lie.

There seemed to be a gleam of hope that developed in Dean's eyes. Harry looked away. "Then I don't understand. If she missed me, then why is she avoiding me? I know before we left she said that she needed some time. I don't want to force anything on her. I've done that enough, but she won't even look at me. I love her so much, Harry. I really do."

"I know you do, Dean," Harry breathed. The weight of everything pushed down on his shoulders and he felt like he would fall off his broom.

"I want to get back together with her right now, but I don't know if it's worth all of this," Dean said.

He turned back to him. "What do you mean?"

Dean chewed on his lip for a bit and twisted the bat in his hands. "If her being around me is making her so nervous because she feels pressured, then I don't know if this is worth it all. I can't make her do or feel anything. I'd rather Ginny just be alone than feel forced to come back to me right away. It has to be something she wants. She already knows how I feel and what I want."

Harry gazed at Dean. He had so much written on his face and in his eyes. His feelings weren't phony. He was not with Ginny just because. Dean loved Ginny. For the first time Harry truly realized how much Dean felt for her and what his game had cost him. He wanted to tell Dean the truth. He didn't want Dean holding on to false hopes. "Dean--"

"I've talked to Ron about it," Dean said.

"What?" Harry rushed.

"I've talked to Ron about it," he repeated.

Harry clutched his broom even tighter. "You-you talk to Ron about Ginny?"

He shrugged. "Why wouldn't I? He is her brother and knows a lot more about her than I do. Besides, Ron and I are friends."



Harry didn't like the tone in Dean's voice nor the spikes of jealousy and anger that poked around inside him. For ages, he had been biting his tongue and hating how he could never talk to Ron about Ginny, yet Dean could causally walk up to him and ask for advice without a worry. Dean had Ginny and now Ron at his aid. It was unfair. Dean had the love of his life and his best mate is a way that Harry had never been able to achieve.

"Andâ€¦what did he say?"

"Ginny isn't talking to him much, but Ron said that she doesn't do things without a good reason. Her being so distant must mean something. I asked if he thinks that Ginny and I still have a future." Dean stopped talking and looked at him straight in the eyes. Harry held on to every word and nodded. "He said yes. It must mean something if he said it. Ron is bloody protective when it comes to Ginny." Dean laughed as if remembering something funny Ron had said.

Harry looked toward the sky to avoid. "Yeah, he is."

"That brings me to another thing. Thank you, Harry, and I'm sorry," Dean said.

He turned back to him. "What for?"

Dean looked sheepish. "For what happened in Hogsmeade when Iâ€¦hit you. I never really apologized for that. I'm really sorry. I was mental at the time and I can't believe that you stuck up for me. I don't know why you did, but I'm glad. I can't imagine what Ginny would have thought if she knew what I did to you."

Harry couldn't take it anymore. He didn't want to hear about how he had helped Dean with his relationship with Ginny. "Practice is over." He flew away from him and hurried back to the castle.

He walked up to his room and opened to door. He needed to shower and calm his nerves. However, when he entered, his body went into even more of a frenzy. Sitting on his bed was Ginny. She quickly got up and walked to the center of the room. Harry closed the door. "Ginny, what are you doing in here?"

She held her shoulder, just as she did that night. "I've only been in here a couple of minutes. Seamus let me in."

Harry nodded and tried not to stare, but he couldn't help it. It seemed like years had gone by since he was close to her and had heard her voice. Small whispers from their night together filled his brain, and he finally let them. He felt safe and not ashamed to let the pleasure run through him when Ginny was around. "So, how are you?"

She shook her head. "Not too good, you?"

He smiled and walked a little closer to her. His body felt more relaxed, and his heart warmed over again. Even with everything going on, Ginny's presence was a peaceful awakening for him. "Actually, I'm feeling better now."

She returned his smile for only a second before growing more serious. "You had your practice with Dean?"

"Yes," Harry shot, not wanting to ruin the good feeling.

She frowned. "You-you didn't tell him anything, did you?"

He gawked at her. He then remembered what Hermione had told him. He had to make Ginny feel safe and like she could still trust him. "Ginny, I didn't tell Dean anything. He tried to get something out of me, but I didn't let him. I'm not going to tell him anything about what happened or about what you told me. He's not important right now, you are."

Her features softened a bit. "Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me. I'm not going to add any more stress to this. Ginny, we have to talk. We need to talk about what happened," Harry said.

She nodded slowly. "I know, Harry. It's just—so much is going through me."

"I know how you feel. This is killing me. I mean—on top of everything else, I—I miss you. I miss you so much," he confessed.

Ginny moved closer to him. She was close enough now that he could see the tiredness in her eyes and the extra paleness to her color. She was drained. Ginny was drained as he was. However, she was still beautiful. He could still feel her lips against his and smell her scent. "I miss you, too, Harry. It's been completely miserable without you around."

Her words warmed him. He was so scared that she hated him. He had to let it out. "Ginny, I meant everything that I said that night. I love you, and I want to be with you. Whatever you believe I think about you, don't. It was my fault. I'm sorry. Please, don't blame yourself and don't think that I see you differently. Nothing has changed for me. If anything, everything I feel for you has grown."

Tears swelled in her eyes. "But-but you know that I've slept with Dean."

"It doesn't matter," Harry urged.

"Yes, yes it does, Harry. It matters because I know that you must think that I don't love you as much as I do. It's not true. I'm sorry that I ever let him have me. Dean is wonderful but—he's not you. I—I don't regret what we did at all. I'm not upset that it happened...just the way that it happened. I'm not that kind of girl, Harry. I don't just do things like that for anyone." Red stained her face. Ginny blinked and let her tears fall. However, she did not wipe them away. She was strong even in her weakest moment and Harry admired that about her.

His heart beat rapidly. He could feel his knees shake. Everything he had felt since it happened washed over him. The guilty truth seeped out of him. "I don't regret it either. Having you was the best feeling of my life, and I wish I could have made it last longer. I wish I could have at least...taken you to the bed or something. I'm not that kind of guy, Ginny. I just don't do things like that, either."

Ginny moaned slightly and closed her eyes. He knew that she was reliving the night in her mind. He was, too. A current moved between them. It was scorching and so incredibly strong. He finally let what they did fill him up in the best way possible. "Harry, I'm so confused." She opened her eyes. "I love you, but I can't lie to you and say that I don't love Dean or that it's not killing me to see him like this."

"I feel guilty as well, Ginny. I have to see him every day, and he always looks at me as if he knows something. I don't know what to do." Harry hated that it seemed as if Dean had more influence on their relationship than he did.

"This is all my fault. I brought him into this. I brought you both into this," she whispered.

"What do you want? What do you feel for him?" Harry asked. He honestly wanted to know. He had never cared before nor did he ever think would, but now it was crucial.

She looked away. "Harry, why are you asking me this? Don't you think this is hard enough?"

"I understand that, but I need to know. I need to know because...if you truly love him and want to be with him, then I have to accept it. I'm so tired of feeling guilty and feeling like I'm hurting you and Dean because I'm in the way. If you still want him, please, just say it. This is too much for me, Ginny." Harry had to stop speaking before his voice cracked. He didn't want to say the words, but he had to do the right thing. He had to do the right thing for someone. He was so tired of being the bad person and hurting everyone for his own selfish reasons.

Ginny sighed and looked at him. "You're right. I do love him. He has been there for me on so many occasions and for a while, I truly felt like I was over you or at least able to move on. I thought Dean would be the one for me, but I never forgot about you, Harry. I never stopped thinking about you. I still loved you and wanted you." She smiled. "Spending time alone with you over holiday reassured everything I have ever felt for you and us...having sex erased any doubts of who I want. As great as Dean is, I can't go back to him, now or ever. It wouldn't be right. I would just be lying to myself and to him. I love you, Harry. I want you. I always have. I always will."

The pain from moments before faded a bit. Hearing her say her feelings for him mended every sore spot in his body. "But," he said quietly. He knew there was something.

"I can't just tell him it's over for good and then start dating you. I can't do that to him. I need some time. I hope you can understand that, Harry. I love you but right now, I need some time to myself. I need to figure some things out. Is that okay?" Ginny bit her lip and it seemed as if she was holding her breath.

The warm feeling left him. It felt as if the Whomping Willow had hit him in the stomach. However, he understood and was thankful it had been her to say it and not him. As much as he wanted Ginny, things had happened too fast. Too many secrets needed to be worked out. "It's okay. I understand. Ginny, more than anything else, I want us to be okay. I want us to be friends again. Now that things are a bit more open, they can wait. I just don't want us to stop talking. I want us to be close again. I need you to be happy and feel in control."

She let out a heavy breath. "I want us to be okay again, too. I don't want you to worry about what I feel. I want to be with you...I'm just not ready right now but please, don't stop loving me." She walked closer to him and put her arms around him. Harry held her back as tightly as he could. He hoped that she felt as good as he did. After so long of waiting and wondering about her feelings, Harry knew how she felt. However, for some reason the rush was gone. He just wanted things to get better. He still wanted her and it hurt so much that he still did not have her, but it was something that had to be done. Being her boyfriend was what he wanted dearly, but being her friend was what he needed most.

"I could never stop loving you. I told you. I'm not going anywhere," he whispered. He pulled away. The strong mix of emotions made his body feel incredibly heavy. He had to say something. "I know that Hermione knows."

She nodded. "I hope you don't mind. She wouldn't let me leave unless I told her, and it felt good to tell someone. I reckon I'm going to tell Luna. She's my best mate, and she's so worried about me."

Jealousy spiked through him again. He envied that Ginny could confide in her best friend about what they did. "And what about Ron?"

Ginny's eyes widened. "You can't tell him."

"I know but you have no idea how hard this is. The way he looks at me and how he always asks what is wrong--"

"I do understand, Harry. He's my brother. He does the same to me. I know it's hard," she interrupted.

"But, it's different," Harry started. "Ron's your brother. You can tell him. He'll get upset but will understand. He'll love you no matter what you do. It is not like that with us. I'm supposed to tell him everything, and I'm supposed to tell him the truth. I want to. You have no idea how badly I just want to tell him and have him hit me. I don't even care if he puts me in the hospital wing. It's not about that, but I know that if I tell him, then

he'll hate me. He won't trust me, and he won't want me around you ever again."

She shook her head gently. "Your friendship with him is deeper than that. He won't hate you. Besides, he can't tell you not to see me, Harry. He's my big brother, but he doesn't own me."

"I know he doesn't, but it's not that simple. See, you don't understand," he said.

She rolled her eyes. "Then explain it to me."

He wasn't sure of what to say. He could see the irritation in her eyes, and he did not want to add to it. "It would be too hard to be around him all the time and know that inside I'm hurting him or really upsetting him."

Ginny didn't seem to get it. "So, if being with me made Ron angry, you would feel bad?"

"Of course I would, wouldn't you?" Harry asked.

She shrugged. "He'll be angry no matter who I date. I can't let it control me. It took him months to stop glaring at Dean."

"This is different. We are best friends. It will be worse for me," he tried to explain.

Ginny gave him a look. "See, this is what I mean. I know you love me but you still see me as Ron's little sister and you can't separate where your loyalties to me and where your loyalties to Ron should be. You need to before we ever start dating."

Harry felt his face flush. He felt like a tit, but he couldn't help himself. He wanted to explain to Ginny that it was harder than it seemed. He didn't know if he could tell her that what Ron thought about their relationship meant a great deal to him. He bit his tongue. He didn't want to make things worse or appear even more like a knob. "You're right. I'm sorry. You need to work out what to do about Dean. Please, talk to him. Say something to get him off my back."

She ran a hand through her hair and it fell back into her face. "I know. I will, I promise."

Harry couldn't stop himself. He moved the hair out of her eyes. She was so gorgeous, and he was happy to feel the fire between them again. He smiled and she returned it. He moved closer to her, and she closed the gap. The kiss was slow. It was more delicate than their first had been. It felt so incredible. He moaned softly, and she did as well. Nothing else existed for those few moments. He pulled away and opened his eyes. He saw Ginny's large brown ones looking right back at him. "I hope that was okay," he whispered, loving how his lips tingled.

She licked her lips. "It was perfect."

Harry wanted to lean in and kiss her again but he knew that it would be too much and this time he would listen to his reason before his pleasure. "Well, I need to shower, but I'll be down at dinner."

"Okay, I'll see you." Ginny gave his hand a squeeze and left his room. Harry watched her feeling okay for the first time in weeks. He collapsed to his bed and tried to process everything. The sadness was still there but it was okay.

Things were not perfect but they were better and it was all he wanted.

\*\*\*\*First, I just want to say that I am admiring Harry more and more every day. There is this anguish, worry, and need for him to be a good person and not hurt anyone that I love to explore and express. Okay, I think it is fitting that they did not get together. In the REAL world, things do not always just click and unlike movies and TV shows, sex does not solve the problem. Not everyone feels like "oh, now it's great!" after shagging. There is still a lot to work out. If they got together now, it would be too soon and things would feel forced. There is still a lot Ginny and Harry need to consider and take care of but at least they know they love each other. They have to work out their issues before taking that next step. This is what happens in real life. So, things are not perfect for them and there's still pain but there's also a bit of clarity.

Second, and I can't believe I'm saying this, but I hope everyone is able to understand Ginny's place right now and doesn't think ill of her. She didn't mean for all of this to happen. She didn't mean to bring these men into her life and create this complicated existence between them. She didn't mean to hurt Dean. She didn't mean to hurt Harry. She's fifteen and is just confused and torn about her love life. I think this was a very mature decision on her part. She could have easily told Harry "lets start dating" or "I'm going to try and get back with Dean and see if he's the one I really want" but she didn't. She didn't want the pain to spread any further. She has to work things out. She has to get herself together and ask herself some serious questions. Confessing her love for Harry is one thing, it's a whole other game taking that step and dating him. She's not toying with him, she just wants to do the right thing and take things slower. Dean is still apart of her life and she can't ignore him. Dean. He really is a sweet character and really makes the H/G interesting in this story. Dean is still a force in both of their lives and he won't just disappear because Ginny and Harry love each other.

Third, I did read over the H/G moments from Half Blood Prince and Deathly Hallows to help with this chapter but I realized reading over this that more of my personal opinion of Harry/Ginny and the Harry\*Ron\*Ginny came through, lol. I'll be honest. At the end of the day, I believe Harry loves Ron more than he loves anyone else in his life and Hermione is a smidgen under him in second place and Ginny is a very close third. Reading HBP, Harry's number one concern regarding dating Ginny was Ron. She didn't understand why he was so scared and I don't think she truly ever will. Harry can't be with her if Ron doesn't approve of it, or at least a

little bit. That is my take. It is so important that Ron is on Harry's side and he does not want to "betray" him. Even after Harry and Ginny kissed in HBP, he looked straight over to Ron for some sort of sign that it was okay and then he left with her. So, this is both exciting and hard for Harry. I can't write Harry in total disregard as to what Ron will think of everything. I don't believe it's how he operates.

Lastly, and I don't think too many people will mind but after this chapter, the Harry/Ginny will take a needed backseat to Hermione/Ron. The way H/G are in this chap is going to be how they are for some time. The focus is going to be Hr/R for a while. Even the chaps I have from Harry's perspective will largely deal with R/Hr in some way. I need to kick their storyline into gear now and I am devoting my time to them for a while. Like I said, I doubt you all mind, lol, but for those who actually read this story for the H/G love as well and have invested into them, just know they're on the back burner for a bit. Not forever, but for a bit. So, fair warning!

So, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. It's another one I am proud of. I love where I have H/G right now. I think it's realistic and as canon as I can make it. If you don't agree, I'm really sorry, lol. So, thanks for reading and review if you want to start jumping into the R/Hr goodness! It's R/Hr time, haha!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 22

Thanks for the reviews! Okay, I need to address a few things because while reading the reviews, I came across some rather interesting feelings about how I ended Harry/Ginny in the last chapter along with Harry's feelings about situations/people. So, let's talk.

First, I'm fully aware that Ginny is 15 and Harry is 16. I know they're teenagers and I know how teenagers are at this age, lol. HOWEVER, I believe that Harry and Ginny aren't your average mess of kids. Obviously, Harry has been through more than people twice his age and I think that with everything he's been through, it puts his perspective in a different place and allows him to see things a bit more clearly. He's certainly not perfect, but let's face it, he's Harry Potter, lol. From the very first book he possessed a maturity that a lot of 11-year-olds and bloody hell, adults don't have. So, I like how Harry reacted. I think it's canon. No, he's not happy happy joy joy about it. He's still upset, pissed off, and a bit hurt, but what else is he going to do? He loves the girl to pieces and he's going to respect her decision. I don't care if he's 16 and should throw a hissy fit like some think he should. No, he's not like that. As for Dean, I'm not even through with him yet, lol. His reaction to all this hasn't even happened. He's calm about it right now because not everything is out in the open and he's still sort of in denial, but, give it time and you'll see where it goes. The Harry/Ginny/Dean isn't over yet. I don't want to give anything away, but I need to clear that up. Lastly about this, I take personal experiences from my life, friends, and so forth to help

me with my stories. Yes, I use the books and my own imagination, but I talk to other people to bring a real sense of "real life" in this, so, for some to believe that this situation and how it was handled isn't realistic, i'm sorry you feel that way, but it's not true. Older doesn't always mean wiser or more capable and sometimes teenagers are able to make good decisions. \*shrugs\* If you don't like that, I'm sorry but I strongly feel that's how I should go.

Second, I got some reviews about this the last time and again this time about Harry's reaction to Ginny having sex with Dean. Let me clear this up, HE'S NOT JUST OKAY WITH IT. Obviously, he's really hurt and disappointed about it, but you know what? There's nothing he can really do about it. He can't go back in time and stop them. So, all he can do is swallow the lump in his throat and continue. He's not going to stop loving or wanting her just because of that. That's not Harry. It's not in him to do that at all. Read the books again and see how he handles situations where someone he cares about does something that he doesn't always agree with. See how he reacts and handles it and then maybe you'll understand better why I had him respond this way. It's an issue that troubles him obviously, but at the time he really just wanted to get through to Ginny and not make her feel worse that she already did. He wasn't going to throw it in her face or cry his eyes out in front of her for it. It's not like Harry to do that. Honestly. However, just because it wasn't really talked about in detail now, doesn't mean it won't be later. I think I might of thrown some people off when I said the H/G is taking a back seat. They're not finished in this story. I'm just shifting focus for a while. I still have their storyline to complete.

Lastly, I want to talk about my characterization of Harry. This is the first time I've ever written a story from his perspective and I'm loving and learning so much as I go along. Reading the HP books, I loved how JK let us into his feelings. She sort of teased us with his emotions. Of course, he has to be a rock and whatnot but there's deep emotion there that I feel wasn't let out in the books because of everything else that was going on and because of how Harry had to be to get the job done. Well, I want to let it out in my story. I love writing emotional turmoils and breaking people out of their shells a bit. That's my style of writing. So, I'm doing that for Harry. I'm writing him a bit more emotional and a lot less "Chosen One." I like it this way. I think the emotion is there inside Harry. JK led the way and in this story I'm just opening the door a bit.

Anyway, I hope I cleared some things up. That's what reviews and author's notes are for. I want us all to be on the same page. :)

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"So, that's where we are," Harry explained.

"What is she going to say to Dean?" Hermione asked.

He shook his head. "Dunno, but I hope it's enough. I feel incredibly torn here. A part of me is really excited about what



it could mean for us, but the other part is so bloody scared about what is going to happen because of it."

Hermione smiled at Harry. She looked into his eyes and saw the anxiousness and a bit of bliss in the green orbs. "Don't focus on it too much. Besides, you should be celebrating. It is over for you. You have Ginnyâ€¦sort of."

"It's not the simple. I don't have her, and there's still a lot that needs to be worked out. Besides, even if everything was perfect I can't really be happy. You aren't with Ron," he said gently.

She had to look away. It was hard enough feeling happy for Harry. He was making it so much harder by bringing up that fact. Hermione was well aware that she was not with Ron and had not spent any real time with him since returning back to school. They were more distant than they had been before. "Oh, don't worry about me." She avoided his eyes. "Look, I need to go. McGonagall needs me to get the certificates drafted, and it's going to take me ages."

"I can't believe how much work she gives you," Harry said, standing up and stretching.

"I don't mind it. If it will look good on my resume as a potential candidate to be Head Girl, then I'll do it." Hermione got up as well and swung her bag over her shoulder. Yes, she did want to make a good impression, but she also wanted to take her mind off Ron and her new stiff relationship with him.

Harry gave her a look of concern. "Well, don't work too hard. I know it's useless to say, but I will."

"I don't mind hard work," she breathed. Working hard was what she was counting on. She knew that if she focused on her work then she couldn't think about anything or anyone else. "What are you about to do?"

"Quidditch practice and I'm sure that it will be a piece of piss," he said sarcastically.

She chuckled. "Just focus on the game."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yes, with Ginny who I want; Dean who wants her just as badly, and Ron, who will want me de-bollocked when he finds out all thereâ€¦looking at me."

Her heart stung for a moment. She saw the stress in his features, but her bitterness won out. At least Harry could spend time with Ron without Lavender breathing down his neck. At least Harry could play around with Ron and help him improve his skills. At least Harry could see Ron's bright eyes and lanky body in brilliant action. She bit her lip and let her thoughts wander for a minute before snapping back to reality. She had to go.

She left the library and walked to McGonagall's classroom, trying to plan what she would do first. She loved making lists in her

head. However, she kept getting distracted by Harry's story about how he talked to Ginny, knew that she wanted him, but she wanted to wait. It must have hurt him. He was good at putting on a brave face, but Hermione knew that it wasn't what he really wanted. Friendship was a double-edged sword, and being friends was more and more of a theme in her life and her relationship with Ron. After their brief moment in the hallway, it was almost as if Ron was trying to stay away from her. The only time she was alone with him was during Prefect meetings or patrolling, and he never said much. It was incredibly frustrating and hurt just as much. Ron was the only person who could make her body ache with sadness just as greatly as he made her body soar with happiness.

Hermione walked into the Transfiguration classroom and up the stairs, leading to McGonagall's office. She gave the knob a series of taps with her wand that she had been entrusted with. She entered the room and looked around. She admired the neatness and large bookshelves in the room. If she had ever wanted an office, she wanted it to look like this one. However, as she put her bag and noticed the pile of certificates that needed drafting, she sighed. She really would be there all night.

About two hours in, Hermione put her quill down and stretched her fingers. She was tired and hungry. She rubbed her eyes, trying to wake up. She didn't want to quit. She wanted it all completed and into neat stacks by the time McGonagall came back.

The knob turned and she sat up, going back to the parchments. Disappointment filled her stomach.

"Blimey, you look just like her sitting there."

Hermione's heart skipped a beat. She raised her head. Ron was standing just inside the door. He was in his Quidditch gear and was completely flushed. He brought in a powerful scent of earth and sweat. It was oddly appealing to her. She jumped out of her chair and rushed over to him. She pulled him further into the room and shut the door.

"Ronald Weasley, what are you doing here?" she snapped. "You can't be in here. How did you even know I was in here?"

He chuckled. "Wow. Um, is it okay if I answer one at a time?"

She tried her best to glare. Ron seemed out of breath and beads of sweat trickled down his face. She didn't want to think about how alluring he appeared. "You shouldn't test me."

He grinned. "Fine. Well, first, I came to see you. Second, you told me that you would be in here. At our last meeting, you told me that McGonagall gave you the brilliant task of signing the graduation parchments and awards for the seventh years. You also talked over and over again about how excited you were to be allowed in her office. I can understand it now. It is impressive. Your office will be like this but probably even more amazing." He looked around and ran a hand through his hair. The damp locks glided between his fingers. He was innocently naive as to how

sexy he was. Hermione closed her mouth, feeling drool about to escape down her chin.

"You were actually paying attention to all that? You didn't look at me once when I was speaking to you," she said with a frown.

Ron stopped looking around and focused his eyes on her. "Just because I wasn't looking at you doesn't mean that I wasn't paying attention to you. I always listen when you speak. You just don't notice that I do."

Hermione was not sure of what to say. He was looking at her so intently. She felt the room shrink. For weeks, she had wanted to be alone with him, but now that she was, it was almost too much. "W-well, that's very nice of you but as you can see I have a lot of work to do." She walked back over to the desk and shuffled through unsigned certificates.

He walked over to her, bringing the scent closer to her. She held on to the table for support. It was so raw and so Ron that it should have been bottled and sold worldwide. It was boyish and lovely. She let the aroma engulf her. Even through the musk, she could whiff a hint of apples. It was another beautiful thing that Hermione loved and knew about Ron. He always smelled a bit like apples, and it only attracted her to him more.

"Can I help?" he asked.

She laughed and turned to him. "You want to help me? You want to work?"

He shrugged. "Not really, but if it will help you out then sure."

She smiled and considered it. She would love for him to help, and it was sweet of him to offer. However, the feeling was cut by her anger and annoyance. Ron had done nothing but ignore her and avoid her since returning to school. The smile dropped. "Thank you for offering but no thanks. I can handle it. Besides, I'm sure you have more important things to do, like Lavender." She flushed at her implication and glared at him once more.

Ron frowned. "What does that mean?"

"Oh, you know what it means. Ron, you have spent almost every minute with her since we've returned. You never seem to want to be around me or talk to me. We have barely been together but now you want to help me work? You want to spend time with me? Is there some quota that you have to fill before going back to pretending that we're not friends?" she asked, hating that her voice was shaky.

He gave an exasperated sigh. "Hermione, you know that's not true."

"Then what is true?" she demanded.

He opened his mouth several times as if trying to find the right words. He closed his eyes for a moment before opening them and

taking a small step toward her. "I'm not pretending that we're not friends. I do want to be around you and talk to you and...I always want to spend time with you, Hermione. That is the truth."

She let herself bask in his words for only a second but already she could feel her body heat up. "That's a load of rubbish and you know it. Lavender-"

"Please, will you just stop it? I don't want to talk about her! I did not run straight here after a two-hour practice without a shower or even a bloody sip of water so we could talk about her! I didn't risk getting caught by McGonagall so her name could be brought up! I came here to spend some time with you! I came here for you, and yes, if it means filling out names for five bloody hours, then fine. I'll do it. Right now, I will do anything if it means that we can talk and justâ€¦be around each other. Why isn't that enough for you?" Ron asked. There was so much passion and strength in his voice.

Hermione swallowed the lump in her throat. "Because I don't want to be your backup plan. If you want to spend time with me, then it has to be something that you actually want to do and when you want to do it."

His jaw dropped a little. "Hermione, you are definitely not a backup plan. I have never thought of you that way. Of course I want to spend time with you. This is what I want to do. I really want to be here, and I want to be here with you. I came, didn't I? I'm sorry, but what else do you want me to say? Tell me whatever it is that you want, but don't make me leave. Please." Ron closed his eyes and rubbed his face roughly.

She bit her lip. His words seemed so earnest and felt so desperate. There was no way that she could tell him to leave. She didn't want him to. She examined him. Ron looked exhausted and uncomfortably hot. She went to the table and poured him a drink. She walked over to him slowly. "I'm sorry, Ron. You're right. Here, I want you to take a drink for starters. You look like you're about to melt right here on the floor."

He pulled his hands away. He took the cup. "Cheers." He took it all in one gulp. "Harry really had us working out there."

She took the cup and set it down, not sure of what to say. "D-did you really run all the way here?"

"Yeah, I hopped off my broom, gave it to Harry, and came straight here. It's a good thing that I'm a Prefect. I almost got stopped a few times. I didn't want to waste any time orâ€¦run into anyone," he explained.

The heat expanded on her skin. Her heart lifted. She had a feeling she knew who the "anyone" was. Ron had run straight to her. She had been his first thought. Her body trembled at the idea. "Ron, it's dangerous to do that in this weather. It's so cold outside and if you get too hot too quickly, it can cause cramping or cause you to get sick." She didn't like sounding like a total nerd but she had to speak. She couldn't keep looking into

his eyes and loving how delicately he said his words or how his Quidditch gear fit him in all the right ways and made him look like a warrior.

He chuckled. "You really do know everything don't you?"

She rolled her eyes. "Not everything."

He shrugged. "Well, it doesn't matter. It'll be worth it. I really miss you."

A stinging sensation hit Hermione's eye. "You do?" It came out as a breathless whisper.

He nodded. "A lot."

Her legs moved without her notice. She walked closer to him. He looked down at her. His eyes were so open. The room felt even smaller. "I miss you, too. I justâ€¦I didn't think you cared. You spend so much time with Lavender. Even more time than before. Iâ€¦Harry and I barely see you."

His eyes darkened a bit. "I know I do. She wants to make up for lost time." He rolled his eyes. "It's not as fun as you and Harry must think. I miss you both and Iâ€¦I dunno." He turned around and rubbed his neck.

Hermione took his hand. It was so warm. A spike of pleasure went through her. "Ron, you have to stop holding back. You said you wouldn't remember?"

He turned back to her. Hermione felt her face flush just as brightly as his did. It was the first time that she had brought up their flirtation from the first night back. He gripped her hand tighter and licked his lips slowly. She watched him, feeling her hand shake in his. "Yeah, I remember," he whispered.

She let go before she completely lost it. Even after so much time a part, the intensity between them was incredibly strong. In fact, it was stronger and grew more and more by the second. "Then tell me. Say whatever it is that you think you're not allowed to say." Hermione was scaring herself. She didn't know why she wanted to push things. She normally wanted to hold back and let things take its course, but she couldn't anymore. She was so afraid of losing Ron, and she missed him too much. Seeing Harry and the happiness in his eyes was something that she wanted. She wanted to know her own fate. She was tired of guessing.

Ron took her other hand. "I-I miss what we had over holiday."

The warmth burst inside her. She blinked and the tears she longed to release finally came out. She wiped them away, feeling relieved that it was not just in her head and what had happened was real. "I do too, Ron. You have no idea how much I do. We came back hereâ€¦and you went away. I thoughtâ€¦I thoughtâ€¦"

He quickly handed her a tissue from McGonagall's desk. "Don't. Don't believe whatever it is that you've come up with. I'm so

sorry, Hermione. I've been such a prick to you, and I want to kick my own arse for it. I've been really confused lately, and it's hardâ€¦finding balance, but it has nothing to do with you. You haven't done anything wrong. It's my fault. I'm so fucking sorry. You're my best friend, and I never want to hurt you. I know that I do, but I don't mean to. You have to believe me. "

Hermione wiped her nose and sniffed. "I believe you. I don't expect everything, Ron. I know that I must make it seem that way, but I just want to spend some time with you. You're my best friend, too, and I really enjoy talking to you. I got so used to being able to go to your room or see you on the couch and talk to you. It was almost as if I hadn't seen you all year."

He smiled. "I know what you mean. Shit, I didn't realize how much I missed having you nag at me."

She swatted his arm. "I do not nag."

Ron gave her a look. "Please. You always want to tell me what to do, and I know you enjoy it. Admit it."

Hermione felt her ears burn. She gazed at him. "I will if you admit that you like it when I tell you what to do."

He moved a little closer to her and smirked. "Okay, I'll admit it. I like it when you tell me what to do. I love it when you are in charge."

She held on to her skirt and shifted her legs. She could feel the heat in her lower stomach, and she knew that her knickers were ruined. "And I like telling you what to do. I love being in charge."

They grinned and stared at each other. They played a game. It had been happening from as early as third year to Hermione's knowledge. They challenged each other silently to see who would give up first. Sometimes it was for choosing between studying and chess. Other times, it was for who was really in the wrong during an argument but lately, the staring contests did not feel as innocent. They were more heated and lustful, and Hermione was never sure of what they were really trying to achieve. Ron moved closer to her and she held on to her skirt tighter. "So, do you want to be in charge now?" he asked.

She knew that he was nervous and a bit embarrassed, but he held his ground. Hermione was unable to. She moaned slightly and let go of her skirt. "Y-yes, I do. Would you like me to be?"

"Yes, I would. I think I can handle you." He bit his lip.

Hermione's mind froze while the rest of her burned. She wanted to but she refused to give up. "Are you sure? I can be pretty severe with punishments." She knew that she had gone too far, but it was worth it. Ron's eyes widened and if at all possible, he flushed the deepest red that she had ever seen. He looked away and groaned, but tried to cover it up with a cough. She smirked. She had finally won one. "Are you okay, Ron?" she asked innocently.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's really warm in here," he said, pouring more water.

She continued to smirk and went behind the desk. "Well, we should probably get started."

It was wonderful. After explaining to Ron what to do for the fourth time, he picked up the slack and together they worked diligently. Hermione finally was able to talk to him, and he made her laugh as he always did. For a while, they were in their own world and she never wanted to leave. "Fuck, it's so bloody hot in here," Ron said sometime later. He got up from the chair and stretched. He sat on the desk and fanned himself with both hands.

"I don't think it's the room. You have on three layers," Hermione said, getting up as well. She stood in front of him. It was a pleasant change. With Ron sitting down, they were at equal eye level. He was sweating severely and his face was glistening. "Maybe you should go shower."

"I'm fine," he rushed.

She smiled. She felt a bit guilty for keeping him in such conditions, but it meant the world to her that he wanted to stay with her. She didn't want him to leave. "Well, can I at least help you a little?" She poured him yet another glass of water. Ron chugged it down. She took a tissue and dabbed his forehead.

"Aren't you a helpful witch," Ron cheeked.

She chuckled. "Well, I don't know how I'd explain it to McGonagall if she found you passed out on the floor."

"You wouldn't have to. She'd give you an award on the spot. In fact, she would probably wake me up and make me draft it," he said.

"Oh, I doubt it," Hermione answered. She dabbed around his ears and his jaw line.

Ron watched her, and it made her body dampen. "I'm surprised that my sweat doesn't bother you."

She gave him a look. "Why would it?" Ron shrugged but she knew the answer. Lavender was probably bothered by Ron's sweat. It made sense. Lavender Brown was extremely feminine and stereotypically dainty. She probably cringed whenever Ron came around her after practice all sticky and dirty. Hermione wanted to laugh. The girl was completely daft. If she could not find Ron's rugged and commanding appearance simply spectacular, then it was her loss and certainly Hermione's gain. "Well, it doesn't bother me at all. I'm not a delicate girl."

He grinned. "I know you're not. I love that about you."

She gripped the tissue. It wasn't something he liked about her or found interesting. Ron loved that fact that she wasn't delicate

like Lavender. It was always something she worried about. Hermione knew some blokes fancied the girly girls, but it was a personality trait that she would never have nor wanted to try to obtain. It was almost too much to take knowing it was something that Ron wasn't particularly interested in either.

She pulled away. "Okay, you're all dry now."

"Thank you," he said softly.

She dropped the tissue and looked into his eyes. They were so brilliant and extremely blue. She looked beyond them and noticed his eyelashes. She had never been close enough to really look at them. "They're golden."

"What?" Ron said.

Hermione had not meant to say it out loud but it was shocking. "Your eyelashes are golden. I didn't know that."

He laughed. "I'm a ginger, Hermione. What other color would they be?"

She laughed as well, feeling like an idiot. Of course, she knew people with red hair sometimes had golden eyelashes but it was different seeing them on Ron. There was something tremendously beautiful about it. It was special and so fitting. A part of Ron was golden. It was perfect. She did not know if it was worth trying to explain it to him. She couldn't stop herself. She slowly reached out and touched them. Ron closed his eyes, giving her permission to touch him. She gently ran her finger across his eyelashes but she did not stop there. She moved her finger to his eyes. She traced around his eyelids. Ron opened his eyes. It astounded her how powerful his gaze was. He didn't say anything. She kept going.

Hermione ran her fingers across his forehead and noticed that there was a freckle patch around one of his temples. His hair tickled her fingers. She gently moved it out of the way. He softly chuckled and her smile grew. She moved down to his cheeks, noticing another patch of freckles on his left one. She knew then that she adored the patches. Most of his freckles were cutely spread out but the clusters were even more adorable. She fingered the patch and tried to keep her breathing steady. She tried to appear like it was no big deal but inside her body was hyperventilating. Her heart raced and she was burning. Ron watched her all the while. He did not move. His blue eyes stayed glued to her.

She traced his strong jaw and slowly moved her finger down his long nose. He closed his eyes and shivered. She licked her lips. She had always known Ron was gorgeous, but being so close to him and touching him heightened everything. He was unique and every feature was perfect. There was no contest. Cormac, Harry, Krum, they all were good-looking but they did not lift a parchment compared to Ron. To top it all off, his sapphire eyes were so massive and dazzling. She could see the specks of brightness in



the orbs and noticed how his pupils were larger than most people's were even in their normal state.

She touched his cheek again and rubbed her thumb across it. "Your skin is so soft, Ron." She gasped and his eyes widened. She quickly removed her hand and blushed. She had not meant to speak but once again, it just came out of her. "Oh, I'm sorry. That was highly inappropriate," she said. She shook her head several times and stepped back.

However, Ron did not seem upset. In fact, he grinned a bit and shrugged. "No, it's okay. Um, thank youâ€¦I guess."

Hermione snorted, feeling totally embarrassed. "You're welcome," she mumbled.

He rubbed his neck. "Youâ€¦you don't have to stop if you don't want to."

She felt the heat in her stomach grow greatly. She stared at him and felt the pulse between them. "I don't want to stop," she whispered.

Ron tugged on her tie and slowly pulled her closer to him. He looked into her eyes and she never wanted anything more in her life than him in that moment. "Then don't."

His words were simple and incredibly low but they affected her greatly. "Okay," she whispered. She moved her pointer and middle finger lower to the bridge between his nose and his upper lip. She paused. Ron did not move. He did not say a word. He simply gazed at her. She mustered up her courage and went lower. Hermione traced the outer part of his mouth. She loved the curve of his upper lip and how his lower lip stuck out a bit like a permanent pout. She let out a shaky breath and traced the inner part. She put her fingers against his lips and slowly dragged them across.

Ron closed his eyes and moaned. "Mmm, that feels really good."

Hermione was not sure how much longer she could hold on. Her legs shook terribly, and her body was soaked in every way. His lips were just as soft as the rest of his skin was. "M-my best, remember?"

Ron opened his eyes and everything else disappeared. Hermione was so engrossed in Ron that the room could have caught on fire and she would not have notice or cared. He parted his lips slightly. Every emotion she had amplified. He continued to stare at her in silence. He swallowed hard. She knew what he was telling her. She knew that he wanted her to keep going and that it would be okay. She could see the slight fear in his eyes but there was something else as well. It was desire. It had to be. It had to be because she felt it, too. It made her shiver. Hermione could not think of what it would mean if she did it with Ron's permission. As hard as she tried to care about other factors, it was useless. She forgot about being a stand up girl and respecting Lavender's delicate feelings. All that existed was she and Ron.

She slowly eased her pointer finger into his mouth. She could feel the heat of his breath and the moisture of his wet mouth. Her breathing hitched. He closed his mouth around her finger and raised an eyebrow slightly. The tip of his tongue licked her finger as his lips pressed around her skin. A powerful shock of pleasure went through her. She whimpered loudly, unable to stop herself. She slowly pushed her finger deeper into his mouth and then pulled it back. She repeated her moment. Ron's tongue folded around her finger, and he moaned as she pumped her finger deeply into his mouth again. Hermione whimpered again and finally stopped. She slowly pulled her finger out, and Ron's lips tightened even more as she did. He kept his eyes on her, and she jerked from sheer bliss.

Hermione put her wet finger to his mouth and glided it across his lips. Her body was on fire and her head was cloudy with desire again. Everything she felt was automatic and pure instinct. "Your lips are just as soft as the rest of you. I can't imagine what it would feel like to kiss you." She was so intoxicated by passion that her words almost slurred.

Ron's chest heaved roughly. He pulled her hand away. "Do you...do you want to find out?"

Her knees weakened. She had to place her hands on Ron's knees to keep herself up. "Yes," she whispered.

He nodded slowly. "Good. I've been looking at you this whole time and-and your lips seem really soft, too."

Hermione's breathing came out in shallow pants. She put her forehead against his. "We c-could kiss each other. That way we'll know for sure."

Ron placed a hand on the small of her back. She could feel how warm it was but also how badly it shook. He stared at her. "Okay, y-yeah, that will work." He licked his lips and looked down at hers. She couldn't believe what was happening, and she couldn't believe how amazing it all felt. Everything slowed down as they inched forward.

However, Hermione didn't have the time to make a move. She could hear the heels of McGonagall's shoes come into the classroom. She gasped and quickly moved away.

Ron stood up and rubbed his hands against his thighs. "Shit, what do I do?"

Hermione pushed through her feelings to focus. She looked around and quickly put a stack of parchments in his arms. "Just go with along with me and try to look moody. It shouldn't be a problem for you," she cheeked, trying to stay calm and keeping herself from realizing what had happened. She studied Ron. She searched his face for his first honest response. It would determine everything.

Ron chuckled and rolled his eyes. "I'll try." He frowned and pouted a bit. "How's this?" he asked. Calmness came over her. Even though they were about to be caught, he did not seem angry about their actions and that was most important.

"It's perfect," she said.

Ron smiled. "Yeah, well, you said that you were severe with your punishments."

She bit her lip and blushed. McGonagall came in. Ron immediately frowned again, and Hermione stiffened her composure. She looked between them. "Ms. Granger, what is Mr. Weasley doing in here?"

Hermione crossed her arms over her chest. "I left to go to my room to get something, and I saw Ron and Draco Malfoy about to fight. I broke it up, but I did not trust that Ron wouldn't go after him, so I made him come up here to work. I figured that would be better than he eating with his friends would be. Don't you think so, Ron?" She gave him a cross look and raised an eyebrow.

Ron groaned in frustration. "I already apologized, Hermione."

"That's not good enough. You are a Prefect, and you need to show a better example to the younger students," Hermione urged.

He sighed. "I know, okay." He turned to McGonagall. "I'm sorry, Professor McGonagall."

"I hope this was okay. I got a lot more work completed, and I kept Gryffindor from losing points, just in case Ron would have gone after Malfoy." Hermione looked away from Ron as he chewed on his lip. She couldn't think about his mouth and certainly not his tongue now.

McGonagall's face was blank for a few moments before a small smile formed. "Your actions were ideal, Ms. Granger. Fifteen points will be awarded to Gryffindor for your great leadership. Mr. Weasley, you are fortunate that Ms. Granger is your Prefect partner."

Ron smiled slightly. "Yes, I am." Hermione didn't return his smile for fear that McGonagall would be able to see her ruse, but inside her heart lifted with pride.

"Well, it looks like you two got quite a lot accomplished. How about you two go on down to dinner? This can be finished later, and Mr. Weasley, you can continue to help Hermione since you seem to be so good at following her directions," McGonagall said sternly.

Hermione had to bite her lip to keep from laughing, and Ron's ears glowed red. However, he tried his best to seem annoyed. "Certainly."

They were excused and as soon as they were safely away from her classroom, they laughed. Ron leaned against the wall and ran his

fingers through his hair. "Fucking hell, I can't believe that worked. You're quick and such a bloody genius."

"I don't know. For a while, I thought that she wasn't going to go for it. You did well, too. I can't believe we got away with it," she said.

He smirked. "It doesn't matter. You're her favorite student. She would believe anything you say. Even if you told her the truth, she would be okay with it. At least as far as you are concerned that is."

Hermione's smile faded a bit. "Andâ€¦what is the truth?"

Ron pushed himself off the wall. "What do you want it to be?"

She opened her mouth to tell him that she wanted it to be everything, but someone called their names. She turned and saw Harry walking over to him. She was half-aggravated and half-relieved. "Shit, Ron, you still haven't showered? Hermione, how can you stand it?"

"I guess I haven't noticed," she said.

Harry smiled. "Is that so?" She blushed and grinned at him. He smiled right back at her, well aware that something had happened.

Ron cleared his throat. "So, are you heading to dinner, Harry?"

"Yeah, I waited for you but you never showed. I figured that you went looking for Hermione," Harry explained, giving Ron a similar all knowing smile.

Ron didn't seem fazed. "She was working for McGonagall and now she owes me."

"How do I owe you?" Hermione asked.

"Well, not only did I make McGonagall give you fifteen points, but I reckon I assured your spot as Head Girl. I'll meet you two there. I need to wash as all bloody hell." He walked off but gave Hermione a smirk before parting them. Hermione looked after him and let her body tingle and burn from what had happened. It was glorious.

"So, are you going to tell me now or are we waiting until after dinner?" Harry asked.

She turned away from Harry and led the way to dinner without a word.

\*\*\*\*WOW! So, this was another chapter that came out completely different from how I envisioned but I'm so bloody proud of it. I actually wrote this chapter a few different ways and I love this one the best.

As you all have realized, I turned a new leaf with this story. I'm going with this new pro-active/more emotion/more human type

of thing. It's happening for all the characters and I really love it this way. However, I'll confess that I still had my reserves for Ron and Hermione. I still wanted to keep them in this "good boy/good girl/wooden doll" view when it came to them together and what would happen but after some talking with a close friend of mine who was in a similar situation to theirs I realized that I had stop being so scared and needed to be true to myself and to Ron/Hermione. I'm a R/Hr freak and if this was just me writing for myself, I would have had them shagging ages ago, but this is my first real attempt at a really long R/Hr fic where they don't start out as a couple. So, it's been a battle to keep them in this "friend zone." I'm all about R/Hr love/passion/touchy feely/flirtation but for this story it can't really be that way. With that said, I sometimes fear that I've had them too stiff in this story but I really don't want them all over each other either. So, I've tried my hardest to find balance and I think I've achieved that. I'm proud of my work. I've been able to give them heat without taking it too far and I hope you all can agree that this chapter didn't take it too far. I'll explain my reasoning for what happened.

Ron and Hermione are soul mates. What they feel for each other is a powerful force. They are just drawn to each other. Lavender is...someone in the way to be frank. Yes, Ron is her boyfriend and he does care about her to an extent, but she's not Hermione. He only loves and wants Hermione. Of course, Ron is the only one for Hermione and her feelings for him can't be measured. So, it makes sense that when they're together and they're alone and the moment is there, everything else disappears and they act purely on feeling. However, at the same time they're both kinda thick when it comes to how the other feels and they still try to see reason in it all. Lol, that why I had them talk about "we can see just so we'll know." It was them trying to rationalize their actions because of course, they still don't totally think the other wants them and they figure, "Oh, Ron doesn't really care, he's just curious" and "Oh, Hermione doesn't really want me, she just wants to know everything." I thought was sort of adorable/thick R/Hr.

Now, I think we all know what kind of people Ron and Hermione are. They are honest and have integrity. I don't consider their actions or "would be" actions bad. It may seem unnecessary for my to say this but I know some people see a fine line between what is considered cheating and what is considered wrong and appropriate. I'm totally fine with what happened but I don't know if everyone else is. They would only be this way for each other and I believe that. I hope you lot are too. I want us all to be on the same page. I can't say it enough.

With all this in mind, I decided to take it there. I let Ron and Hermione open up and explore just a bit of what they feel. As I said, them returning to school was when everything would unfold and that's what is happening here. Every chapter is bringing a new element and is bringing everything closer together. So, I hope this was okay and I really do mean that. I'm comfortable with their actions and I really hope you readers are as well.

Whew, so, now that is out of the way! lol, I really hope you all enjoyed the hotness between Ron/Hermione. I wanted to build the mutual sexual tension and create something steamy for you lovely readers to read/enjoy. :D We get them admiring and loving each other chap after chap but I wanted to turn up the heat. I'm all about heat.

We know Hermione wants Ron. We get that time and time again in these chapters but I really haven't given a heavy example of Ron wanting Hermione in a sexual way. I mean, I've given a few things and all but it's nothing extremely obvious. I love writing really sexy things between R/Hr. I love their love for each other but I also really enjoy the sexual tension and desire. I wanted to show and make it known that it's not just Hermione who is an addict for Ron. Ron is just as sexually attracted to Hermione and what they did shows that. I think that as much as Hermione and Ron love each other, they burn for each other just as strongly and are so sexual when it comes to each other. If you haven't noticed, I have a serious thing for Ron/Hermione sexiness, lol. Read any of my one-shots at this site if you need further explanation. ;)

Lastly, the playful/suggestive banter, I hope everyone enjoyed it. With the HP books being from Harry's perspective, we did not get to read all the conversations Ron and Hermione had with each other but even so, it is obvious they love to challenge each other. It's what makes them so great together and I know they are playful and can dish it to each other, so that was fun to write. They are teenagers and I like them acting...teeny, lol.

I hope everyone enjoyed it. I certainly did! So, if you want the next chapter, REVIEW!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 23

Thank you all for the reviews! Wow, I'm so relieved/excited that everyone liked the last chapter! I love making you lovely readers happy. :D

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry flipped through his playbook. For the hundredth time he marked out plays and wrote better ones. "Harry, have you seen my black sock? I can't find the bloody thing," Neville said, pacing around the room.

"No, sorry," he breathed. He looked up from his parchment and saw Neville run around the room. "Why do you always get so nervous? You have been dating Luna for a while now. I'm sure that she won't care if you don't have matching socks."

He frowned. "It doesn't matter. I always want to make a good impression."

Ron chuckled and got up. He looked around the room for a few minutes before reaching under Neville's side table. "Here." He handed him his missing black sock.

"Cheers," Neville said. Harry watched as Neville continued to get dressed. He appeared so much lighter and happier than Harry had ever seen him. It seemed like for the first time all year; he noticed how happy Neville was. Harry pushed the bitterness away. "Well, I don't want to keep her waiting. I'll see you two later."

Harry looked over his plays again but turned his attention to Ron. He was sitting on his bed and gazing at the glass chess set that Hermione had got for him. He didn't play with it but he often took it out, moved the pieces around, and smiled at it in awe. "Are you ever going to actually play with it?" Harry asked.

Ron didn't look up but he shook his head. "No. I don't want anything happening to this."

"Oh, okay," Harry said, going back to his work.

"I'm sure they'll have a fantastic Valentine's Day, Neville and Luna," Ron said out of nowhere.

Harry looked up and tried his best to smile. He didn't want to be reminded that it was the day of love. He didn't want to remember that it was the second Valentine's Day in a row that he was miserable and missing Ginny. To top off his bad day, he felt a cold coming on. Annoying sneezes gushed out of him without warning. "I'm sure you will, too."

Ron rolled his eyes. "Yeah."

Harry could see the slight pout on his face. Ron wasn't nearly as dressed up as Neville. In fact, he wore wrinkled jeans and an old orange Chudley Cannons t-shirt. "Is that the outfit that Lavender picked out for you?"

Ron broke out of his sulk and grinned. "Shit, you heard that?"

He chuckled. "How could I not? Lavender was right outside the door barking orders on what to wear for today."

"She wants to coordinate pink and red. I told her the best I could do was maroon, but my jumper isn't clean, so I hope orange is okay." Ron scratched at a crushed substance on his jeans.

"Well, at least you have someone to spend Valentine's Day with. I'll be in here, working on scrimmages." Harry sighed and fell back against his pillow.

Ron snorted. "Believe it or not but I'll be happy to trade you. Besides, I'm sure that you could have gone with Cho if your bollocks would have grown in time."

Harry gave him the finger. "First, my bollocks must be a lot bigger than yours. At least I would have told Lavender to forget

the color schemeâ€¦andâ€¦I couldn't have asked Cho about going to Hogsmeade anyway."

He frowned. "Why?"

He turned away. He couldn't say that he was still in limbo because of his current situation with Ginny, and he could not say it was because he hadn't felt anything remotely interesting for Cho since the Christmas dance. Therefore, he shrugged. "It doesn't matter now."

Ron took one of his pillows and threw it at him. It hit Harry in the face, making him sit up. "Harry, don't do this. Tell me what's going on."

Harry threw it back. He tapped his fingers on his leg. He had to think of something. He didn't want to lie to Ron again but he had no choice. "Sheâ€¦Choâ€¦she's found someone else."

"Wow, mate, I'm sorry. Who is it?" he asked.

Harry let out the breath that he didn't know he was holding. He shook his head. "She didn't tell me. She wrote me a letter over holiday. In it said that she just wants to be friends."

Ron took a knight from the chess set and squeezed it in his hand. "Fuck, that's a kick in the bollocks."

"Yeah," Harry breathed. He felt his heart ice over a bit. The sympathy in Ron's voice was terrible and while he was relieved that Ron believed him, he hated that Ron took his word for truth without question.

"Is that why you've been so gutted? Is that the real reason?" he asked.

Harry looked at him and nodded. "Yes, it was a shock, and I didn't know how to take it."

"Why didn't you say anything, Harry? You could have told me," he said softly.

He wracked his brain and pulled out another lie. "It's embarrassing, and I wanted to believe that it wasn't true. I came back looking for her. I wanted to talk to her and see if she meant it. She does. She flat out told me that there's nothing more between us."

"What a bitchy thing to do," Ron spat.

"Well, if that's how she feelsâ€¦" Harry tried. He didn't actually want Ron to be upset with Cho for no reason. She was still his friend.

"It doesn't matter. You deserve better than that. You're better off, really," he reassured.



Harry chuckled. Ron was predictably loyal no matter what. "Really? That's what you said the last time and then when you found out I fancied her you were all for it again."

He shrugged. "I'm for whatever makes you happy at the time. I will say that you should leave her alone for good. Find someone else."

Harry looked at him. "Like who?"

It seemed like a simple question, but it was not. Harry searched Ron's eyes. He hoped that Ron would say someone more confident and strong. He wished Ron would say a girl that he knew very well. A woman they both could trust and love. Harry dreamed of Ron saying that he should be with someone like Ginny and more importantly, he should be with Ginny.

Ron scratched his head. "I don't know. Someone better." He looked away. "Ginny isn't going anywhere with Dean. I found her earlier this morning in the Great Hall. She said that she wants to be alone. Before that I saw Dean storm outside. I reckon he hasn't been back since." He rubbed his face. "I'm worried."

Harry swallowed the lump of guilt. "I'm sure Dean is okay out there. Seamus will get him and drag him out."

"No, I'm not worried for him. I'm worried for Ginny. I have never seen her so out of it. For a while, I thought that you two were upset for the same reason, but now I have no idea what to think. She's hiding something from me, and I hate it." Ron suddenly turned to him. "Harry, do you know what's wrong with her? If she has entrusted you not to say whatever it is, then I can respect that, but she's my sister. She's my responsibility while we are at school."

Harry had to hold on to his blanket for support. Ron gave him the same fierce stare that Ginny always did. It was incredibly powerful. His words pierced around in his body. He felt so selfish. Yes, he wanted to keep his relationship with Ron intact, but Ron's relationship with his sister was on the line. Ron's promise to his parents to look after Ginny was on the line as well as his confidence. It wasn't right, lying to someone like Ron. He didn't deserve it.

Harry opened his mouth, feeling the truth on his lips. He would take the consequences as they came. "Ron." There was a knock on the door, and he stopped his sentence. Ron put the chess piece down and sighed. "Don't worry. I'll get it, mate," Harry said. He went to the door. Luckily, it wasn't Lavender. Hermione was on the other side. She looked like how Harry felt.

However, she covered most of it up well with a forced smile. "Harry, is Ron still here?"

"Yeah, come on in," he said.

Ron was looking sulky again but when he looked up and saw Hermione, he immediately stood up and smiled. "Hey, Hermione."

She returned his smile and it seemed genuine this time. "Hello. Um, I like your shirt."

He tugged on it. "Yeah? Well, it's one of my favorites."

She moved closer to him. Harry watched a bit of color rise on her neck. He knew something had happened, and he was eager to find out. Hermione refused to tell him, and Harry knew it was her way of getting back at him for not telling her about what happened with Ginny. "That's good. It looks great on you," she said.

Ron blushed. "Thank you. So, do you want something from me?"

She held on to the sides of her skirt. "Well, I'm on my way to meet McGonagall."

He rubbed his neck. "That's right. You're practically organizing the graduation ceremony all by yourself."

She grinned. "Not all by myself but I'm helping out as much as I can."

"You're too modest. Just admit that you're brilliant," Ron urged.

Hermione beamed at him. "I'd rather have you tell me."

He moved a little closer to her. "I'll tell you every day."

They smiled and stared at each other. Harry was not sure if he should have left or stayed for the show. There was something about the way his two friends looked and spoke to each other that seemed different. Even their flirtation was different. He thought about slipping out of the room but a horrible gust of fiery tickle clogged his nose. He sneezed loudly. Hermione jumped and Ron looked down. "Oh, I'm sorry," Harry said, hating how even his sneezes had horrible timing. He sniffed and rubbed his nose on his sleeve.

"No, it's okay. Ah, listen, Ron, I'm here because I was wondering if you wanted me to take your schedule with me to the meeting. I can get your assignments while I'm there," Hermione said.

"You'd do that for me?" Ron asked.

She smiled. "Of course, I owe you remember?"

He smirked. "Yeah, I remember." He reached in his bag and pulled out his schedule. He handed it to her.

Once again, they stared at each other, but Hermione did not let it linger this time. "W-well, I should get going."

Ron took her hand. "Wait, do you really have to go? I-I mean, do you have to go now? Harry and I were just talking. You can stay."

Hermione turned a faint pink. She looked down at their held hands for a moment. "I'm sure McGonagall wants me there early."

Harry felt it was his time to step in. "Oh, come on, Hermione. I'm sure she won't mind if you aren't early. I think being on time is what's important." It was remarkable. Hermione Granger was the only person Harry knew who felt uncomfortable about showing up to something on time instead of thirty minutes early.

She looked to him and Harry tried to convey the message to her that Ron wanted her to stay very badly. It was obvious to him. He couldn't understand how Hermione didn't see it. However, she must have received the message. "Okay, I guess it will be okay," she said.

Harry nodded. "I think so, too." Hermione sat next to Ron on his bed, and Harry noticed how closely they sat. "So, what exactly do you have to do?"

She sighed. "We're just going over the layout of the ceremony for right now. Dumbledore wants to do something different."

"All the professors are going bloody mad over it. All of the Prefect duties have to do with the ceremony somehow, it seems. Shit, I didn't know NEWTs were so important," Ron said.

She gawked at him. "I'm going to pretend that you did not just say that."

"Oh, here it comes," Harry cheeked.

Ron laughed. "What did I do now?"

She shook her head. "Ronald, obviously NEWTs are important. Finishing all seven years here is a wonderful accomplishment."

Ron turned to Harry. "Are you getting any of this?"

"Not at all, mate," he breathed.

Hermione glared at Harry and swatted Ron's arm. "You two can both shut it. It's blasphemy what you're saying."

Harry and Ron burst into laughter and her face softened. She soon joined them. It was nice. The dread that Harry had been feeling all day seemed to melt away. It felt amazing to spend time with his best friends again and have a good laugh. It seemed so rare that the three of them were together and happy these days. Ron was the first to stop laughing. "Oh, Hermione, you know Harry that and I are just taking the piss. We think it's great that you care so much."

"Yeah, someone has to. We both would have failed out a long time ago if you didn't care. Ron is right. You are brilliant," Harry added. Hermione smiled, looking between the two. Harry felt his spirits lift even higher. He wanted so much for Hermione to be happy and feel appreciated. He loved her very dearly. She had done so many things for him over the years, and he didn't know where he would be without her.

"Well, thank you both. You boys aren't too bad, either. You know, when you actually put some effort in," Hermione said.

"You think so?" Ron asked. His voice was rather soft and he looked at Hermione intently.

She stared right back at him. "Yes, I do."

Harry was sure something was about to happen. Ron and Hermione gazed at each other as if he was not even in the room. As if, nothing else even existed.

A heavy bang hit their door. "WONNIE! ARE YOU IN THERE?" someone screamed from the other side. That time, Harry was sure of whom it was. He mentally cursed and looked to Hermione. She was frowning as well.

Ron rolled his eyes and sighed. "Hold on," he groaned. He went to the door. When he opened it, Lavender came rushing in, bringing in a flowery scent. She was dressed in a very short grey skirt, grey knee socks, and an extremely tight pink jumper. All of her assets burst and popped against her clothes. Harry let his eyes stare for a second but easily pulled them away. After having Ginny Weasley's body, nothing else compared.

Ron did not seem to notice her over the top outfit at all. "Hi," he said simply.

Lavender pouted and flipped her hair. "Won, you're not wearing your outfit." She looked around and spotted Hermione. "Oh, hello," she said. Her voice dripped of spite.

Hermione stood her ground. "Good morning," she said sweetly.

Ron looked between Lavender and Hermione. He cleared his throat. "Listen, um, I couldn't find my black trousers, and my only maroon jumper is dirty. I thought orange would do."

The expression on Lavender's face was priceless. She looked as if he had strangled a kitten. "Ronâ€¦that violent shade of orange is NOT a good substitute. I meanâ€¦you look as if you just crawled out of bed."

"Honestly, Lavender?" Hermione said loudly. Harry watched as she actually balled one of her fists. This was a change. Harry never thought that he would have to hold Hermione back before but if it was ever going to happen, it would be today.

Ron looked to her. "Hermione, it's okay."

"No, it's not! She shouldn't talk to you that way, and it's obvious that she is blind! You-you look really...really good," Hermione said, turning a bright pink.

His ear faded to pink as well. "I'm glad you think so."

Lavender rolled her eyes. "I'm not blind, Hermione. If anyone is, then you are. The shirt is too orange."

Ron rubbed his neck and finally tore his eyes from Hermione. "This happens to be one of my favorite shirts, and all my jeans look like this. Why do we have to dress up in the first bloody place? We aren't going to impress anyone."

She put her hands on her hips. "I just want us to look like a couple." Harry looked to Hermione. They exchanged an incredulous look.

It was Ron's turn to roll his eyes. "That's something else that I don't understand. Everyone knows that we're together. We hold hands and we snog. I think that's enough to make us look like a couple." Harry was not able to keep it in. He roared with laughter. Hermione put a hand over her mouth and chuckled as well.

Lavender and Ron turned to them. He grinned but she glared. "This isn't any of your lots business, and it's certainly not funny."

"You don't have to snap at them, Lavender. We are the ones arguing in front of them," Ron said. Harry closed his mouth. He had been seconds away from telling her that she had a lot of nerve. She was the queen of getting into business that wasn't hers.

Lavender looked as if she wanted to continue to bitch but she sighed. "Fine, Won, whatever, let's just go. We are really behind schedule and you haven't even said anything about my outfit. I worked really hard on it." She rolled her shoulders back and poked out her chest more.

Ron walked away from her. "You know that you look great," he mumbled.

He went to his bed and grabbed his jacket. As he put it on, he glanced at Hermione. She focused her attention on her lap. Ron's expression changed, and his features softened. It was strange. Harry watched as Ron gazed at her with an odd look in his eyes. It was distant and hard to read. "No."

"What was that, Wonnies?" Lavender asked. Her voice was a bit shaky and high-pitched.

Ron turned to Lavender. "I said, no."

She frowned. "No, what?"

He pulled his jacket off. "No, I'm not going. Lavender, I can't go with you today. Maybe I'll meet you later but right now I can't go."

Lavender ran over to him. "What? Are you being serious?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I am."

She grabbed his hand. "Oh, Wonnies, sorry if I made you angry because of what I said about your outfit. You look fine. Don't take it out on me."

Ron pulled his hand away. "Lavender, this isn't about me being angry, and I couldn't really care less about what you think of my clothes. The truth is that Hermione, Harry, and I were talking about something really important before you came in and I would like to finish the conversation." Harry shot a glance at Hermione. She looked up and stared at Ron in such a loving way. Harry had seen her look at Ron in a similar way before but her look now was much more expressive and tender.

Lavender's jaw dropped. "What?"

"I hope that's okay with you," Ron said. Harry could tell that he did not honestly care, though.

She flipped her hair. "Actually, it's not. Wonnies, you can't do this! We have to spend today together! You can't spend it with Harry and-and her!"

Ron clicked his teeth. "Actually, I can. Besides, I really want to talk to them. I haven't been able to lately."

"You see them all the time, Won Won!" Lavender whined.

"You can't honestly believe that. I never get to see them or talk to them. That's why it's important that I do now. It's important to me that I talk with my friends." Ron's tone grew more and more serious as he went along. Harry didn't know what to think. Usually, Ron agreed with whatever Lavender said.

"Won, don't get angry with me. You don't have to be so mean." Lavender's bottom lip trembled. Harry rolled his eyes. Lavender always used her emotions and tears to get to Ron.

Ron's features softened. "I'm sorry."

She nodded and giggled. "Okay, I forgive you."

He nodded. "Great. So, as I said, we can meet up later or something, okay?"

She stomped her foot. "What? No! No, that is not okay! You are coming to Hogsmeade with me! You are going to say goodbye to Harry and her and then we are leaving!"

Harry shook his head and felt his anger grow. He wanted to tell Lavender that Ron was not her slave and she could not talk to him like a child, but he held his tongue. Lavender was Ron's girlfriend and his responsibility. Harry wanted to see Ron stand up to her. He was such a defender when it came to everyone else in his life, but Ron usually let people like Lavender walk all over him.

"You are being completely unfair right now. What is the big deal? All I want to do is spend a few bloody hours with my friends. Why does that bother you so much?" Ron asked.

"It doesn't bother me, Wonnies. I just cannot believe that you're doing this and especially today. You have to come with me. You can see Harry and her later." Lavender flipped her hair again and set her jaw.

Harry saw a flash of red cross Ron's eyes. "First, Lavender, stop acting as if you don't know Hermione's name. It's fucking rude, and you can't force me to go with you. I spend every bloody day with you. For once, I want to spend some time with my friends. I want to and I will."

"You don't mean that," she breathed.

He crossed his arms over his chest. "I do. I really want to spend time with Harry AND Hermione." Harry glanced at Hermione. Her face was red and her eyes were glossy. However, it was not from sadness. Harry had seen that look before. Ginny had given the same look to him right before she jumped in his arms and snogged him.

Lavender seemed shocked at Ron's confidence. She tapped her foot on the floor repeatedly and glowered at him. "Well, you can either come with me now or don't bother looking for me later."

He took a step toward her. "Are you telling me to choose between you and my friends?"

Lavender pointed her chin in the air. "Yes, I am."

"Fine," Ron breathed.

"Good," she said with a smile.

"Have a good time," he said.

Lavender's eyes widened, and she shook her head. "You can't mean that."

"If you are asking me to make a decision about who I want to spend time with, then I certainly do mean it. I'm staying here with Hermione and Harry." Ron stared right into Lavender's face.

Lavender's jaw dropped. "Are you seriously picking Harry and Hermione over me and especially on Valentine's Day?"

Ron looked down at the floor as if he was unsure about what to do next, but he looked back up and said, "Yes, I am."

The silence in the room was painful but Harry could not feel happier. He and Hermione looked at each other at the same time. They were silently telling each other how privileged they were to say that their best friend was Ron Weasley, who was now the coolest person they knew. Lavender gasped and gawked at him. Harry could see the tears in her eyes. However, this time Ron

didn't seem to care. She flipped her hair once more and stormed out of the room. She glared at Hermione before slamming the door. Harry could hear her heels clomp away. Ron slowly walked over to his bed and sat down. He looked a bit dazed.

"Shit," he breathed.

"Shit, indeed," Harry added. "Ron, where did all of that come from?"

Ron shook his head. "I don't know. I just got so annoyed. I didn't want to go with her. I have been dreading this day for ages."

"Why?" Harry asked.

He rolled his eyes. "She probably planned for us to double lunch with Parvati and Blaise and do some other pointless shit. I just want a bloody break."

"Really?" Hermione asked quietly.

He nodded. "I shouldn't have to sneak around to spend time with you."

She smiled and bit her lip. Harry knew there were so many things that she wanted to say. "No, you shouldn't," she said quietly.

Harry smirked. "Your sister will be proud, and I reckon that you've ruined Lavender's entire month."

Ron chuckled and rubbed his eyes. "Yeah, well, I'll apologize tonight or whatever."

Hermione's smile faded. She suddenly turned away from Ron. "I should go. I'm really late."

Ron took her hand again. "Hermione, wait."

She pulled away. "It's fine. I'll see you later."

He seemed like he wanted to say something else but he sighed in defeat. "Okay."

"Bye, Harry," she mumbled before quickly walking over to the door and leaving.

"What was that about?" Harry asked.

Ron got up and sat next to him. He ran his hands through his hair. "Harry, I think I messed up."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked. He sat up straighter. He had been waiting to hear those words. Harry was prepared to reassure to his friend that yes, he made a mistake dating Lavender but that Hermione was more than ready to forgive him or that whatever he said to upset Hermione could be fixed.



Ron turned to him. "I almost kissed Hermione."

Harry's eyes widened. It was not the response that he had expected. "Really? When?"

He shifted in his spot. "The day that I went to see her after practice."

"Of course. You almost fell off your broom coming down. I think I still have the bump from when you threw your broom in my face," Harry said. It had actually been hilarious. All during practice Harry knew that Ron was thinking about other things rather than Quidditch. He was so distracted and as soon as Harry called time, Ron had zoomed out of the sky and jabbered on about wanting to see Hermione.

Ron laughed. "I already apologized, mate. Anyway, she wasn't exactly happy to see me. We argued for a while. She was angry because I've been spending so much time with Lavender, and she thought that I was ignoring her. I tried to explain that all I have wanted to do was be with her like we were before."

"Did she go for it?" Harry asked.

"I reckon that she understood. She let me stay. I helped her fill out awards and whatever else for the seventh years. It was bloody grueling, but I didn't really care. We were talking and just pissing around. I kept making her laugh, and she kept smiling at me. It was amazing." Ron's smile grew so wide that Harry wondered how his cheeks were not in pain.

"Mate, as much as I love the fluff, I think it's the almost snogging part that we're here for," Harry said with a wink. He honestly did not mind Ron talking about his great time with Hermione. It meant everything to Harry that his best friends, the two most important people in his life, were okay. It was all he wanted.

Ron blushed. "Oh, right. Well, that wasn't first. We did something else first. Somethingâ€¦major."

Harry gasped. It was an honest gasp. His eyes widened as Ron paled. "Did youâ€¦I meanâ€¦did you twoâ€¦" Harry was not sure of what to ask. After all he had told Hermione, he could not believe that she could do the same thing.

"Huh? Oh, no, no, gods, no. It's nothing like that," Ron rushed.

Harry put a hand to his chest. "Fuck, Ron, don't scare me like that."

He gave him a look. "Why would it scare you? Would it bother you if we had?"

An ugly case of dÃ©jà vu hit him. He suddenly felt Hermione's annoyance. "No, I don't mean it like that. If you and Hermione are shagging, then great but there are many reasons why that wouldn't be the best thing right now. That's all I'm saying. It

doesn't get any deeper, I swear." His features softened and Harry rolled his eyes. He had already had the best out there, and it certainly was not with Hermione. Ron would never understand that Hermione Granger was not Harry's type. She was good-looking and kind, but she didn't compare to Ginny's fiery attractiveness and even fierier personality. Of course, Harry couldn't tell him any of this.

"Right, sorry," Ron mumbled.

Harry waited and when there was no answer he added, "Well, are you going to bloody tell me what happened or not?"

He nodded and cleared his throat. "Yeah, right. So, anyway, I was sweating as all bloody hell because I just came from practice, and it didn't help that I ran all the way there to see her. So, she just came over andâ€¦wiped the sweat off my face. She wasn't bothered at all."

"I reckon it was a nice change. Lavender always whines when you get too close to her after practice," Harry helped.

He nodded. "Exactly, and she took her time. She was very thorough. It's Hermione Granger, so I shouldn't have expected anything less but still. I was shocked that it was happening. I just watched her, and I must have looked like an idiot. Then, she stopped and said something about my eyelashes."

"Your eyelashes?" Harry asked. He squinted at Ron's eyelashes to see if there were chunks missing or something intriguing. He couldn't find anything.

Ron shifted and blushed harder. "Yeah, it wasâ€¦I dunno, but then it happened. She started touching my face. I don't know what she was trying to do exactly, but I didn't tell her to stop. I didn't say anything. I couldn't. Her fingers are so small and soft, and it felt so damn good. She was extremely close to me, and I could smell her and-and feel her body heat." He closed his eyes for a moment as if trying to remember the event. "I saw every feature up close." He sighed deeply and shook his head with a grin. "Hermione is so incredibly beautiful, Harry. She's easily the most beautiful person...fucking ever."

Harry smiled, giving Ron a bit more credit. Ron always said that he was shit with words but he could be pretty tender when he wanted to be or at least when it involved Hermione. "Yeah?"

Ron looked at him. "Oh yeah. I couldn't stop staring. It's not like I'm completely thick or anything. I have always known how gorgeous she is but being so close to her made me realize it even more. Her eyes, her nose, her smell, and bloody hell her lipsâ€¦everything just, paralyzed me. Does that make any sense?"

"Yeah, it makes sense," Harry said quietly. He knew exactly what that felt like. Ginny made him feel that way all the time. Harry wanted to tell Ron about it to make him feel more comfortable and sane, but he couldn't.

"I didn't know how long it would go on. Then, she said my skin was soft." Ron paused again. Harry raised his eyebrows, encouraging him to go on. He took the hint. "She stopped. I reckon she was embarrassed. She pulled away and I panicked. I didn't want her hand to move away. I told her that she didn't have to stop. I felt like a tit saying it but I did not know what else to do. That's when the major thing happened."

"What happened, Ron?" Harry asked.

He picked at the crust on his jeans again. "Hermione started touching my lips and I..." He covered his face. "Shit, I can't tell you."

Harry gently shoved him. "Ron, come on, it's me. How long have we known each other?"

Ron frowned. "Yeah, but it would be easier if you told me stories like this."

"Well, if I had any then you and the whole bloody world would know," Harry cheeked. Truth was, he had the ultimate sexual story to tell but could not mutter a word about it. "Whatever it is, it can't be any worse than what Seamus likes to spill about him and Hannah."

He shivered and stuck out his tongue. "You have point there. Well, Iâ€¦sort ofâ€¦sucked her finger."

Harry gave him a look. "You sucked Hermione's finger?"

Ron's ears matched the scarlet curtains hanging from their beds. "I don't know what got into me, mate. Her finger was there and it just happened. I can't even begin to tell you what I was thinking because I wasn't thinking. It was automatic to me. It felt like something I should do and something I would enjoy. I did, too. I didn't even know that I liked stuff like that but I do. At least, if Hermione is involved I do." He bit his lip and smirked.

Harry felt rather surprised as well. Sure, he knew Ron was a sixteen-year-old bloke and had sexual desires like every other guy but for some reason Harry had considered Ron to be more on the reserved side. Whenever he was with Lavender, she was mostly the one insinuating the touching. However, Harry figured that Ron was more like himself now. Harry was only really blinded by lust when Ginny was involved. Obviously, Ron was the same way with Hermione.

"So, what about the kiss or did you two do something else before as well?" Harry asked.

Ron snapped out of his daydream. "No, it definitely happened next. So, after that Hermione pulled her finger away and brought up how soft I wasâ€¦again. I reckon she enjoys teasing me that way. I couldn't believe that she wanted to mention how soft I was yet again. Are blokes even supposed to be soft?"

"Damnit, Ron, just get to it!" Harry ordered.

He chuckled and rubbed his neck. "Sorry. Well, she said that she wondered what it would feel like to kiss me."

Harry raised an eyebrow. He was beginning to think that he knew less about his friends than he always believed. "Hermione said that?"

"Yeah, I couldn't believe it myself. She kept staring at me and then she said it. I lost it completely. Everything I had ever—|anyway—I told her that I wondered what it would feel like to kiss her. I know how stupid it must sound but in the moment, it felt okay. It felt right." Ron sighed and stared off.

"Then what?" Harry practically snapped. Ron Weasley was the worst storyteller who ever lived. In fact, Harry was sure Ron was the worst storyteller of all time.

"She said that we could kiss so we'd know for sure. I sort of wanted to laugh. She made it sound like a bloody homework assignment," he said.

"I doubt that was what she wanted it to seem like. You know how she gets when she's nervous," Harry defended.

"Yeah, well, she must have been. Fuck, I was, too. I mean it's not as if I haven't snogged before but for some reason my heart felt like it would explode, and I could barely breathe. I was nervous. No, scared is a better word. I was scared and excited. We leaned forward and I thought it would happen. I—I wanted it to happen so badly," Ron explained.

"So, why didn't it?" Harry asked.

Ron pounded his fist on his leg. "Bloody McGonagall! She came into the classroom just as it was about to happen. I thought that I would lose my bollocks that night, but Hermione brilliantly came up with a story and got us out of trouble."

"And that's it?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, that's what happened," Ron breathed.

Harry gazed off and went over everything in his head. "Okay, so, my questions is, when did you apparently mess up?"

He gave him a look. "Harry, did you not hear anything I said? Did you not hear about what I did to Hermione and about me almost kissing her."

Harry stared at Ron and waited for him to continue but that was apparently it. "Okay—|"

"What do you mean, okay?" Ron said, almost hysterically.

"Well, I don't want to sound insensitive but that's not that bad, Ron. For fuck sake, I was expecting something a bit more dramatic. How did Hermione take it?" Harry asked. He already knew

that Hermione probably had a few heart attacks during the process, but he had to act thick to keep up appearances.

He licked his lips and rubbed his hands together. "I think she liked it. Shit, actually, I think she loved it. I've never seen her like that before. Bloody hell, Harry, I don't know what came over me. I completely forgot about everything...even Lavender. All I could think about was Hermione and how badly I wanted to make her feel good."

"That doesn't sound like a mess up to me, Ron. It sounds like a bloke wanting to make the girl he cares about happy," Harry said simply.

Ron's eyes widened and his blush increased. "But-but it's not supposed to be like that, right? That's the problem. You have no idea how fucking turned on I was. If McGonagall had not walked in, then I honestly don't know what we would have done. Seriously, if Hermione had wanted me to lay her out on the desk and snog her until I passed out, then I would have." He suddenly groaned and rubbed his face again.

Harry snorted and patted Ron's shoulder. "It's okay, mate. Let it out."

Ron shook his head with his mouth open. "What is with you? Did you not just hear me?"

He shrugged. "I'm sorry to disappoint you. Do you expect me to be surprised? I have known for ages that you've wanted Hermione. This isn't anything new."

"It's not?" he asked.

Harry chuckled. "For fuck sake, Ron. I've known about you fancying Hermione for about as long as we have been friends. I told you, I know you better than I'd like to sometimes."

Some of the anguish in Ron's features disappeared. "So, you don't hate me or think I'm a prick? I do have a girlfriend."

Ron's news was so fantastic that Harry had completely forgotten about Lavender. "Well, do you want me to say that what happened is good for your current relationship? No, it's not, but honestly, you have been walking around here all year like a pumpkin waiting to explode. I see you every day being the best little boyfriend that you possibly can be to Lavender."

"I really try. It's hard," Ron said.

"I can tell," Harry said. "Ron, I don't give you enough credit. After what I have seen today, it must be difficult. You always put her first, and you always go against what you really feel and want. This time, you just couldn't hold back. I can understand why you couldn't hold it back and why you probably didn't want to. Besides, I have no room to judge anyone." Harry shut his mouth before he could reveal anything.

He raised an eyebrow but did not press the issue. "But what about Hermione?"

Harry nudged him in the side. "You said she loved it, so, I doubt she cares."

Ron rubbed his neck. "Do you think it's more than that? I meanâ€¦I know she sort of has a thing with Krum butâ€¦do you thinkâ€¦sheâ€¦likes me?"

The answer was so simple and obvious that it almost hurt Harry to hear Ron ask the question. There was so much that he could have said and so many different ways to say it, but he gave Ron a smile and answered with, "Yes, Ron, I think Hermione likes you a lot." It was straightforward and what Ron needed to hear. Harry didn't want to overwhelm him any more than he already was.

He let out a low sigh and grinned. "Really?" His voice was incredibly gentle. "I keep telling myself that what happened was justâ€¦I dunno."

"Come on, even you can't allow yourself to make that far of a stretch. Ron, Hermione fancies you, and you know her well enough by now. She's not just going to get close like that to anyone and as for Krum, I wouldn't be so worried. You're here and he's not." Harry had almost forgotten about the letters and the other set of lies that he and Hermione had told Ron.

His glee seemed to grow but something in his eyes was still uncertain. "And you twoâ€¦"

"Never. Ever," Harry answered. "I know how you feel about her and how she feels about you. There is nothing between us. There never has been and there never will be."

Ron seemed a bit more relieved. "What do I do?"

"It's simple. Ask yourself who makes you happy. Are you even happy with Lavender?" Harry asked.

Ron looked away. "I used to beâ€¦I think. At least, I thought I was."

Harry nodded. "And what about now?"

He shrugged. "Whatever I thought we had seems to fade a little more every day, and it goes away even faster when I see Hermione."

Hearing Ron speak about his relationship with Lavender was chilling. All year Harry and Hermione had made plans and talked about their feelings. They agreed about how they felt. It never occurred to Harry that Ron and Ginny were in a similar place and that their feelings matched as well.

"Well, I know that I haven't always been the biggest Lavender supporter but if you aren't happy with her, then you shouldn't keep her along like this. It's not fair to her. Her feelings are

invested in this and it's her life, too." Harry spoke from the heart and he hoped that Ron listened to him. As much as Lavender annoyed Harry, he did not want Ron to hurt her the way he and Ginny had hurt Dean. No one deserved that kind of pain.

Ron nodded and sighed. "Yeah, I know. I need to talk to her. I feel so guilty. I don't do these sorts of things. No matter what I feel for Hermione, I can't be a total wanker to Lavender. I'm not a cheater, Harry. My parents didn't raise me to be one."

Harry rubbed Ron's arm. "Listen, it's okay. You're not a bad person. I know that you would never want to hurt Lavender or Hermione. All I have to say to that is that no one is perfect. I know what you are, and Hermione knows what you are. Ron, you really do need to be more honest with yourself and about what you want. You have to be so that you won't ever have to worry about things like this happening."

Ron uncovered his face and exhaled deeply. "Harry, as pathetic as it may sound, I just want to actually feel like getting dressed up, and I want to genuinely be excited about Valentine's Day. I don't think I ever have before."

Harry smiled, getting the eerie feeling he always did when he felt like he and Ron were sharing the exact same thoughts and feelings at the exact same time. "It's not pathetic. It's what I have wanted for years now it seems."

He gave him a sympathetic look. "I am really sorry about Cho. I don't like what she did to you."

"It's okay. It's for the best. She is not the one for me. I reckon Ginny was right about that," Harry said.

Ron searched his eyes. "Yeah, she's pretty good at reading relationships." Harry turned away and nodded, unsure of what to say. "Soâ€¦do you want to play some chess or whatever?"

Harry turned back to him. "Don't you have something more important to do?"

He shrugged and stood up. "I'm already in trouble. I might as well enjoy the freedom while I can."

"We can talk about this more if you want to," Harry said.

Ron shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "I need to clear my head a little. A lot is happening right now and I justâ€¦"

"Want a distraction for a while?" Harry helped.

He smiled. "Yes, that's exactly it."

Harry grinned, completely understanding what Ron was going through. "Okay, get the board out." He grabbed his pillows and made a space on the floor.

Harry wanted to press the issue of Lavender and Hermione. He wanted Ron to open up more about his feelings for Hermione. However, he knew his best friend by now. Ron was one of those people who had to figure things out in his own time. He was determined and incredibly stubborn. Harry admired that about him. It reminded him of Ginny. His heart fell a bit. He missed her and wished he could be spending the day with her in Hogsmeade, but it was not a total loss. Harry could not spend Valentine's Day with the girl he wanted he almost felt like this was worth it.

Finally, there seemed to be some light shedding on his friends.

\*\*\*\*Okay! So, wow. I really enjoyed writing this one. Oh, just a small thing before I go into the big moments of this story. I like to stay as canon as possible but I'm sorry, I really love Neville/Luna. I'm a huge fan. So, I like having them in here and Neville is super sweet, lol.

First, I want to say that Lavender was the perfect bitch in this one, lol. Out of all the characters JK wrote in the HP books, Lavender Brown is one of the most realistic. We all know girls like her. We have all been annoyed and have wanted to slap girls like her. In this chapter, I really brought that out of her. I can remember mates of mine dating girls like her and saying things to them like Lavender said to Ron. The comments about Ron's outfit and her making him choose are things I have seen and been a part of time and time again. I'm sure many of you have as well. So, when I wrote that bit, I was so frustrated yet felt accomplished because I knew how Harry and Hermione must have felt watching her talk to Ron that way. I've felt it too. Lavender really outdid herself and really reinforced what a tart and annoying little brat she is. Most importantly, she reinforced why she's not the right woman for Ron.

To go along with this, the argument with Ron/Lavender. I'm also really happy about how that turned out. Hermione is braver, Harry is more in tune, and Ginny is making some tough decisions. Well, Ron needs to grow up a bit as well. Lavender has practically controlled the entire relationship and he's fed up. You can really tell his sympathy is gone and he is truly just tired. So, that argument between them was needed and I really enjoyed giving Ron his bollocks so he could tell her off. That's the kind of bloke he is. You don't make him angry and you don't threaten him and under no circumstances, do you ask him to choose. He's always going to pick his friends and family first. Also, it was just bloody time that Ron made his move. He had to take a stand and more importantly, take a stand in front of Hermione.

Now, the talk Ron and Harry had. Lol, I was laughing the entire time I was typing. I had to get some help from a few of my male friends on how to write this. I sort of made them act it out for me so I could make it as "bloke-ish" as possible, lol. I know how I would write them but I wanted a little testosterone to back me up. It was fun. I wanted to know how best mates talked about experiences and things like this. My friends were like "Well, it can't be all touchy feely and fluffy. Blokes like to get straight to it but there's some emotion there, so they shouldn't be stiff either." Lol, so, I tried to do that with their conversation. I



also asked about how a guy would handle it if he was in Harry's shoes and what I wrote for Harry was a summary of what they were saying. He would be understanding and honest. He would be happy that his mate was finally being honest with himself. I agreed that was the right move. Harry is like that anyway, so it worked out.

Okay, now, about Ron's question. I laughed typing that as well. I was like "DUH, OF COURSE HERMIONE LIKES YOU! YOU ADORABLE KNOB!" lol. It is so very cute of Ron, isn't it? :) I was considering Harry reveal Hermione's feelings or at least hint more about her love but it would completely take away from...some stuff about happen and it's not Harry's style. So, the suspense is still there for Ron.

This chapter was a fun and easy one. It basically sets the stage for what is about to happen in the next part. I would explain exactly what it is but that is for you lot to find out! So, thanks for reading and REVIEW! I mean that's only if you wanna know about it!

CHEERS! ;)

## CHAPTER 24

Disclaimer: Thanks for the reviews!

"Before we adjourn, I want to extend my gratitude to a few sixth years that have shown vast maturity and leadership. Choosing the Head Boy and Head Girl is not an instantaneous decision. The faculty puts much into consideration and some of you have gone above and beyond this year. So, keep that in mind." McGonagall gazed around the room before settling on Hermione. She instantly sat up straighter and smiled slightly.

After the meeting, Hermione packed up her overstuffed bag. She was rather tired and wanted nothing more than to lie in her bed and read. "Ms. Granger."

She turned around. "Yes."

Professor McGonagall smiled. "I want to thank you again for helping out as much as you have this year. It's certainly not going unnoticed."

"Thank you very much. I honestly don't mind. I enjoy my job, and I enjoy helping out as much as I can," she explained.

McGonagall nodded. "Well, it's refreshing to see such dedicated Prefects like yourself. However, I'm afraid that I cannot say the same about your partner. Where is Mr. Weasley?"

It was something that Hermione had been wondering herself. Right after their last class, Ron had disappeared. She was surprised when he didn't show up to their meeting. She didn't really want to think about what he was doing instead or who for that matter. "He was complaining about some stomach cramps earlier. I'm sure that he went to the hospital wing," she quickly explained. No

matter how much Ron's lack of responsibility infuriated her, she did not actually want to get him into trouble.

Professor McGonagall did not express too much concern. "If he truly is sick, then I guess that it's not his fault. However, if this was some sort of scheme he created to get himself out of his duties, please remind him that I am head of Gryffindor house. He might have forgotten."

"I will. I'm sorry for his absence," Hermione said.

"Please, Ms. Granger, you have no reason to apologize. You are a model student," McGonagall reassured. All Hermione could do was smile. Inside she was a mixture of nerves and chuckles. Her statement was no longer exactly true. Days ago she had almost been caught. She had almost been caught being close and heated with Ron. She could still feel the wetness of his tongue and the heat of his mouth. She could hear his moan and see his bright eyes gazing at her. She had to bite her lip to keep from whimpering. "Ms. Granger?" McGonagall said.

She snapped out of her trance. "Right, sorry. Yes, I'll talk to him." She readjusted her bag on her shoulder and walked away.

Hermione shook her head and tried to clear her mind on her way back to the Common Room. She still could not believe that it happened. She couldn't believe how exciting and sexual it was or how mischievous she felt for it. It was not in her to do things like that, but she loved every second of it. She wondered if Ron was rubbing off on her a little too much in terms of defying authority. She smirked. It had to mean something. Ron had to feel something. It could not have just been him being a bloke. He wasn't like that. However, whatever it was, it wasn't enough. Ron was still with Lavender. No matter what Hermione came up with in her mind, it didn't amount to anything. He was still Lavender's boyfriend, and it angered her. It confused her. Hermione didn't know what to do or what to say. She was tired of it all.

"Password!" The Fat Lady demanded.

Hermione jumped and once again broke out of her trance. "Oh, s-sorry. It'sâ€¦it'sâ€¦ahâ€¦" She couldn't remember the password. She was so distracted by her situation with Ron that it was affecting her memory.

"It's Tangie," Harry said from behind her. The Fat Lady extended her arm and the door opened.

"Thanks," she mumbled.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"It's just one password. I'm not the first person to forget it," she snapped.

Harry frowned a little. "Maybe you should sit down."

"Actually, there's some reading tat I need to get out of the way," Hermione said. She tugged on her heavy bag.

He pulled her bag off her. "No, you need to sit. Come on." He took her arm and led her to the couch.

She honestly felt a bit better, sitting down and having the bag off her shoulder. She let out a heavy breath and rubbed her eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm just really tired. It's been a long day."

"More like a long week. Hermione, what is going on? You're starting to look like how I look these days, and it always means that something is wrong," Harry explained with a small smile.

She chuckled. "I've been stressed out. Well, more stressed than usual."

He raised an eyebrow. "Could it have anything to do with what happened in McGonagall's office?" Her eyes widened. He shrugged. "Ron told me."

She rolled her eyes. "Yes, that's right. Ron tells you everything. You're his best friend." She tried not to make her statement sound full of spite, but it was difficult.

He seemed to notice. "Are you angry with me for it?"

"No, it has nothing to do with you. It has to do with Ron. It has to do with where we are. I hate it. We're friends, but it feels like a little more than that. I don't know. Maybe he's just messing with my head. Maybe he's bored with Lavender and just wants to mix things up." Hermione could go on and on about what she thought Ron was doing to her. Mostly all of her ideas were bad, so she tried not to think about them too often.

"Hermione, you know Ron is not like that. He's confused right now. He's just as stressed out as you are," Harry explained.

She sighed heavily. "Yes. He told me the same thing. I'm frustrated with him but at the same time, I have no right to be. I'm not telling him the truth either. I can't. I'mâ€¦"

"Scared?" he added.

She groaned in frustration. "It sounds incredibly ridiculous said out loud but, yes. I am. I mean it's a bit fuzzy now but what if he really justâ€¦"

"Wants to be friends or doesn't want to complicate things?" Harry added again.

She looked at him. "You can tell me to be quiet any time."

He gave her a look. "Hermione, why would I do that? I completely understand how you feel. I'm right now in that situation. It's horrible but at least it's honest. I know where Ginny and I standâ€¦somewhat. You need to talk to him about it. Even if the worst happens, at least you'll know."

"How are things between you and Ginny?" she asked.

"Don't change the subject, Hermione, but we're talking and that's a start," Harry said. "Now, let's get back to you and Ron. What does he have to say about what happened?"

"He doesn't. We really haven't brought it up since it happened. In fact, we really have not spoken a lot since that night. There just hasn't seemed to be any time. We've both been busy. I'm busy with Prefect duties, and he is busy with Lavender. I'm sure that he had a lot of making up to do after Valentine's Day." Hermione thought back to that day. She was still in awe with the way Ron stood up to Lavender in such a confident and sexy way. Harry chuckled. "What's so funny?" she asked.

He smiled. "I was sure that I was gonna have to keep you from hitting Lavender. I've never seen you so angry before."

"Well, she was being disrespectful toward Ron and the girl was obviously out of her mind. How dare she say that Ron didn't look good? You saw him," Hermione said gently.

Harry clicked his teeth. "Ah, he's not really my type."

She licked her lips slowly and thought about how tightly his shirt had fit on him and how firm his arms and shoulders were. "Hmm, he certainly is mine."

Harry's smile faded a bit. "Why did you leave in such a hurry? Why were you so angry?"

She looked away. "I was late for my meeting."

"That's all?" Harry asked.

She opened her mouth to say yes but she knew that was not all. In fact, she still managed to make it there early, but it was the last thing on her mind at the time. "You heard him, Harry. Ron was just going to apologize to her later. I got frustrated."

He patted her knee. "Well, I don't think you should worry. You never have enough faith in Ron."

"What do you know that I don't?" she asked.

He smirked. "I dunno."

Before she could ask another question, the hole opened and Ginny walked in. "Oh, hey you two."

Harry sat a little straighter and smiled tenderly. "Hey, Ginny, what are you up to?"

She sat on the floor in front of them. She shared an affectionate smile with him before turning away. "Nothing. I have absolutely nothing to do, and I'm enjoying it."

"I wish that I could say the same," Hermione breathed.

Ginny rolled her eyes. "I doubt that. Isn't free time what your boggart turns into?"

Harry laughed but Hermione frowned. "You are way too much like Ron," she said.

"And speaking of Ron, where is the tosser? He didn't show up to his training session today," he said.

"I don't know. He wasn't at the Prefect meeting either," Hermione said.

"That's odd. Skipping a meeting I understand, but Ron would never miss a training session. He loves practice and is one of the only people who don't mind your nutter way of training, Harry," Ginny said.

Harry shrugged. "It's the only way that we're going to succeed. Besides, I never hear you complain."

Ginny smirked and tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. "I don't mind a little roughness." Harry gazed at her, and his face flushed over a bit. Hermione shifted in her seat. She had no problem with Harry and Ginny flirting. She was happy for them but once again, it made her think about Ron and the flirting that she had done with him.

The portrait hole opened for a second time. Lavender came running in. She stopped near them and looked each one of them down. She eyed Harry and Ginny and finally settled on Hermione. There was a fire in her eyes and her face was soaked and crimson. Her expression was so powerful that Hermione honestly wanted to know what was wrong. Before she could even ask what the matter was, Lavender let out a wail and ran upstairs.

Hermione turned back to Harry and Ginny. Both shared identical looks of confusion. "What was that?" Harry asked.

"I don't know. Lavender always cries, but I haven't seen her cry like that before," Hermione said softly.

"I'm sure Ron will fix it. He probably didn't notice how her nail polish matched her eye shadow," Ginny said with a shrug. Once again Harry laughed.

"You're not concerned?" she asked.

"No, I'm not. I'm not going to pretend that I like her just because she's dating my brother. She annoys me, and she's an insult to females." Ginny exhaled in frustration. Hermione wanted to laugh. Ginny had never really liked Lavender but she tolerated her for Ron. Hermione admired that.

Harry beamed. "Not everyone can be great like you, I reckon."

Ginny looked away. "I'm not that great, Harry."

There was softness in her voice that bothered Hermione. She had a feeling as to what would make Ginny say that. "How is Dean?" she asked.

Both Ginny and Harry turned to her. Harry focused on his hands. Ginny sighed. "Not too good. I talked to him a little. I didn't tell him everything, but I told him enough to where he knows that I'm not getting back together with him. It was horrible. I haven't seen him much since."

"Neither have I. He's hardly been in the room," Harry said. "Seamus ends up having to look for him at night."

Hermione felt awful for Dean. Not only because he was her friend but also she saw her fate becoming similar to his. "Well, you did the right thing, Ginny. Not everyone has the strength to see the truth and make the difficult decision to change."

Ginny smiled slightly. "Thanks. It doesn't make this any better, though. I hate hurting him and because of that, there was no way that I could bring up Harry."

"Why?" Harry asking obviously a bit hurt and taken aback.

She gave him a sympathetic look. "It's not what you think, Harry. I justâ€¦I couldn't do it to him. He was barely dealing with me telling him that it was over for good. I had no strength to add in that I was in love with the very person that he always accused me of wanting more than him. I will tell him though, Harry. I promise."

Harry didn't seem any better. "Okay."

Ginny reddened a bit. "Harry, I'll tell him. I just need to find the right time. I don't like doing any of this. I know that I have to, but it hurts."

"I don't get any sort of pleasure out of this, either," Harry said. "I understand what you're saying, Ginny. I justâ€¦I don't know." He and Ginny shared a look again but this time it was full of guilt and apprehension.

"Listen, I'm no expert but I think Dean is better off this way. At least he can attempt to heal and move on. There wasn't any point in continuing to make him believe that you two still had a future. You two have to remember that. This is better for Dean," Hermione said.

"I guess," Harry and Ginny said quietly together. Hermione wanted to say more. She wanted to reassure them that they had done the right thing, but the truth was that she knew Dean must have been devastated. For the third time, the hole opened. The person who walked through made her body heat up and her heart skip a beat. Ron slumped into the room. He looked exhausted and ashen.

Harry stood up. "Where the hell have you been? I haven't seen you all evening, and you missed your training session."

"You missed the Prefect meeting, too. McGonagall was really angry," Hermione added.

"And last but not least, Lavender stormed in here a while ago. Tears and glares were present," Ginny said dully.

He slowly walked over to them and sat next to Ginny on the rug. He rubbed his eyes. "First, I'm sorry, Harry. Second, McGonagall is always really angry with me. Third, I know about Lavender." He uncovered his face and exhaled deeply.

Hermione examined him. Ron seemed completely drained. "Are you okay?"

He shrugged. "I think so butâ€¦I shouldn't be."

"Why?" Harry and Ginny asked together.

Ron loosened his tie and rubbed his eyes again. "I just broke up with Lavender." It seemed like days, years, or millennia went by before Hermione was able to process what Ron had said. There was silence between the four of them. She didn't move. She kept her eyes on Ron. She waited for him to add on or say that he was joking.

"Youâ€¦what?" Harry asked finally.

"Lavender and I broke up. That's why she was really upset when you saw her. She didn't take it very well." He stared off and ran his fingers through his hair repeatedly.

Ginny shook her head slowly. "Hold on. You actually broke up with her? You personally told her that it was over?"

Ron's mouth twitched as if he was trying to hold back a grin. "Yeah, I did." He finally looked to Hermione. She still could not move. There was a slight ringing in her ears. He looked away.

Harry took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Okay, Ron, you're going to have to start from the beginning and take us through this."

He rolled his eyes. "What is with you lot? Is this a bad thing?"

"No, of course it's not. It's justâ€¦you've been Lavender's personal assistant and mouth cleaner for almost six months and suddenly the job is done?" Ginny said.

Ron frowned. "Thanks a lot."

"It's-it's true, though. What happened?" Hermione finally managed to say. Her voice was extremely soft and a bit shaky.

Ron looked to her. "She was really angry about me not spending time with her on Valentine's Day. I knew that she would be angry but not as much as she was. She gave me a terrible lecture and made me feel like shit for not going with her and spending time

with you -err- I mean you and Harry." He quickly cleared his throat and looked to Harry. "I couldn't take it. I thought that a day or two would cool us both off if, but it only got worse. I just couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't keep lying to myself and hoping that things would get better or that I'd feelâ€¦somethingâ€¦anything."

"I can understand that," Ginny said softly. She rubbed Ron's arm.

He nodded. "Yeah. I was tired of putting up her and her ways. I was tired of dreading every time that I had to see her. I've been wanting to break up with her for a long time now, but I thought that we might have been able to get over this, but we couldn't. She wanted something that I didn't, and I couldn't keep pretending that I was okay with it."

"What did she want?" Hermione asked.

He turned back to her. "To make us more serious."

She kept his gaze. "And-andâ€¦what do you want?"

Ron's eyes burned through her clothes and touched her skin. It felt incredible. "Not her."

Her heart raced. She didn't know what to do. She wanted him to turn away. Almost telepathically, Harry answered her pleas. "How did she take it?" he asked.

Ron turned his gaze away from her. "Well, I took her to the Prefects' bathroom and we talked for a while. The longer we talked, the more I knew that I had to break it off."

"What did she say?" Ginny asked.

He played with the end of his tie and kept his eyes on the floor. "It's not one thing that she said. I just realized that it would never work between us. So, I told her the truth. I told her that I wanted to break up. We want too many different things. She needs someone else and-and I do, too. Of course, she screamed, cried, and said some awful things-"

"About what?" Hermione and Harry asked together.

He looked back up and his neck flushed to red. "Just stuff. She actually thought that it was a joke. She apologized and everything. Bloody hell, I almost took it all back. I just wanted her to stop yelling and crying."

"She tried to trap you, Ron. I should kick her arse for that," Ginny snapped.

He smiled at his sister. "But she didn't. I explained to her that I was serious. That's when she broke down. I felt terrible. I still do."

"Ron, that's expected. You're not an evil bloke," Harry helped.



"Yeah, breakups are hard no matter what, Ron," Ginny added.

He rubbed his neck. "Still. Lavender is a nice person, but it wasn't there. We tried to make it work, but no one should have to try that hard. It should be natural. It should feel right without having to force it to be." Ron once again looked to Hermione.

Hermione knew exactly what he meant. With Ron, she never had to try. Everything simply came out of her and always felt right. With Ron, it felt like destiny. "W-well, it says a lot that you were able to recognize that. You have to do what's best for you," she said quietly.

He smiled. "Yeah. I don't want to hold back so much anymore." His ears reddened. Hermione felt a blush of her own.

"How do you feel, mate?" Harry asked.

Ron's eyes widened a bit, and he exhaled deeply again. "I feel bad, and I feel bad for Lavender, too. I didn't want to hurt her, and I know that I did. I'm also bloody tired from all the talking butâ€¦I feel good. I feel really good that it's over and that I'm out of that situation."

Ginny grinned at her brother affectionately. She hugged his arm and rested her head against it. Ron rested his on top of hers. "I'm really proud of you. I'm glad you are finally doing something for yourself. You're right. It's hard and you feel bad but like you said, you feel good as well. That's most important. You have to make yourself happy. What you did was very brave, Ron." She pulled away a bit and winked at him.

He gently smiled at her. "Thanks, Ginny." He kissed the top of her head. Hermione's heart melted. It was lovely. Ron and Ginny often took the mickey out of each other and were mostly cynical toward each other. It was rare to see them as tender siblings. She knew that the love was there, but she had never seen it expressed so clearly before. It eased her anxiety a little.

Ginny lightly punched his arm. "However, if you decide to date someone like her again, then I'll have no choice but to kick your arse and leave you on the floor in tears."

Ron rolled his eyes. "Please, like you could ever reach my arse, midget." Hermione sighed and shook her head. Of course, the tenderness couldn't last.

Ginny looked from Ron to Hermione and suddenly cleared her throat. "Well, I better get going."

"Where are you going?" Harry asked.

She gave him a look. "I have some spells to practice. Harry, I'm sure that you have new scrimmages to write."

Harry frowned for a moment before smiling slightly. He quickly looked from Hermione to Ron as well. "Oh, yeah, um, I have loads to do. You're right. We should go." He stood up also.

"What's going on?" Ron asked.

"Nothing. Ginny and I have a lot of work to do and you have a lot of catching up to do. Hermione said you missed a very important meeting," Harry rushed.

It was clear to Hermione what Harry and Ginny were trying to do, and she appreciated her friends so much for it. She turned to Ron. "Yes, it was a pretty long meeting."

"Great," he said sarcastically.

"Here, take my spot. I'll go upstairs and work," Harry said.

"Yes, good idea. I do my best work in my room," Ginny added. They quickly moved away and headed to the stairs. Hermione gave them a small smile, and they returned it before leaving.

Ron got up and sat next to her. Her heart beat painfully, and her palms sweated severally. He stared at her and chewed on his lip while she tried to dry her hands on her skirt. She had to break the silence. "So, you really are okay?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm okay. We just didn't get on. At least, as a couple we didn't," Ron said.

She held on the ends of her skirt. "Oh, I see. Well, I-I agree with what you said about a relationship needing to feel natural. It's another reason why I could never actually date Cormac. I'd have to force myself to want to be with him."

He nodded slowly and his mouth twitched again. "That's good. I mean, uh-huh, that's how it felt with Lavender. In the beginning it was fine, but by the end I was exhausted. She's just not the one for me."

A lump clogged and smoldered her throat. Hermione didn't know why she felt incredibly on edge. "Did I mention how angry McGonagall was?"

He groaned. "Yes, you told me. Am I in trouble?"

"I said that you were in the hospital wing. You had stomach cramps earlier, and you went right after class. So, for right now you're not," she answered.

Ron grinned. "I'll have to remember that if she asks me. Thanks for helping me out. I know you hate it when I don't do my Prefect duties."

"You're right, but I didn't know what the real problem was and I didn't want you to get into trouble. I took notes if you want them." Hermione dug into her mess of a bag but could not find her notes. She dumped her bag on the cushion of the couch. All kinds of rubbish fell out. She really needed to clean out her bag. Despite the mess, she was able to shift through and find them. "Here you go."

"Cheers. I'll find McGonagall later and tell her that I got the notes from you. Maybe it will make her happy and will make you look even better in her eyes," he said with a wink.

Hermione smiled. "That would be great. I really do think that I'm in the running for Head Girl. McGonagall was hinting at it during the meeting." She looked away and stuffed the contents back into her bag. He reached out and helped her. Their hands brushed, and she instantly jumped. It was strange. Her body was on high alert and exceedingly tense. Ron's touch was like a shockwave of energy.

He paled a bit. "Oh, I'm-I'm sorry. I didn't mean toâ€¦!"

She shook her head and let out a shaky chuckle. "No. No, it's okay. You didn't do anything wrong. I don't know what's wrong with me." She did not understand why she was so out of breath or why her body had reacted in such a way. She was overwhelmed by everything. She could not believe that Ron broke up with Lavender. She could not believe that she had almost kissed him days before. She could not believe that instead of crying or instead of being upset, Ron was okay. He was okay and he was sitting with her, helping her put her work away. The implications of what it all meant took a toll on her.

Ron moved a little closer to her. Hermione wasn't sure if she wanted him so near to her. A part of her wanted to fall into his chest. A part of her wanted to pull him close and give him the kiss that she should have in McGonagall's office but another part of her wanted to move away. The idea of having Ron was something she desired for years but being so close now terrified her. She had never been so close to a dream before, and she didn't know how to react.

Ron opened his mouth to speak but the portrait hole opened and a gang of noisy second years came in. Hermione watched as they made a space at one of the tables and cracked open their books. "Do you want to go for a walk?" he asked, reading her mind.

Hermione turned to him and smiled slightly. "That sounds great."

They strolled the empty corridors of Hogwarts in silence. Hermione kept sneaking glances at him. They were close enough to where she could reach out and snake her arm around his waist, but she didn't have the nerve to. Ron stopped walking and sighed. "Are you mad at me?"

She stopped walking as well. "What?"

He leaned against a wall and slid down. He kept his eyes on her all the while. "Are you mad at me?" he repeated.

"What would make you think that?" she asked, walking over and sitting next to him.

He shrugged. "I dunno. The way you're acting right now and how you seemed when I talked about the breakup. It just feels like

you're mad at me. Not to mention, I've barely seen you in the past few days."

"You're one to talk, Ron," she said.

"I know. I know that I probably have no reason to say it but I just want to know if I did something," he said.

Hermione gazed at him. She was very close to him. Her lips tingled. She wanted to kiss him so badly. She wanted to feel his soft lips against hers and feel his talented tongue in her mouth. "You didn't do anything, Ron. I've been busy. We both have been."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," he said with a frown. "Hermione, I hope you know that I wasn't ignoring you. I just needed to figure out some things for myself. I never know what you are thinking and I want to clear that up."

"You don't have to explain. I can understand why you've been preoccupied. I rather felt the same way. I figured you were mad at me. I thought you were but I don't know. I don't know what I thought." She took a breath and rubbed her eyes. She was so worn-out and void of ideas. All her strength and brilliance felt more and more useless everyday.

Ron reached out and pulled her hands away from her face. He took them into his and laced their fingers. His touches filled her with life and felt so good. He literally had magic in his fingertips. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you feel that way. I wasn't angry. Out of all the things that I've been feeling lately, anger isn't one of them. At least, not toward you." He pulled his hands away.

Hermione didn't want him to. She wanted to take them back, but she was too afraid. A new fear pressed on her shoulders, and it angered her. She was sick of never knowing and feeling torn. "What have you felt toward me?"

He kept his eyes on her. "A lot of things."

Heat covered her body. She was lost in emotion. She could not understand why everything was always so complicated and intense between them. "Look, Ron, if you want to forget about what happened, then we can. We can pretend that it never happened. I just don't want it to be like this anymore. I don't want us to feel awkward around each other and never know what to say. All year we haven't been able to speak to each other."

He gave her a look. "What do you want to back to then?"

"I don't know. Last year, last summer, anytime before this year. We've never been so all over the place before. If you want to pretend that—that." Her eyes glossed over. She couldn't believe what she was saying. She didn't want to pretend or forget anything, but she needed things to be okay. She needed to be able to talk to Ron the way Harry had been able to talk to Ginny earlier.

"Is that what you want, honestly?" His voice was extremely soft.

"It's not about what I want. It's about what needs to happen. Do you understand my reasons? Don't you feel this wall between us? No matter how close we get, the wall is still there." Hermione wasn't sure of what she was saying, but she had to let her thoughts out. Even after almost kissing him, she still had no idea what he felt or what he wanted.

"Of course I feel it. I understand what you're saying, Hermione. I feel like I'm always doing something wrong and someone always gets hurt because of it. Maybe you're right," he said.

Her heart dropped. "If it will help you, then we can go back to how we were, Ron."

He raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean help me?"

"You keep saying that you're confused and stressed. You told me that I stress you out. I don't want to do that. I don't want to make things more complicated. I-I don'tâ€¦" She had tears in her eyes and her throat felt tight.

His face softened. "You don't complicate things, Hermione. I'm sorry if I made you think that way. You're actually helping me to see what I want."

"And what is that?" Hermione asked gently.

He reached out and wiped the water streak from a tear that rolled down her cheek with his thumb. She wanted to push her cheek into his hand, but he quickly pulled away again. "I don't want to pretend that nothing happened."

Her heart skipped a beat again. "You don't?"

"No. Hermione, I meant it when I said I don't want to hold back so much anymore. Do you honestly want to pretend that nothing happened?" Ron asked.

"No, I don't want to pretend that nothing happened," she took a breath, "Ron, I don't feel bad for what happened in that room and for what was about to happen. I wanted it." Her heart pounded out of her chest as she slowly revealed the truth.

"I don't feel bad, either. It's the main reason why I couldn't keep being with Lavender. I felt guilty for liking it and for wanting more." He talked as if he was out of breath.

"You wanted more?" she asked in a wheeze.

He nodded. "Yeah, I did."

She could hear ringing in her ears again, and her body was on fire. She was so soaked in sweat and arousal. "I felt the same way. For the first time, I really hated McGonagall."

He laughed nervously. "Yeah, so did I."

Ron gave her a small smile and reached his hand out again. This time, he placed it on her knee. He rubbed his thumb across her skin, and she whimpered slightly. Automatically her body relaxed. His touches were unbelievable. When Cormac had touched her, all she wanted to do was slap it away but with Ron, she wanted him to continue. She wanted him to go higher and touch her everywhere. Hermione's love and sexual desires for Ron were spilling out of her all over the place. She couldn't control it anymore. She placed her hand on top of his.

"Please, don't pull away," she said softly.

He lightly squeezed her knee. "I won't."

She leaned her arm against the wall and rested her head on it. He did the same. "Ron, there's a lot that I need to tell you," she said, gazing at him. Her heart felt like it would give out from beating so fast.

He nodded slowly. "Do you want to talk about it tomorrow? It can just be you and me."

Hermione was not sure if she had something to do but it didn't matter. "Yes, we can talk tomorrow, and I have no problem with it just being us."

He seemed to relax a bit. "Brilliant, so, sometime after breakfast? We can meet somewhere. How about the empty classroom that we went to after that Prefects' meeting?"

"Yes, that sounds great," she said rather hoarsely.

Ron grinned broadly. "O-okay. I'd say tonight but I'm sort of tired."

"It's okay. I'm actually really exhausted. It's been an unbelievably busy week." She looked down at his hand that was still on her knee. She could feel his eyes on her. He ran his nails across her kneecap lightly. The sensations going through her were astounding. One small touch brought so much out of her. She closed her eyes for a second and engulfed the feeling. "That feels so good," she whispered.

"I'm glad that it does. You need some relief every once in a while. You work too hard," he said softly with a smirk.

Hermione bit her lip. She would love for Ron to relieve her for the rest of her life. "Someone has to do it, and I don't mind if it's me."

"You're mental for thinking that, but it's great, too," he said.

Hermione blushed. "Thank you, I suppose. Well, it's mental that you always want to take care of everyone. Ginny is right. Your heart is too big sometimes."

He laughed. "I'll have to work on that."

She shook her head. "Don't," she said gently. They stared at each other. Hermione looked into Ron's eyes and lost herself in his warmth. He was so beautiful and was every bit of goodness and safety in her life. Someone walked past them, and they dropped their gazes.

Ron cleared his throat. "So, tomorrow?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

He looked down at his hand and traced patterns on her knee. Hermione watched and loved the look of his large, freckly, and pale hand against her skin. "W-well, we should go. Come on," he said suddenly. He got up and held out his hand.

Hermione took it and pulled herself up. She wasn't sure of what to say. "So, what are your plans now?"

"I'll try and find McGonagall and talk to her. Hopefully she won't want a note from Pomfrey," he said.

"I'm sure she won't. I think she'll be rather surprised that you would come to talk to her in the first place. It might make her happy," Hermione tried.

He rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I'm sure she'll be proud of me."

She grinned. "She should be. I am."

"Thanks," he said softly.

She couldn't stop herself. She moved closer to him and pulled her arms him. Ron firmly wrapped his around her waist and held her tightly. She closed her eyes and let her body relax and feel secure in his strong and locked embrace. It felt so wonderful to hold him. Everything about Ron completed her. She knew that he was the one for her and the pride in her heart told her that she was the only one for him.

She pulled away slightly and looked up at him. "I should go. I have some work that I need to get finished."

"Okay, but you better not be late tomorrow," he ordered.

"I won't be. Don't worry. Besides, you are the one with a punctuality problem," she cheeked. Once again, they stared at each other. Her body ached to do something. She stood on her toes and kissed his cheek firmly. She tried to put every bit of love and passion into it. Ron held her waist tighter as she did. She moved away, and Ron's face was pink and his eyes were bright.

"I'll see you tomorrow," she whispered.

"Yeah, see you," he whispered back.

Hermione slung her bag over her shoulder and walked away from him. Her knees were shaking and she smiled all the way back to

her room. She almost didn't want to go in. She knew that Lavender was in there and she figured that she would yell and blame her. She took a breath and prepared herself. However, when she opened the door, Lavender wasn't throwing things around or telling Parvati what a bitch she was. No, Lavender was in her bed curled into a ball. She whimpered and bawled. Parvati lay next to her and rubbed her back.

She closed the door quietly, but it was enough to make them notice. Lavender turned to her. Her face was red and her eyes were swollen with tears. However, she didn't look angry. There was sadness in her expression that Hermione had never seen before and it pulled at her heart. Lavender looked like she wanted to say something, but she fell back against the pillow. Parvati wiped her own few tears and went back to holding her.

She quickly changed and settled in her bed. She honestly felt bad for Lavender. She was completely wrong for Ron but Hermione knew she cared about him. She could understand her pain. Losing Ron was the worst pain Hermione could think of ever having to feel. However, as badly as she felt for her, she could not deny her excitement. Tomorrow she would finally talk to Ron about everything. She would finally get her feelings out and hope his were the same. Tomorrow, she could actually get the kiss she should have given him in the office. She held her pillow closely and closed her eyes.

Hermione was ready.

\*\*\*\*Yay! Ron is a "free agent" lol. I don't want to say too much because I don't want to reveal anything but I will say that it wasn't important for me to make this whole dramatic fall out after the breakup. I wanted that for Ginny. I wanted her to be really upset and have this sort of "grieving" period but that's not necessary for Ron. First, in my story, Ginny actually really cares about Dean and Dean's love for Ginny is important to the Harry/Ginny plot. However, it's not like that for Ron. Sure, he liked Lavender and cared about her a bit but it was never anything serious for him. The only girl who could really bring him to tears and feel bad after a breakup would be Hermione. Second, if I had made the breakup a huge deal it would take away from what is going to happen soon.

However, I'll bring out some detail about the breakup in a certain part because it will be important for some other things lol

With that said, you should probably review if you want the next chapter. It's ah yeah

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 25

Thanks for the reviews!

Okay, I keep getting the same couple of comments and many-many private messages and they concern the same ideas, and even though



I keep answering them, I keep getting more, lol. So, I want to sort this out. \*clears throat\*

First, there is an idea that I don't make them "teenager" enough. Maybe it's because I'm only a twenty something year old and I can't see it, but I think they are plenty "teenager." I'm sorry that some of you don't agree. I put a lot of my own teen years and experiences with my friends and family into this but I go by the book as well. I don't mean to sound bitchy, but maybe some people need to re-read the Harry Potter series and remember how the four of them acted and how they handled things. I find it a little insulting how some people keep telling me that they aren't acting "stupid" or "impulsive" enough. I can't agree. Not all teenagers fit the stereotype of being whiny, immature, and oblivious. I don't agree with that at all. Some people are just more mature, more focused. It doesn't mean they are perfect or don't make mistakes; it just means some are better able to handle things and I believe Harry, Hermione, and Ginny are certainly examples. If some people don't think so, please, re-read the books. Now, as for Ron. I love the bloke so much. Yes, he is impulsive and sometimes really immature. I get that. I agree with it. HOWEVER, in many stories with Ron, he's always only like that and it's something that Ron-haters love to feed on. They think he is this incapable of being serious or focused type of person. I have always fought against it. I think with Ron there a balance between his emotional side and his more mature side. I also think that the mature and driven sides of him are not explored or opened up enough. It's certainly there. He has just as much focus and drive as the others; it just takes a bit more to bring it out of him. I have always tried to make him a bit more on that side without him losing his "moody Ron charm." Moreover, when his love for Hermione is involved, and I mean his deep feelings for her, I think that is when he is the most established. Reading Deathly Hallows opened Ron up and he handled his relationship with Hermione in a way we hadn't seen before. There was vast growth and maturity.

Maybe I should have said this from the beginning and I apologize for not doing so. Yes, this story is rather centered around the Half Blood Prince era; HOWEVER, I take what happened throughout the entire series and use those influences for the characters. Therefore, I also dip into the ideas of Deathly Hallows when I write the characters. In fact, the last two books inspire me the most when writing this. I try my best to keep things canon and interesting.

I really do want to make the readers happy. That's why it's important that we talk like this so we are on the same page. I am all about us communicating and I love everyone's feedback and ideas/suggestions, but there are some things that I stand behind 100% and how I write those four is one of those things.

I reckon I just have a different idea about what maturity means. I know plenty of young people who are very mature and I know plenty of adults who need to grow up. There is so much that goes into what defines "maturity" other than just age. So, this is my take on those four teens and I'm bloody proud. I can only hope

that the majority of the readers are as well. I really do try but I also want to stay true to my beliefs and myself.

Second, I also keep getting many-many private messages about how I write my male characters in this story. I am trying very hard to take into account what people are saying to tweak them and make them as honest and true "males" as I can. I take my own writing experience, I ask my male friends, and I refer to the books on how to write people like Ron, Harry, and Dean. I dunno. Maybe I just don't see it once again, but I honestly feel like I do an okay job. I don't consider myself a writing expert. I don't pretend that I know all the inner working of the male mind either. I can't. I'm a girl, lol. However, I try my best and I think I know these males well enough to where I can serve them a bit of justice. I am really sorry that some people can't see that. It's not as if I'm trying to make the male characters any less strong and dynamic as the female characters. It is certainly not a conscious decision. I love Ron and Harry and I want to treat them the right way.

All I can say is that the story is far from over and I will do my best to improve. There is still plenty of growing and changing that the main four characters have to go through and I have so much in store for them and new ideas come to me every day. I will be growing and changing along with this story and the characters. There are still plenty of bumps and curves that the four have to encounter and with every line, I will try harder. So, keep faith in me! I keep asking for patience and I'm going to ask for it again.

Cheers.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Are you going to eat or just look around frantically all morning?" Harry whispered in her ear.

Hermione turned her attention to him. "I'm looking for him, Harry."

"I told you. I think he's still asleep. When I got up, his curtains were closed," he said.

"I don't know why he would be asleep. He's the one who told me not to be late," she said. Hermione was a ball of nerves and anxiousness. All night she had thought about what she would say to Ron and what would happen.

"Well, Ron is normal. He told you after breakfast, so for him it means after breakfast. For someone like you, it means right when breakfast starts," he cheeked.

She lightly swatted his arm. "Oh, leave me alone. I'm just anxious. All the waiting is getting to me."

"It's understandable. It's a big day. I'm really happy for you, Hermione," Harry said with a smile.

Hermione did not want to be too affected by his words but she was. She was excited as well. "Yes, I just hope that it goes well and that he shows up."

Parvati came to the table and scooped some breakfast sandwiches into a napkin. "Hungry?" Neville asked.

She rolled her eyes. "It's not just for me. Lavender doesn't want to come down, but I told her that she has to eat. So, I'm bringing her some food. Is that okay with you?"

Neville blushed a bit. "Sorry, I didn't know."

"Well, now you do," she spat before walking off. Hermione looked after her and felt a bit of guilt.

"How was Lavender last night?" Harry asked.

She looked to him but noticed that most of the table and other sixth years were looking at her as well. "W-well, she cried a lot. I haven't really seen her this morning. She was still in bed when I got up. I don't know. You're better off asking Parvati."

Seamus smirked. "Yeah, I reckon you are all broken up about it. Aren't you, Hermione?"

"Shut up, Seam. I'm sure that Lavender feels bad enough without us talking about her," Dean snapped.

Seamus's composure changed. "You're right. I'm sorry."

"Whatever, I'll see you later," Dean said. He got up from the table and stormed off.

Even more guilt seeped into her. She turned to Harry again. He looked just as guilty. "Do you want to get out of here?" she asked.

"Yeah," Harry said quietly. They quickly left the hall and walked around the castle.

"Has Dean tried talking to you?" she asked.

"No, and I'm trying to stay out of his way. I know that he blames me or at least finds me somewhat responsible," Harry explained. "I reckon he's right. Shit, I feel really bad."

"I do, too. I feel awful for Dean and for Lavender," Hermione said.

He gave her a look. "You feel bad for Lavender?"

"I know it sounds strange, but I do. She looks horrible. Sure, I have never wanted her with Ron, but she does care about him and I know how she must feel. I don't actually want her hurting like this. I don't know what I thought would happen when you and I started this. I feel extremely thick. How could Dean and Lavender not get hurt in the process?" she asked.

Harry ran a hand through his hair and seemed just as torn as she felt. "I know. I've been thinking about that, too. I hate what Dean and Lavender are going through, butâ€¦what else were we supposed to do?"

Hermione turned away. Yes, she wanted justification for what they did, but it was not easy to accept. "I guess you're right."

"Look, don't worry about it right now. You need to think about what you're going to say to Ron," Harry urged.

"The truth. I'm going to tell him about my feelings and what I have always felt. There really isn't anything else that I can say. All I can do is say my part and listen to his. That's what I'm most worried about," she said.

"You shouldn't be. Everything is going to work out. Ron is going to tell you what you need to hear."

"I hope so," she said.

Harry smiled. "Don't worry. Just make sure that you come up for air after all the talking is over with."

"I doubt that will happen, but I won't make you any promises. There's a lot of time that needs to be made up for," she said with a blush.

"Figures," Harry said, rolling his eyes.

"Well, I'm going to head to the classroom. If you see Ron, tell him I'm in there," she said.

"I will." He reached out and hugged her. She held him back. "Good luck. No matter what happens, I'm here."

"Okay, thank you," she said.

Harry pulled away. "Be gentle with my best mate."

She laughed. "I'll try. See you." She walked away but gave Harry one more smile before turning the corner.

Hermione quickly opened the classroom door and made her spot by the window. She pulled out her notes and decided to get some studying done. There was no point in doing nothing while she waited. She ran a hand through her hair and suddenly wished that she had brought a mirror. She never usually cared about what she looked like but for some reason she wanted to appear a bit more presentable. She sighed and decided to deal with it. She wouldn't risk it. She didn't want to leave and end up missing Ron.

She opened a book and began reading. However, it was hard for her to concentrate. She was so excited and nervous. She was also incredibly happy. She could not believe everything was happening and that everything was happening now. Harry was right. She couldn't think about Lavender and Dean right now. She had to

focus on her life and her desires. Almost an hour past and Hermione began to get worried. She wondered if Ron had changed his mind.

Finally, the door opened. She looked up and her heart skipped a beat. It was Ron. She closed her book. "Hey, I was wondering if maybe you had changed your mind."

He closed the door and walked over to her. His face was rather pale and his eyes looked tired. "Yeah," was all he said.

She looked him over. "Is something wrong?"

He ran a hand through his hair. "I don't know. It was hard for me to get to sleep."

"Same here," she said with a smile. He did not return it. She stood up and moved a bit closer to him. "Ron, what's the matter?"

He let out a shaky breath and shook his head. "I'm not sure."

"Tell me about it," she said.

He continued to shake his head. "I don't know if I can." His voice was low, and she didn't like the darkness in his eyes.

"Ron, you're scaring me. Tell me what's wrong," she said. Her heart pounded rapidly. She didn't know what was happening. She figured that Ron was about to tell her that he really did just want to be friends. It was all a mistake.

Ron stuffed his hands deeply into his pockets. "I've been thinking about if I should even bring this up."

"Bring what up, Ron?" she said impatiently.

He pulled his hand out of his pocket and handed her a folded piece of parchment. She took it and opened it. She knew what it was by the handwriting. It was a letter from Krum. He wrote it to her two years ago. "Ron, where did you get this?"

"It fell out of your bag when you dumped your stuff out yesterday. I saw the envelope and just took it," he confessed.

"Why would you do that?" she asked. "It wasn't yours to take."

He rolled his eyes. "Please. Don't give me that shit right now."

"Ron! You took my letter. W-why?" she asked. She was a mixture of aggravation and worry. She didn't know if she should have been angrier that he took her letter or more nervous that he knew something was off about it.

He rubbed his neck. "I dunno. I just wanted to know what he said. Harry gets to read them so I didn't think that it would be a problem. I was curious but that doesn't even matter. Hermione, why do you still have it? Is he still your boyfriend?"

"No, Ron, he isn't," she said softly. A small pit grew in her stomach. She became even angrier. It never occurred to her that she had old letters in her bag. Her laziness kept her from cleaning out her bag and now she was paying the price for it.

"I don't understand. Why would you keep an old letter of his?" he asked.

"What?" she said stupidly, coming out of her thoughts. She was so scared and angry with herself that she couldn't focus.

Ron pointed to the letter. "The date on the envelope is recent but the one in the note isn't. I don't understand," he said.

Hermione did not know what to say. Panic settled in and mixed terribly with her other emotions. She didn't know how to answer his question. She wasn't prepared for it. It never occurred to her that Ron would make that connection or find out about the letters in the first place. She never once thought about what she would say to him if he ever found out.

"Ron, I-I can explain," she said slowly. She actually had no idea how she would.

"Please do because I'm really fucking confused right now, Hermione," he said.

She hated the tone in his voice. She dug into her mind and tried to find something, but all she could think of was the truth. She took a breath. "Ron, you're right. It is old. The date in the letter is the right one," she said.

Ron opened his mouth but said nothing. He frowned and rubbed his neck again. He seemed completely confused. "But-but why is the one on the envelope different? Is it some sort of thing you two have? You two send each other new and old letters? Is it some sort of love game?"

"No, Ron, that's not it. There are no love games between me and Viktor." Hermione didn't want to explain it to him. She felt absolutely nothing for Viktor Krum and everything in the world for Ron, but instead of telling Ron about her feelings, she now had to tell him about what happened. She had to reveal the truth.

Ron took her hand. "Hermione, if you're trying to cover up your relationship with him, then don't. I need to know what is going on. Are you still seeing him? You two have been writing each other all year."

Hermione couldn't take hearing Ron talk about Viktor, and it hurt feeling his hand on hers. She couldn't stand him believing that she wanted Krum and not him. It was all too much. There was no way out. There was no way that she could lie her way out, but she did not want to. She had to tell him the truth. She had no choice. He deserved honesty. "Ron, stop it. You're wrong," she said. She pulled her hand away.

He frowned at her gesture. "What am I wrong about?"

She looked into his eyes. She could see the slight fear in the beautiful blueness. She loved Ron more than anything else in the entire world. She had to be honest with him. She let out a shaky breath. "The letter is old because Viktor hasn't written me since the end of fifth year."

He gave her a look. "What are you talking about? He's your boyfriend. Why wouldn't he write to you?"

"No, he is not my boyfriend. He never has been, and he never will be. There are no new letters from him, Ron," she said.

He shook his head. "But-but I've seen the letters. He's been writing to you all year."

A pang hit her chest. The weakness in Ron's voice killed her. "No, he hasn't. All of those letters are old but the dates on the envelopes have been updated. I don't talk to Krum anymore. I don't care about him at all, and I'm sure that he doesn't care about me," she said.

The confusion painted on Ron's face only increased. "So, why would you fake those letters? Why would you take them like you've never read them before?" he asked.

She dreaded the question, but she had to answer it. "I faked them to make you believe that we were writing each other and that we were dating."

A bit of color rose on his neck and his eyes grew. "Why...why would you want me to think that?"

"To make you jealous," she said quietly.

His jaw dropped. "What? You wanted to make me jealous. What for? Why is that important?"

Her heart beat so fast that it hurt. She also felt her knees shake and her stomach flip over. She had no idea how to stop the conversation or how to turn back time. She was trapped in her own lies with no way out. "It-it was a part of my idea. A part of my,"

"Plan?" Ron helped. His voice was incredibly soft. She bit her lip and nodded. She couldn't speak. "So, you've had a plan all year to make me jealous? You've wanted me to think that you were dating Krum all this time. Is this some weird thing that you get off to?"

Hermione blushed. The viciousness in his voice was something that he reserved for people who wronged him or made him extremely angry. She never thought that it would be used against her. "No. Ron, it's not like that. I didn't do it solely to make you jealous. I-I thought that maybe that with you being with Lavender-"

"What does she have to do with this?" he interrupted.

"Nothing and everything. Ron, I thought bringing Krum back into my life or at least making you think that he was would influence the way you saw Lavender." Saying it out loud made her feel ill. It sounded horrible and incredibly unintelligent.

"I don't understand. You wanted to make me jealous so that I'd break up with Lavender? This was a plan to get me to leave her?" he asked loudly.

"Please, let me explain it to you. You're getting it all wrong," she said. She could feel the lump in her throat form. It burned all through her body and made her feel weak.

"Hermione, how am I getting this wrong? You have lied to me about Krum all year so that I would feel jealous and breakup with Lavender. Is there anything else that I do not know about? What about..." he asked.

"Ron," Hermione started. She didn't think that she had the strength to bring up Cormac.

"Wait a minute." Ron's eyes grew even bigger. The sickness in her stomach amplified and the burning throughout her body spread. She knew what was coming next. "Hermione, no, do not tell me. Was Cormac apart of your plan?"

She could see the disgust in his face and the horror. She had no choice but to reveal everything now. "Ron," she started again.

"No, please, Hermione, please. Please don't tell me," he begged. The color in his face paled and disappeared.

Her bottom lip trembled. "Yes, he was."

Ron stomped his foot and pulled at his hair a little. "Fucking damnit, Hermione! You mean to tell me that you went to the ball with him just to make me jealous? You pretended to shag him to hurt me?"

"No! I mean, yes. I meanâ€¦ Ron, I never meant to hurt you. I didn't think that it would bother you so much," she tried to explain.

"That is a load of fucking bollocks and you know it! You know how I feel about him and how he feels about me. Don't pretend like you had no idea!" he yelled.

"I'm being honest. If I would have known, then I never would have gone. I didn't pretend to do anything with him. I told you that I didn't. I told anyone who asked me that I did not do anything with him. It was never my intention to. I justâ€¦ I wanted to get away. I wanted to try." The lump in her throat cracked, and the tears began to spill out of her eyes. She hastily wiped them away. She didn't want to cry in front of him. She wanted to be strong and explain everything to him. She had to.



Ron's face softened and he automatically reached his hand out as if he was going to wipe her tears away, but he quickly pulled back and hardened his expression. "Try and get away from what?"

She took a moment and chose her words carefully. "I had to get away from you and Lavender. It was never about doing anything with Cormac. I never wanted to go with him in the first place. I don't fancy him at all."

Her explanation did not seem to make Ron feel any better. If anything, more confusion and anger grew on his face. "Hermione, what is your problem? Why would you do all of that if you never fancied him in the first place? Is it that important to make me jealous and to make me breakup with Lavender? Was there some bet? Did you just want to see how long she and I could go before we drove each other mad?"

"No, it's not like that. What we-"

"We? What do you mean, we?" Ron interrupted.

"I mean me. I meant to say I," she rushed. A chill ran through her. She had actually let herself slip.

"No, you said we. That's what you meant. Hermione, who else was a part of this?" he asked.

Hermione shook her head. "No one was. I didn't mean to say that." He stared at her, and she looked away. She feared that Ron would be able to see the truth in her eyes. They were silent for a while.

"Hermione, was Harry in on this?" he finally asked.

"No, he wasn't," she said firmly. There was no way that she would bring Harry into this. Nonetheless, she knew that Ron would put the pieces together.

He saw right through her. "Don't lie to me. He was in on this, wasn't he?" She stayed silent and kept her gaze on the floor. Everything was falling apart. "Hermione, he read the letters. He stood right next to me and read them but he never let me see a single one. He also knew about you going to the dance with Cormac. Fucking hell, he told me about it and even seemed happy that you were going with him. Harry knew everything. He has known everything all this time. He had to know. You two did this together!"

"No, it's not like that!" she urged. She did not want Ron to talk anymore. The way he said it made it sound as if she and Harry had created some conspiracy or vendetta against him. It wasn't what she wanted. It was never what she asked for. It couldn't be true.

Ron ignored her. "Did you two start a game? Did you want to see how long it would take me to realize that everyone was right about Lavender and me? There must be nothing better than for you to know that you're right. Is that what this was really about?"

Hermione Granger always having to be right about every bloody thing?" The edge in his voice dwindled and broke.

"No, Ron! That is not what this was for! I'm sorry. I am so sorry!" she wailed. Her entire body felt hollow, and it was growing increasingly hard to breathe. She couldn't stop the tears. They poured out of her.

Ron acted as if her apologies meant nothing to him. "Did you tell Harry everything? Was it all planned out from the beginning?"

Hermione wiped her eyes, but it didn't help. "Ron, please, listen to me. It wasn't all planned out."

He glared. "So, how much of it was? Did you switch off lying every other day?"

She exhaled deeply. "No, it wasn't like that."

"Hermione, did you pretend that—that you liked me touching you all those times and saying those things to you so I would do it more? Was it something that you and Harry laughed about afterwards?" His voice was void of all power and strength. It was all because of her.

"No, Ron, everything that ever happened between us was real. I wanted and meant everything. It's just the Krum and Cormac ideas that we made up. I never lied about the other things or my feelings. Those things happened because we made them happen. You have to believe me. I—I would never have to pretend to enjoy you touching me. I like it so much and everything you have said—all those sweet things—they meant the world to me. They still do. Please, believe it." She felt out of breath and a bit lightheaded.

He closed his eyes for a moment as if he was taking in her words but when he opened them, he did not look any better. "Why do I have to believe you? Do you honestly expect me to take your word now? You and Harry have been lying to me all year. The two of you have been tricking me and making me feel like an idiot since school began."

"It was never my intention. I never wanted to hurt you," she said.

"How fucking thick do you think I am? It had to be your intention. If you were not trying to hurt me, then what were you trying to do? Did you want me to leave Lavender so she would feel miserable? Was this about getting back at her for something?" he asked.

"No! This wasn't about trying to hurt her. To be honest, I never thought about what you leaving her would do to her," she said.

"How could that be?" he asked.

She took a breath. "Ron, this isn't about you breaking up with Lavender, not entirely."

"Oh, I know it's not. You wanted to make me feel like a fucking tosser in the process!" he yelled.

She could feel her own anger sizzle. He was wrong about everything. "No, listen to me! I thought that by making you jealousâ€|by making you think that I was interested in other guys, thatâ€|that you would realize your real feelings for both me and Lavender and that maybe, you'd see that you made a mistake."

"You wanted me to see that I made a mistake?" he asked.

"I know it sounds wrong but, yes. It wasn't about trying to hurt you or her," Hermione explained.

He shook his head and shrugged. "Well, Hermione, you don't have to lie and trick me to make me to realize that. I already knew that I made a mistake. I knew from the very beginning that I made the biggest fucking mistake of my life dating Lavender. What you and Harry did was something else. You two wanted me to feel like shit and hate myself for being stupid and a coward! I don't need your fucking help with that! I can actually manage it just fine by myself."

His words made bile rise in her throat. It made her nauseas hearing Ron talk about himself in such a way. "Stop it! Please, don't ever say that! I would never want you to feel that way. I would never want to make you feel bad about yourself. God, Ron, I didn't want you to be hurt. I just wanted you to realize."

"Realize what?" he demanded.

She felt her entire body tremble. For so long she had thought about how she would tell him, and she never imagined it like this. "I wanted you to realize that maybe-maybe you liked me."

He blushed and his eyes enlarged. "By lying?"

"I didn't know what else to do, Ron," she confessed.

"So, lying was your only choice?" he asked.

"The truth isn't that simple. It's been really hard for me, Ron. I was scared," she said.

"What do you have to be afraid of?" he asked.

"Of telling you how I really feel. I've been so scared to tell youâ€|how much I like you." She could hear her heart beating. It was horribly loud in her ears. The nerves took complete control of her body.

"Don't," Ron whispered.

"What?" Hermione said.

"Don't. Don't you dare try and use that," he said softly.

"Ron, I'm not using anything," she said.

"No. Stop it. You can't say this to me. Whatever speech you prepared for this, just forget it," he spat.

Her eyes filled with tears again. "There's no speech. Please, Ron, let me tell you."

"No, I don't want to hear it. Stop lying!" he said.

"I'm not lying! This is exactly what I was going to tell you today. It's what I have wanted to tell you since I was fourteen. I want you to hear how I feel, and I want to know how you feel. Ron, it's the truth!" she said.

"How dare you? Why are you doing this to me?" He rubbed his eyes. They there slowly fogging.

"I'm not doing anything! I'm telling you how I feel!" She wanted so badly to hold him. She hated that she was hurting someone who meant so much to her.

"And what do you expect me to say, huh? What do you want from me after all this? You can't just choose now to be honest. You can't lie day after day and then demand honesty from me. It's not fair," he said in a trembling voice.

"I know it's not. I'm sorry, but I have to. Ron, I want the truth. Tell me how you feel," she sobbed.

"It doesn't mean anything. It doesn't matter what I feel," he whispered.

"Of course it does! It means everything. I'm so sorry for what I did but it doesn't change how I feel. Just tell me!" she demanded.

He pulled at his hair again. "What the fuck do you want to hear? Do you want me to say that I feel the same way? Fine, I do. What I feel—what I feel."

"Yes?" Hermione said.

He took a step back. "No, no, I'm not doing this. You don't get to do this to me."

She took his hand. "Ron, please, it doesn't have to be this way."

He snatched it right back just as coldly as he had done with Lavender. "You're right. It doesn't. You didn't have to do what you did."

"But, Ron, you have to understand. I—"

"SHUT UP! I do not want to hear it anymore. Stop fucking throwing it in my face!" he yelled.

Hermione stood her ground even though she felt minutes away from collapsing. "Stop throwing what in your face? Is it bothering you that I'm being honest? You are giving me such a hard time for lying, well, I'm not right now. Ron, I am trying to tell you how I feel. Do you not feel the same way? Is that why you are really upset?"

Red flashed in his eyes. "Why are you trying to turn this around? There's no way that you can make this about me. You know why I'm acting like this. I have every right."

"I am only trying to get something-"

"I'm fucking sorry that I dated Lavender, okay! I'm sorry, Hermione. I didn't know that dating her would anger to the point where you would need to seek revenge. I didn't know. I'm sorry. There. Is that what you are trying to get out of me?" he asked.

"You're not listening to me. You aren't understanding any of this," she said.

"No, I am. You like me but I ended up dating someone else. So, you lied to me and tried to make me jealous and miserable all year. That sounds like revenge to me. You can't say that's not what you did," he said.

Hermione didn't know what to say. She knew that he was wrong, but the way he said it aloud made her plan seem vicious. "Ron, it wasn't like that. It was about the pain. It was never about revenge. Stop saying that it was."

He moved a bit closer to her. "What pain? Hermione, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry that I went out with her, but I was not intentionally trying to hurt you."

"I know you weren't," she whispered.

"Then why would you feel the need to hurt me?" he asked.

"Stop saying that! Ron, I was not trying to hurt you! I was trying to help you. I was trying to help us!" she screamed.

"Lying and tricking me doesn't help. Hermione, I know that I'm not the smartest or the quickest, but I realized, okay. I broke up with her. It wasn't right away like it should have been but it happened." He took a moment and let out a shaky breath. "I realized that dating her didn't change how I felt about you. It's too strong. I realized it and I did something about it. Why couldn't that have been enough? Why is what I do never enough?"

Ron's words warmed her body but stung her heart. "Ron, you are enough, but I was terrified. I was terrified that you might actually love her. I had no idea what you felt for me, and I was too afraid to ask. I was too afraid of hearing that you didn't want me. Are you telling me that you haven't been scared?"

"Of course I've been scared but it doesn't excuse anything. I know that I should have said something. I know that I fucked up, but I didn't make a plan to hurt you," he said.

"Then why were you with Lavender? If you honestly have liked me the whole time, then what was all that for?" she demanded.

"I was trying to move on! I thought that you wanted Harry, so I tried to move on. I have always thought that you wanted him, and I knew that I had to let go. That is why I started dating Lavender. She's nice and I knew that she fancied me. Then when you started your letters with Krum, I figured that you moved on to him," he explained.

"What? Harry? Ron, I-"

"So, I let my guard down completely," he interrupted, "and I really tried to be with her. I dated Lavender to help myself. I thought she could make me happy. I just wanted to do something for myself for once but I guess I can't even do that. No matter what choice I make, it's the wrong one. I've been confused all year because of what you were doing. How could you do this to me, Hermione?"

She had feared the phrase ever since starting the game with Harry. She lost it completely. "Because I love you and not just as a friend. I'm in love with you, and I want you so much. Ron, I want us to be more than friends. I know that I should have told you but I couldn't. I know that I shouldn't have lied but I did. However, it was never to hurt you. I did it so that maybe I could get you to realize that you want me."

Ron opened his mouth but turned away from her. When he turned back around, his face was pale. "You don't have to make me realize anything, Hermione. I already know that I want you. I've known for a long time. I thought that you loved Harry and then next thing I knew Krum was back in your life, and then you brought Cormac in after that. What was I supposed to think? You went from one hero to the next."

Hermione felt incredibly faint. Hearing Ron's words filled her up in a way she never experienced before. It was overwhelming. "Ron, I don't care about things like that," she wheezed.

"Yeah? Well, when you pretend that you do I have no choice but to believe it. You can't pretend to fancy someone else but then tell me that you love me and that you want me. How would that help us?" he asked.

She didn't know what to do. Ron was right yet again. "I don't know. I don't know what I thought would happen."

"You didn't think at all. The only thing you cared about was making me feel like shit and guilty for trying to be happy," he said.

"No, I do want you to be happy. I was just hoping that it could be with me. Ron, I meant what I said yesterday and what I said just now. There's so much that I need to tell you," she said.

"Don't give me that rubbish. I reckon that none of it involves the whole truth. Did you ever plan to tell me or were you just hoping that you could get away with lying to me?" he asked.

"Iâ€¦I don't know," she whispered. She actually knew the answer. She would have never told him about her plan.

Ron rolled his eyes. "I think you do. You were just going to go on and let me feel like a fucking idiot. I'm sorry to ruin it, but I'm not that stupid. I'm also not stupid enough to believe your lies."

"Don't you dare, Ron. Don't you dare say that my feelings are lies," she snapped.

"How could they not be? You can't say that you love me and then lie and try to hurt me. It's bullshit," he said.

"I told you that it was never my intention, and it was never my intention to hurt you," she said.

"Stop saying that. It's a bloody lie," he said.

Someone snapped in side of her. She could not take it any longer. "No, you stop it! Stop telling me that I don't love you! You have no idea. You have no idea, Ron, what it has been like. You have no idea what it feels likeâ€¦to hurt a little more every day. All I want is you. I've wanted you for so long and seeing you with Lavender hurt me so badly. When I found out that you were with her, I felt like I lost everything. I know that you didn't mean to cause me pain but you did. I felt my chest cave in a little more every time she kissed you and every time you touched her. I-I felt like I was dying."

All of Ron's fierceness faded. "Hermione..."

She shook her head. "You have no idea what that is like. I love you more than anything else in the world and being without you kills me. Knowing that you were somewhere with Lavender when we should have been together hurt everything inside of me. I had to do something. I had to make the pain go away. I know it's selfish and wrong, but I never meant for any of this to happen. I never meant to cause you pain or make you feel insecure. You have no reason to be. There was never anyone else. Ron, do you understand what I am saying? I just wanted to stop feeling the pain. I wanted to stop hurting." She felt dizzy and exhausted from letting the truth out. The heavy bricks that were fused to her shoulders crumbled and fell to the floor. It was liberating but not healing.

They simply stared at each other. She shook and wheezed but Ron was still. He did not move or take his eyes off her. She didn't know what he was thinking or if he even had heard her. "Ron," she started uncertain.

"Why are you telling me this now?" he asked quietly.

"What?" she said breathlessly.

His chest heaved rapidly. "Why are you saying all of this? Why are you making me do this now?"

"What am I making you do, Ron?" she asked.

His bottom lip trembled, and he wiped his eyes. "It's not fucking supposed to be like this."

"I know it's not," she sobbed.

He gazed at her heavily. "Look, I'm sorry that I made you feel that pain. I'm really sorry, but it doesn't change anything. You tricked and lied to me all year. You and Harry played a game to purposely make me feel like a fool. You manipulated me."

"Ron, no, it's not like that. I did it out of love, not spite," she said. Hermione could not believe that even after her declaration, Ron still did not believe her. He still did not understand.

"Hermione, if lying and playing games is how you show that you love me, then I don't think I want you to." His voice was so gentle that she could barely hear, but it was loud enough to make her brain freeze.

"What are you saying?" she asked shakily.

"I-I don't think I want you to love me if this is how it feels. I don't want it, Hermione. It's not right. What you did isn't right. No matter what, you are still supposed to be my friend. You are supposed to be my best friend. You have always been someone that I've looked up to on how to treat people. I can't believe that you could do this to me. I can't believe you could do this to our friendship." His voice cracked but he stood his ground.

Hermione could barely breathe. A terrible pulsation hit her chest. "Ron," she started.

"Don't bother, I don't want this. I'm so sorry, Hermione," he whispered. He walked away from her and left the room.

Hermione held her stomach. It hurt tremendously. She fell back against the wall and collapsed to the ground. She lay on the floor and held herself tighter. She let her tears fall. They came out harder and rougher with every vicious sob. "Ow," she whimpered in pain. Her entire body throbbed, and she felt so cold. Her heart literally dropped and broke. Every breath came out in sharp, agonizing pant. She was lightheaded and everything stung. She never believed that hearts could literally break but hers did.



She was so disappointed in herself. Ron was right. What she and Harry did was wrong. Still, it didn't make the pain go away. She had been so close but lost it all. She felt stupid and mean but most of all she felt pain. She lost Ron and the feeling was excruciating. Her worst fears came to life. She did not have Ron. She would end up like Dean and like Lavender. She was like them already but worse.

It was all her fault.

\*\*\*\*Yeah, we all knew this was coming. I was thinking about holding off a little longer but I needed this to happen now. It really tore me up to write it but it is necessary. This had to come out and it had to come out now.

I believe in Ron/Hermione with everything I have. I don't believe any other couple in the series love as beautifully and deeply as they do. Therefore, by the same hand, their fights should be just as passionate. Sure, they bicker and have small tiffs all the time but major fights between them should feel and be major. All their thoughts and feelings for each other are laid out and everything they feel while yelling at each other is extreme. They love each other so much so their arguments should feel that way. It should be emotional and powerful. It is what they deserve. Their relationship would not be as emotional as it is if they simply yelled and threw their hands in the air like it didn't matter. No, it is deeper than that. You can tell that it is killing Ron to say the things that he did and it is easy to see what it is doing to Hermione. Therefore, I am proud with the way it came out. I wanted it to be brutal because of everything they feel for each other and everything that will come out of it.

I think Ron's reaction is good too. Ron already wears his emotions on his sleeves and he is a moody and emotional bloke, so, him finding out about it all just overwhelmed him and set him off. He is shocked, confused, hurt, angry, a bit embarrassed but also a tad relieved. I did not want him to simply react. No, I wanted him to lose it. I think he has to lose it for him to realize some things and take certain actions later. Plus, he's even more torn because he wants to be mad at Hermione and stand up for himself, but he also wants to react to what Hermione told him. He is extremely proud but all he has ever wanted is Hermione and to hear her say that she wants him and is in love with him is lifting his spirits but tearing him down as well because of the lies. He wants to hold her, forgive her, and tell her that he loves her too but he can't. It doesn't help that her accomplice was Harry. That makes everything even worse in Ron's case and makes him even more upset. Right now, he has to be angry. He has to take it all in. This is how Ron operates. He takes in the information, lets it sit, figures some things out, and then finds his solution. He has to blow up first and get his anger out. I let him do it. He has the right. Besides, I need it to be this way so when things happen, it will be worth the angst.

So, from here on out, I'm not going to follow the same Hermione, Harry, Hermione, Harry idea in terms of chapters. It will be more of whatever I think is necessary for the story. So, one person may have a few chapters in a row and things like that. It will

still be pretty balanced and whatnot but just not back and forth so much anymore. With that, thanks for reading. I hope everyone is okay with this. I really do. I'm pretty proud of this chapter. I think it's beautiful. If you want to know where everything goes from here, REVIEW!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 26

First, I just want to say thanks to everyone who stands behind me and had such nice things to say about my writing. You all have no idea how much it means to me, so thank you all! Second, thank you for the reviews! You all are brilliant!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry walked back to his room with a smile on his face. He was so happy for Hermione and Ron. After ages of them both wondering and believing that their love was not returned, they now were opening up and revealing the truth. He couldn't wait for them to come back hand in hand or even mouth to mouth. He wouldn't mind. They deserved it. However, when he opened the door to his dorm his smile faded a bit. Dean was sitting on his bed and staring at his football poster. He had not been alone with Dean since their training session. He didn't want to disturb him but he knew he could not keep avoiding him. Therefore, he closed the door behind him and tried not to make any noise. It didn't work. Dean pulled his eyes from the poster and looked at him.

"Hey," Dean said softly.

"Hi," Harry said, sitting on his own bed and pulling out his game book. There was no way that he could get any work done, but he at least wanted to appear as if he was doing something. Dean looked away and continued to stare at the poster. Harry could almost hear the sadness drip from him. He had to say something. Dean was always the one in the dorm with a wide smile and a clever joke. Now, he seemed drained of all the things that made him the brilliant Dean Thomas that he was and he felt completely responsible.

"I'm sorry for what happened at breakfast. You were absolutely right. It was insensitive for me to ask about Lavender," he said.

Dean shrugged. "Yeah, but I might of overreacted. Honestly, I've been a little curious about the situation, too. I was actually thinking about going to find her so I could talk to her."

Harry raised an eyebrow. Sure, Dean was a nice bloke, but he never really seemed to be friends with Lavender. In fact, he sometimes had given Ron a hard time for dating her. "Why?" he asked.

He got up and walked over to him. He sat on Ron's bed and exhaled deeply. "Because I know what she's going through. My girlfriend just ended our relationship or did you forget?"

Harry looked away for a moment. "That was stupid of me to ask. I'm sorry, Dean."

"Stop apologizing for everything, Harry. It isn't your fault," Dean said.

However, Harry could tell by the darkness in his eyes that he did not truly believe that. "Listen about Ginny...I know how much she means to you. and I know how much you mean to her. I'm sorry. I don't think I've told you that."

"No, you haven't. In fact, you have been avoiding me at every turn. Harry, when Ginny left me she told me that it wasn't your fault. She said it was something that she had to do to preserve our friendship. Why would she need to say that? Why would she need to bring you into the conversation?" Dean asked.

He felt extremely uncomfortable. "I don't know. She probably knew that you would blame me. Isn't that what you are doing now?"

Dean smirked at his slight cheek. "Nice, Harry, but no. The only person that I have to blame is myself. I held her too tightly and now she's gone. I don't know if I will ever be able to get her back."

Harry tapped his fingers on his knee and tried to understand Dean's words. "Get her back?"

"Yeah, well, I don't plan to give up on someone I love? I do plan on getting her back. I know that Ginny is angry and whatnot now, but maybe it won't always be like this. She told me that she wants space and time alone, and I'm going to give it to her. She still cares about me, and I don't think that she'll be looking for some other bloke anytime soon. I may still have a chance," Dean explained with a bit of hope in his voice.

It tore at Harry's insides. He couldn't believe that Dean still thought that he could be with Ginny. Dean had no idea that Ginny really left him for good and that the next set of arms she would embrace would be his. "Sure," was all he was able to say.

"Anyway, it's not all that I can talk to Lavender about. I know how hard it must have been for her to date Ron," Dean said.

"Why would it be hard to date Ron?" Harry asked tensely. He didn't care about how gutted Dean was. There was no way that he would allow him to talk about Ron in any negative way.

"No, not like that, Harry. I just meanâ€¦I know how hard it is to date a Weasley," Dean said softly.

"Dean, what are you talking about?" Harry asked.

Dean sighed and stared right at him. "Harry, I'm not a tit. I know that Ron fancies Hermione, and she wants him just as much, I reckon. I've known it for years and a lot of other people have, too, but for whatever reason they didn't get together. It didn't stop people from thinking that it just had to be those two

together, though. I reckon Lavender knew about it going into the relationship. She knew what she was up against when Ron picked her and not Hermione. I was the same way with Ginny."

Harry knew where the speech was going and he didn't want to hear it. "Dean-

"No, let me finish. You, Ron, Hermione, and Ginny have thisâ€¦thing. I mean everyone knows about the Golden Trio but Ginny is in there, too. The four of you are this untouchable force and if anyone else tries to get in, everything goes to shit," Dean explained.

"That is not true, Dean," Harry said. He didn't know who Dean could come up with something so mental. He never once thought about how others saw the four of them and perceived their relationship. He wondered if other people shared Dean's delusion.

Dean chuckled. "It is, Harry. From day one, everyone gave Lavender shit for dating Ron and gave Ron shit for dating her. Even I did. I thought that he should have been with Hermione. It was wrong of me to make Lavender and Ron feel bad for being together. I shouldn't have. I know what she went through. Everyone thought that Ginny should be with you. I knew how much she loved you, but it didn't matter. I wanted her, so I went for it. I reckon that it was stupid of me. The Weasleys' already have their assigned mates."

The anger in Harry's body grew and exploded. "You know what? Fuck you, Dean. Don't sit there and pretend to know what's going on. You have no idea what is happening or what has happened between Ron and Hermione. There's no mutiny, and there's no assignment. They have always loved each other. They just had some problems but they are working them out. Ron never meant to hurt Lavender and neither did Hermione. She did not force anything on Ron. He had his own feelings."

"This isn't just about Ron and Hermione," Dean said.

"Yeah, I know. As for Ginny and me, don't pretend to know our situation either. You don't. I didn't force her to leave you. Her feelings come directly from her heart. Ron and Ginny are their own people and are capable of making their own decisions. Don't blame Hermione and me for being friends with them. I know that I am tired of feeling bad for being good friends with Ginny, and I know Hermione is tired of feeling guilty because Ron cares about her. We are both really sorry, and we feel badly for you and Lavender, but that is as far as it goes." He finally stopped talking and exhaled. He was shaking a little. It felt so good to stand up to Dean and say what was on his mind. Harry was just so tired of it all.

Dean's eyes narrowed. "Accept what, Harry? That's the problem, isn't it. What am I supposed to accept in terms of you and Ginny? What is going on?"

He wanted to tell Dean that he had to accept that Ginny didn't want him. He had to realize that Harry was meant to have her.

That was what Dean needed to accept. However, as open and brave as he was feeling, he couldn't tell Dean that. He knew that it was up to Ginny to tell him. So, he simply shrugged and looked down stupidly. Dean stood up. "Yeah, I figured." He walked out of the room and slammed the door.

Harry's nerves jumped all through his body. He had to calm down. He was trying so hard to be understanding, but there was only so much he could do. He had no idea what would happen when he started dating Ginny. He could hear the yelling that would come from Dean already. It was horrible. He wanted to talk to Ginny. He wanted her to tell Dean now. He was sick of waiting and being polite. Ginny's love for Dean and his pathetic friendship with Dean were the only reasons why he was still able to keep it together. However, all his effort was fading. He had to do something to clear his mind.

He got up and pulled out his broom and polish. He knew a spell to shine it automatically, but he felt it was better if he used his hands and his muscle. Some things were just better by hand, and it distracted him from everything else. For a while, he was able to forget everything and simply do without feeling. The door to the room burst open. Harry jumped and almost dropped the bottle. He turned around, thinking it was Dean ready for another argument. However, it wasn't. Ron was standing just inside the door. His face was flushed, his eyes were glossy, and he actually appeared to be fuming.

"Ron, what's the matter?" Harry asked. Out of all the ways that he had expected to see Ron come into the room after speaking to Hermione, none of them involved him being furious. Harry looked past him. She was not behind him.

Ron slammed the door and walked over to him. Harry swallowed hard. There was something wrong with the way Ron glared at him. His heart sank. Things must have not gone well with Hermione. "I dunno, Harry. I was hoping you could tell me."

"S-so, did you see Hermione?" Harry looked to the door again. Hermione wasn't there.

"Yeah, I saw her," he said.

Harry searched his features. He did not seem happy about it at all. "And you talked to her?"

"Would you stop it? You don't have to hide it. I know about what you did," he said.

Harry's body stiffened. It was not about Hermione. Ron knew about him and Ginny. Hermione must have let it slip when they were talking. The secret was out. Harry sighed deeply. "Ron, I can explain."

"Yeah, I was hoping that you could," he said a bit louder. "Please, explain it to me because I'm about ten bloody seconds away from losing my mind."

Harry closed his eyes and tried to find the right way to start. He didn't know how to explain to Ron why he had sex with Ginny. It seemed pretty self-explanatory. "So, Hermione told you?"

"No, she's not that good of a friend to tell me the truth. Actually, this did." Ron took a note from his back pocket and bashed it against Harry's chest.

He unfolded the crumpled note and read over it. His eyes widened. It was an old note from Krum to Hermione. The realization hit him with a blistering force. It was not Ginny that Ron knew about. He knew about their game. He looked up to Ron. "Ron, please."

"Don't give me that! Don't you dare ask me for anything! Harry, how could you? There's no point in denying what you did. Hermione already told me everything. She told me about her game and how you helped her every step of the way!" Ron bellowed.

Harry was about to answer when another force of reality hit him. Hermione. He couldn't imagine what she was going through at the moment or what Ron had said to her. "Ron, what did you say to Hermione? What did you tell her?"

"Why does it matter? This is not about her right now. This is about you!" he snapped.

Harry held his hands up. "Just let me explain."

"Oh, I will. I want you to explain why you lied to me! You have been lying to me all year! You-you tricked me," Ron said.

Harry shook his head. "No, no, you have it all wrong. I didn't trick you. We didn't trick you."

He rolled his eyes. "That's right. You were trying to get me to realize what I felt about Hermione. You were just trying to make me see that dating Lavender was a mistake. Yeah, I've heard it all. That's bullshit and you know it! You lied to me and made me look like a fucking idiot!"

"That is not true! Ron, all I wanted to do was help you. We did it for you. We did it for you and for her!" Harry shouted. There was no way that he could let Ron believe what he did.

"You didn't do anything for me! Bloody hell, if you felt so strongly about it, then why didn't you just tell me? Why didn't you talk to me about it? You know that we can talk to each other. You did not have to go behind my back!" Ron shouted.

"It's not that easy, and you wouldn't have listened to me anyway! You would have done what you always did. You would have said that you were free to do whatever you wanted. You would have gotten angry with me for trying to help you! This was the only way," Harry tried to explain.

He rolled his eyes. "Oh, so, it's really my fault. I left you no choice but to lie to me and trick me! Fuck, Harry. It's not supposed to be this way! We are supposed to be best friends!"

You're supposed to tell me the truth. You said that you would always tell me the truth."

Harry felt a pang in his heart. "Ron, we are best friends. I wanted to tell you everything, but...I couldn't."

Ron shook his head. "We are NOT best friends. Best friends don't do this to each other. Harry, you lied to me. You looked me in the eyes and lied to me time and time again. You lied to me about everything. I-I trusted you. I trusted you with everything that I said about Hermione and Lavender and you told. You told Hermione. You manipulated our friendship for your own fucking pleasure. You told Hermione, Harry. "

"No, Ron, I didn't manipulate you, and I didn't tell her everything. When you told me not to tell her, I didn't. I swear that I didn't. I always respected that request from you and I honored it." Harry walked closer to him, but Ron backed up.

"So, I'm just supposed to believe that? When I asked you not to tell you didn't, but if I did not then you felt it was safe and okay to go blab to Hermione? You call that respect?" Ron asked.

Harry did not know what to say. Ron was right. "W-well, Iâ€|Ronâ€|it was the only way."

"I am so sick of hearing that! It was not the only way. The only wayâ€|the only thing you could and should have done was tell me the truth. You told me that I could trust you. You told me that you were here for me. You said I could talk to you." Ron's voice grew more and more weak and shaky.

Harry looked away and hoped that Ron would not break down. There was no way he could watch Ron lose it. Ron was an incredibly strong person and when he did let go, it always got to Harry. "I am here for you, Ron. That's why I did this. It's not like lying to you was easy. It took a lot out of me, Ron. Every time I lied, it did something to me. I hate lying to you. I didn't enjoy it."

Ron didn't seem convinced. "And yet you did it over and over again. It couldn't have hurt that badly. And for what? Was it for your own amusement? Was it to prove that once again you were better than I was or that you were smarter and would make a better boyfriend? Did you do it so that at the end of the night you could think to yourself, well, my day was shit but at least I am not a fucking pathetic idiot like Ron?"

Harry frowned. "What the hell is your problem? You know that's not me. I would never think that."

"No, I don't know what you are. I don't know anything about you." Ron blushed. "Harry, Iâ€|I always thoughtâ€|out of everyone that-that you...that you really cared about me. I thought that we understood each other. You made me believe that but it was a lie. Wasn't it?"

Harry's body iced over. He felt a terrible stiffness in his muscles. "Ron, it's not a lie. Fucking hell, I-Iâ€|" His face

flushed and heaviness came over him. Telling Ron his true feelings was something he always thought about but never considered that he would have the nerve to say. He had to now. He had no choice. "Ron, I do really care about you. You're incredibly important to me. That's not a lie. You're my best friend, and I wanted you to be happy. I saw you, mate, and you were hurting. I can't stand it when you aren't okay. I wanted to help make you better."

Ron snorted. "Yeah."

"No, I mean it. That's why I did this. It was not to trick you or to upset you, and it had nothing to do with me. It was to help make you happy again, and I knew that the only way you would be happy is if you had Hermione. She makes you happy, Ron. I know she does. Shit, Hermione makes you the happiest person in the world when you're with her. I knew that, and I had to do something. So, if lying to you was the only way I had to get you with her, I would do it and I did. It wasn't an easy decision but-but I thought it was the right decision." Harry felt exhausted. The truth took so much out of him emotionally. Being honest about his feelings always took everything out of him.

Ron did not appear calmed by his words. "I can't believe that you would say that to me after everything you've done. You thought it was the right decision because you knew Hermione made me happy. Do you honestly believe that it excuses the fact that all year you have been lying and going behind my back? Harry, you betrayed my trust. You betrayed me."

"I didn't betray you," Harry said.

Ron let out a shaky breath. "Harry, you lied to me about Krum and Cormac. You know how I feel about them. You know how Cormac treats me, and how I feel about the idea of Krum and Hermione together. You know how much those arseholes bother me and how much the thought of either one of them being with Hermione just...hurts. How could you play along and make me believe that she wanted either of them? Don't you know how awful it made me feel? You had to have known."

Harry did know how much it bothered Ron. At the time it didn't seem like a huge deal but now he realized it was. There was no way that it could not have been a huge deal. He felt stupid and terrible. "Ron, I'm sorry."

"Oh, you're sorry. That's brilliant, Harry. That makes up for everything," he said.

"I know it doesn't, but I had to do it," Harry said.

Ron glared at him. "You had to? That is your reasoning. Well, how exactly is telling Hermione everything that I say and fuck knows what else going to help? How is talking to her about what I tell you in confidence going to help? Do you really think that I'm stupid enough to believe that? You were not trying to help me. You can't help me if you don't come to me instead of running off to Hermione. No. You were trying to help yourself. For all I know



the real reason why you did this was to have Hermione all to yourself. You spent day after day with her, telling her about me and the things I said to you. I'm the knob right? I bet you couldn't wait to tell her about stupid Ron and what he did today!"

"Fucking stop it! Why would you ever believe that? How fucking dare you?" Harry demanded.

"Me? How dare you try to take Hermione for yourself!" Ron said.

Harry's jaw dropped. "Are you completely mental? You honestly believe that I did all of this to be with Hermione? Are you joking? How could you ever believe that was what I was trying to do?"

"It makes sense," he breathed. "Why wouldn't you want her?"

"No, it doesn't make sense. How many fucking times am I going to have to say it? I do not fancy Hermione. I don't want her as anything more than my friend. I don't see her in the way that you do. She's not the one for me. She never has been and she never will be. I'm not remotely attracted or interested in her in any way. It's not her, Ron, and I don't want it to be her anyway." Harry had to stop talking. There was already so much that Ron hated him for. He wasn't sure how much more he could give him.

Ron shrugged. "Oh, it's Cho, right?"

"No, it's not Cho, Ron," Harry began.

"Who is it then? What backup speech did you come up with?" Ron snapped. Harry began to speak but held back. He couldn't. Ron sighed. "Yeah, I figured."

That was it. It was the same phrase that Dean had said to him when he wanted an answer. Harry couldn't pretend any longer. The last effort he had broke. "Ron, I don't want Cho and I don't want Hermione because it's Ginny. She is the one I want. She's the one that I've wanted this whole time."

Ron stared at him blankly for a while. "Ginny, my sister? You want my sister?"

"She's not just your sister. I want Ginny, my friend. Ron, I want her—"

"Harry, what are you talking about? You don't want Ginny. You don't even fancy her. What the bloody hell is this for?" he interrupted.

Harry balled his fists. "Ron, you have no idea what I want. I'm telling you right now what I want and what I feel. Yes, I want Ginny, and I do fancy her. Well, it's more than that. I—I love with her. I've just always been too scared to tell you. I should have, though."

Ron raised an eyebrow. "Harry, is this more of your lies?"

"No, this isn't a lie. I mean it, and I'm sorry. I know that this ruins everything between you and me, but I can't and I won't stop loving her. I should have told you sooner. I should not have been such a fucking coward." Angry blurriness clouded his vision.

He frowned at him. "I don't understand."

"I know. I know. I have always told you that she was just a friend, but it's not true. It hasn't been true for ages," Harry confessed.

Ron cringed. "Why are you telling me this? Why are you telling me this now, Harry?"

Harry hated how uncomfortable Ron seemed, but he had to make him understand. "I'm telling you now so that you'll understand that I wasn't doing this to take Hermione away from you. I've never wanted her. It's always been Ginny on my mind, honestly."

Ron looked off as if he was thinking about Harry's words. He turned back to him, and his face was full of confusion. "Waitâ€¦if you've always loved Ginnyâ€¦does that mean." He backed up until his legs hit his bed. He sat down. "What was with all that talk about Cho? Did you even like her?"

"Not exactly," Harry said softly.

He shook his head slowly. "But why would you say that you did? Did you have some sort of plan for Ginny?"

Harry tried his hardest not to let the panic and dread seep in. "Yes, but it's not what you think."

"It's not what I think! You've been lying and tricking my sister, too!" Ron shouted. He stood back up. "All that shit about Cho telling you that she didn't want you and you wanting to date her and go to the ball with herâ€¦they were all lies?"

"You have every right to be angry," Harry said.

"No, I'm not angry! Angry does not even begin to cover it! Harry, you promised. You promised that you wouldn't hurt her! You said that you wouldn't." Ron's face flushed darker than he had ever seen.

Harry felt his insides ripping apart. "I know I did. You have to believe me. I didn't want to hurt her. I would never hurt Ginny."

"How is lying to her not hurting her? How is going behind her back not hurting her? How fucking dare you do this to my sister! She's my little sister, Harry!" Ron's voice was so loud that it cracked.

"I didn't mean to hurt her. The thing with Choâ€¦" Harry began.

"Was just to make her jealous, right? Was it to make her feel worse than she already did? You and Hermione are real pieces of work. Fucking hell, you are the reason why she broke up with Dean! It wasn't him. It was you! How could you do that?" Ron spat.

His words pierced Harry's body in the worst way possible. He remembered what he had said to Dean and how liberating it felt. Now, he wondered if maybe Dean was right. "That's not fair. It wasn't my fault. She didn't want him anymore, Ron. Sheâ€¦she wants me. I didn't make her leave him. She did that herself."

"Oh, I bet that's true. I reckon that you didn't make her feel like shit because she moved on and you were left alone. How selfish can you be, Harry? How fucking dare you try to punish my sister. Was it not enough that you fucked her over once? You had to go for round two. Harryâ€¦I justâ€¦I just. I can't deal with this. I can't." Ron ran his fingers through his hair and paced.

Harry nodded repeatedly. "I know that you're angry, but you have to believe that I care about Ginny. I care a lot about your sister." He closed his eyes and took a breath but before he could even exhale he felt a strong and painful pressure against his face and his back was slammed against the banister of the bed. Harry opened his eyes. His cheek throbbed, and Ron had him by the shirt collar.

Ron's chest heaved heavily, and he actually looked a bit surprised that he had hit him. However, his features quickly turned into something furious. "You have no idea how badly I want to hurt you, Harry. I want to hurt you for every lie that you told my sister."

Harry gripped Ron's wrist and tried to ignore the pain in his face. "I deserve it, but it's not going to change anything. I'll still want her."

Ron looked him up and down and roughly pushed off him. Harry kept his guard up and braced himself. However, Ron didn't do anything. "Harry, lying to me and betraying me is one thing but Ginny. My baby sister? My-my family? She's a good a person, Harry. She doesn't need this from you. What you did is just cruel. You aren't good enough for Ginny. You don't deserve her."

Ron's words were things that Harry had feared for ages. They were everything he forced himself not to believe. "Please, don't say that. I wasn't trying to betray her, and I was not trying to betray you. I love Ginny more than you will ever understand. I would never hurt her, and I would never purposely hurt you. I care about you so much, Ron. All I wanted to do was help. I'm sorry."

Ron cleared his throat and shook it off whatever feeling he had. "You and Hermione really enjoy throwing that word around. Love? You don't know the first thing about love. You don't lie to people you love. You do not make them hurt for your own selfish and disgusting reasons. You don't love my sister and you certainly don't give a fuck about me." Harry opened his mouth but

Ron cut in. "Don't. I don't want to hear your shit about how I'm your best mate and lying and manipulating my trust was the only way to help me."

"We can fix this," Harry breathed. His heart felt so heavy.

Ron shook his head. "No, we can't. I don't want to be anywhere near youâ€|ever. You make me sick, Harry. I have no idea who you are or what the hell your problem is. You can take me and Ginny out of your little game as well. I'm done with this bullshit, and I'm fucking done with you." He turned away and headed for the door.

Harry was lost. He could not process Ron's words quick enough. "Wait, please, let meâ€|give a minute to explain."

"I don't care. There's nothing more that I want from you." Ron opened the door. "Don't worry. I'm not going to tell Ginny about this. I'm not like you. I won't run back to her and tell her everything you said. I know what it will do to her, and I don't want to hurt her. That's love." He slammed the door behind him.

Harry finally let his knees give out. He sat on his bed and ran his fingers through his hair. He did it repeatedly until he was pulling at the strands painfully. "Fuck!" he screamed. He picked up the polish and threw it across the room. He took his broom and threw it was well. He kept throwing, screaming, and shaking.

For so long he had feared that Ron would find out that he slept with Ginny. It never occurred to him that there were other secrets Ron could find out about. It was all his fault. The feelings were overwhelming. No, Ron hadn't beaten him up but it felt like he did. He wanted to lie on the floor and fade away but he couldn't. He knew Hermione was around somewhere and as much as he didn't want to see her, he had to find her.

He knew where she was. Sure enough, when he opened the door to the abandoned classroom, he heard her crying and he saw her deflated body by the windowsill. She was curled up and seemed almost lifeless. Hearing and seeing Hermione climaxed his anguish. It was not a nightmare. Ron really knew. Harry slowly walked over to her. Hermione continued to cry. He kneeled beside her and reached his hand out.

"Hermione," he croaked.

She flinched and slapped his hand away. "Get away from me, Harry! I don't want to see you. I need to be alone!"

Harry bit his lip. "Okay," he whispered. He stood up.

Hermione finally lifted her head. Her eyes were swollen and her face was soaked with tears. "Wait, don't! I don't want you around meâ€|but don't leave. Please."

Harry understood what she meant. He didn't want to be around her, but he didn't want to leave her alone or be alone himself. It was too frightening. "Okay, I'll be over here." He moved away and sat

on top of the teacher's desk. He put his back to her. He did not want to see her defeated body or the pain and shame in her eyes. Harry took off his glasses and rubbed his face. His cheek ached, and he knew that it would probably bruise. He close his eyes, sighed, and put his face in his hands. He listened to Hermione's sobs and tried not to feel anything.

The pain, disgrace, remorse, regret, and fury were overpowering. It was the worst guilt that Harry had ever felt in his life. Out of all the things he ever thought could break him down, he never imagined that Ron yelling at him and declaring them not friends anymore would be the definite winner. He couldn't even allow himself to think about what Ron had said about him not deserving Ginny. It hurt too much. Nothing was right. He did not have Ginny, Hermione, or Ron and there was nothing that he could do about it. They were all hurting because of him. The three most important people in his life were miserable because of him. It was all his worst fears come true.

It was excruciating that Ron hated him. Harry didn't want that. It was other sensation entirely that Ron actually believed that he wanted to hurt him and didn't care about him. It was terribly untrue. It went against everything that he believed in. It was and had always been the truest thing about him. Ron saying that Harry did not care about him was like someone telling Harry that he wasn't a bloke or didn't enjoy Quidditch. It was a fact about him and it didn't make sense to go against it.

Hermione whimpered and sobbed again. Harry shut his eyes tighter. He wanted to take her pain away, but he knew that he couldn't. His best mates were broken up because of him. The only reasons why he had survived all these years were in turmoil because of him. Not all the magic and love from his parents could prepare him for this sort of misery. None of Dumbledore's wisdom was enough. It did not condition him for this.

Harry rubbed his eyes harder as Hermione's cries grew louder. He was a fighter. He was someone who wanted to succeed in riding the world of evil, but at that moment, at the realization that he ruined Ron and Hermione. At the realization that Ron was out of his life and Hermione would probably soon be next, Harry gave up. If Lord Voldemort himself burst into the room and demanded a duel from him, he wouldn't fight back. Harry didn't think that he would have the strength to. He just wanted everything to go away.

Anything would be better than this.

\*\*\*\*Wow. Okay, first, I didn't know if I was going to have this chapter and have it at this point in time. After I decided that I wanted this chapter in the story, I really thought about it and I realized that it would be better to have this sort of big fall out with Hermione and Harry's plan at the same time. I didn't want one half of the game not out in the open while the other half was. I wanted it all to be out in the open at one time. It's a lot for them to deal with in such a small amount of time and that's a good thing in this case. You'll understand once things keep going.

Second, I had a couple of different versions of this chapter. I was going to have Ron and Harry sort of physically fight in this chapter. I was going to have Ron get a few hits in and the whole argument would have turned out differently, but I really thought about it and I realized that them fighting would have not been the right way to approach this. Yes, in the few big disagreements that Ron and Harry had in the books, they almost go to the point where they would physically attack each other, but they never did. JK always had someone or something stop them. I think she too felt like them actually really physically hurting each other just didn't feel right and would be too easy and typical. It's not in Harry and Ron to do that to each other. Sure, they may want to but I reckon when it really comes down to it, they wouldn't do it. So, I let Ron get a hit in just because he deserved to \*and I've always secretly wanted him to get back at Harry for throwing the Cedric badge at his head in Goblet of Fire\* On top of that, I didn't want their argument to turn into a physical battle. I wanted it to be more emotional. I don't know why a lot of people believe that Ron and Harry aren't capable of showing emotion toward each other. I know they're not the sappiest of blokes but they do feel and feel for each other. I've always loved that about their friendship and I just adore exploring it. There is a really deep and powerful love and connection between them. I want to open it up a bit. I mean, any time Ron and Harry had a fight and Ron wasn't around, Harry was really miserable and missed Ron a lot, so, obviously he cares, and come on, Ron risked his life for Harry time and time again and always had his back, so, he cares too. Just because they're young and just because they are men doesn't mean they can't feel. I'll never change my mind about that.

Third, I will be honest; I did not intend to have Harry reveal his feelings for Ginny to Ron in this chapter but as I was writing it just came out of me and everything flowed together nicely. I'm actually glad that it came out like this. It makes this new Harry/Ginny/Ron dynamic come into play. Also, while I'm focusing more on Ron and Hermione right now, there are still things going on with Harry and his relationship with Ginny. That's why I put that bit with Harry and Dean in the beginning. There is a lot stirring in the Harry/Ginny/Dean plot and I needed to start panning into it. Like I said, things are far from over for them.

Fourth, I hope you can all understand why Ron was so vicious to Harry. Sure, Hermione "betraying" him is one thing but Ron puts 100% of his trust and faith in Harry. Harry is the one person Ron always felt he could depend on, so, finding out about his involvement shattered him. It shattered them both. Also, some things that Ron said to Harry were things that he had feared for years. The things about him wanting Hermione and Harry believing he's so much better than Ron are ideas that are great pains in Ron's life. Deathly Hallows and the Silver Doe chapter confirm that to it's greatest capacity. This was his worst nightmare really and Ron really is hurt by Harry's actions. Not to mention, Ron truly believes that Harry hurt Ginny. Everyone knows how protective he is of his little sister so hearing about Harry's game really took him over the edge. He's more upset about that than anything else.

One more thing, no, Ginny is never going to find out about the game. I juggled the idea for a while but I figured that enough was going on and I didn't want there to be any more "reveals" like this. Not just that, but I think in Ginny's case, she wouldn't care as much about it. I mean, yes, she would be furious about what Harry and Hermione did to Ron. She would probably kill them both for it but she would not care so much about what Harry and Hermione did to her. I say this because Harry's game for Ginny wasn't nearly as full of lies and plans like his and Hermione's game for Ron and it simply wasn't significant enough to have an impact on her. Ginny wouldn't get upset over Harry pretending to like Cho. That's not in her personality. Besides, Ron would never do that to Hermione and Harry, no matter how angry he is at them. People can disagree with me on this but Ron isn't a "snitch" in any way and especially about something like this. He loves Harry and Hermione both so much, so, it's complicated for him. Plus, he wouldn't want to hurt Ginny. He would never risk hurting her just to get back at Harry and Hermione.

So, despite the yelling and pain, I hope you all enjoyed it. There was some underlining beauty in it all I think, some more honesty came through, and that is always a good thing. Now, for some good news, lol. We really are crossing over after this. I call the end of this chapter the end of the "first half." After this, things will change, grow, and get better in a lot of ways. So, keep the faith/patience and thanks for reading! If you want the first part of the "second half," you should probably REVIEW!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 27

Thanks for the reviews! Wow! I still can't stop grinning. Now, I want to answer some reoccurring questions for you lot. I need to tell you all what's happening. You deserve to know.

One: How long do you plan to carry out this story? Answer: Ah, right now I'm planning this to be a sixth year tale.

Two: How many chapters? Answer: Not sure. However many is needed. I don't want you all to have to read this story forever but I won't promise that it's almost over. It's not, lol

Three: Will Ron and Hermione be okay? Answer: Of course!

Fourth: That's great Rose but WHEN will Ron and Hermione be okay? Answer: Hmmâ€¦I'll answer this wayâ€¦just because I'm calling this the "second half" doesn't mean I'm going to wait until the end to put them together. Oh no. The second half really deals with them being a couple and all the things that happen to them and around them soâ€¦just think about that and you'll get your answer about when they will finally get together!

Fifth: Why is this story so full of angst? Where is all the love and laughter? Answer: In all honesty, when I first thought of this story I didn't plan on having it be this dramatic and full

of angst. Seriously, I thought it would be more of a comedy but as I wrote more and the characters and stories evolved, I realized that I wanted to do something different. I didn't want to be so typical and have this story be full of laughs and simple mistakes and apologizes. I wanted the characters to really feel and grow. I want Hermione, Ron, Harry, and Ginny to really go there and push themselves. I want real questions answered and real honest feelings brought out. I think it's important to make this story as raw and emotional as I can without losing character or authenticity. However, I promise, love and laughs are in store. It's not all tears and yelling. I want Ron/Hermione and even Harry/Ginny to reach some sort of normality and happiness but I refuse to rush it and lose its integrity. Real life cannot be fast-forwarded and even though they are wizards and witches, I don't think they should be immune to having to wait, realize, and make better choices and live with consequences. Plus, it's so much better when things are built up and then let out. It means more. So, there's no need to worry or give up on me. I'm a firm believer in love, romance, joy, and fun, but those things don't come without a bit of hate, betrayal, sorrow, and grief.

Hope this helps!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Hermione sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes. She yawned and felt extremely worn-out and achy. It was for good reason. She hadn't managed to get any sleep the night before. All she could do was cry and feel terrible for the things she did. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to block out the sounds of Ron screaming at her and shaking because of her. She wanted to erase his expressions of hurt and anger from her mind. She couldn't. It was all she could feel and think about. She lay back down but knew that she had to get her homework done. If nothing else, work would keep her sane and keep her numb. She got dressed and didn't say one word to Parvati or Lavender. She couldn't take looking at them and especially Lavender. She still seemed out of sorts and Hermione didn't need to feel worse than she already did.

With a sigh, she grabbed her bag and headed downstairs. However, she was a bit nervous to walk into the Common Room. She was worried that Ron was waiting to yell at her again or that Ginny was waiting to kick her arse but neither was present. So, she tugged on her bag and practically ran to the library. It was the one place where she knew she wouldn't run into either.

She sat at her regular table and pulled out her books. She tried to grasp the material but the last thing she could focus on was charts and charms. She felt horrible. Ron was gone. She had pushed him away. Her heart still beat painfully and everything stung. She couldn't believe how things could have fallen apart so quickly. She put her book down and covered her face with her hands. She didn't think that she could cry anymore, but she could already feel a new batch of tears wanting to break free.

"Hermione?"



She jumped slightly and gazed up at the only person who could have possibly looked worse than she did. "Harry," she breathed.

"Can I sit with you?" he asked.

Hermione thought about it. She had nothing to say to him. The night before he had sat with her as she cried but she didn't say a word to him, and they didn't speak once as they walked back to their dorm rooms. She didn't think that there was anything to say. Nonetheless, she nodded and moved her bag to the other chair. Harry sat and held his hands together. He stared at her books, and she stared at him. He was pale and his large green eyes seemed so lost. Even more devastation had come over her when Harry slumped into the classroom. Ron knew about his involvement as well. It was another thing that was her fault. She ruined probably the greatest friendship of all time. She knew how much Ron meant to Harry, but she didn't know how to help him. She turned her eyes to the slight bruise on Harry's cheek that Ron must have given him. It made her stomach hurt.

Harry finally looked to her. It only sickened her more. "How are you?" she asked. She didn't expect her voice to sound as empty of feeling as it did.

He stared at her blankly. "Is this a real question?"

She sighed. "I just meanâ€¦did you get any sleep?"

He shifted in the chair. "No, not really. Did you?"

"No. I tried, but it was useless," she said.

"Yeah, it was hard for me to close my eyes knowing that Ron was right next to me wanting to de-bollock me." Harry's tone was void of sarcasm.

"Harry, I'm-I'm sorry," she said softly.

He shook his head. "Don't apologize to me. It's not your fault."

"Of course it is. It's my fault that he found out in the first place, and it's my fault that he found out about you. I let it slip, Harry. He wouldn't have known you were involved if it wasn't for me," she said.

"Hermione, it's not your fault. He found the letter. It was bound to happen, and of course Ron would have found out about me. He would have put the pieces together eventually. Besides, even if he would not have I would've told him. There's no way that I would let you face this on your own. I was there, too. It was my idea." Harry closed his eyes at his last statement and exhaled deeply.

"Actually, it was our idea. It was our mistake. It was our mistake that cost me everything. Harry, you should have seen him and heard what he said. He was so hurt," Hermione whispered.

"I know, Hermione. I did see him remember?" He pointed to his bruise.

"I'll take a bruise any day. At least Ron doesn't hate you," she mumbled.

Harry frowned at her. "Hermione, he doesn't hate you. He hates me. He told me he's done with me and that he doesn't know who I am anymore. He fucking punched me, and told me that I was cruel."

She wanted to feel sorry for him but her own situation blinded her sympathy. "Well, he told me that he didn't want my love. I don't know what else to call it if it's not hatred."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Call it him being angry. I doubt he's as mad at you as he is with me."

"Are we really going to do this? Are we going to compare misery?" she snapped.

He sighed. "You're right. No, we're not." They were quiet for a while. Harry's grief radiated off him and absorbed into her skin. It hurt. She still couldn't believe that it was all happening. "I told him about Ginny."

Hermione looked at him. She couldn't believe that he had found time to tell Ron with everything else going on. "When?"

"Yesterday. He thought that I made the game to get with you. He thought that I wanted you for myself," he explained. Hermione's eyes widened. Harry nodded. "Yeah, I know. I tried to explain things to him, but it was a waste of time. So, I had to tell him about Ginny. I told him that I loved her and wanted to be with her. I had to tell him about everything after that and the situation with Cho. That's when he punched me."

"Oh, Harry," she started. She looked around and suddenly felt very apprehensive. She knew that Ginny would burst in any minute and confront them.

"He said that he won't tell Ginny," Harry said.

"What?" Hermione answered, breaking out of her thoughts.

He shrugged. "Ron said that he's not going to tell Ginny about any of this. He doesn't want to hurt her."

A bit of relief came over her, but a new feeling seeped in against her will. It was jealousy. "Well, that's great. At least she won't hate you. You still have her."

He took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes. "Hermione, don't talk like that. You know that it's not that simple."

"I really don't see how it's not, Harry. Ginny isn't going to find out about what we did. You're lucky," she said.

"I guess that makes you lucky as well," he shot.

"Yes, but everything is still a bit more in your favor now, isn't it?" she shot back.

"I thought you said that we weren't going to compare misery?" Harry said.

"We're not. I'm just stating the facts. Ginny won't find out, and that's great for you. Why am I not allowed to say it?" she snapped. More and more anger flooded her. She knew that she was out of line and was acting childish, but she couldn't help herself. She didn't know if she could watch Harry and Ginny continue to flirt and be happy while she felt so miserable.

Harry pounded his fist on the table. "Damnit, Hermione, just shut up and think about what you're saying. It's not that easy and you know it. Fine, Ginny doesn't know but that doesn't mean that she's not going to find out. You think that she won't notice that you, Ron, and me aren't talking anymore? She'll find out and everything will be over. Besides, even if she doesn't find out do you honestly believe that I'll be able to be happy with her? Like I'll just be able to have a good time with her while my best friends aren't happy?"

Hermione looked away as tears filled her eyes again. She didn't know what she thought. She didn't know what the right words were anymore. "You're right, Harry. I don't think you will. It was wrong for me to say that. I don't mean to act this way. I honestly have no idea what I'm saying or what I'm doing."

The anger in Harry's face faded. "I understand. Hermione, I know that there is a lot going on right now but believe that I'm hurting as much as your are. I'm in a really difficult spot, too. In fact, Ginny not knowing makes this even more complicated for me."

She wiped the tears from her eyes. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, Ron is Ginny's brother. She's going to notice that something is wrong with him and she'll want to fix it, but I can't exactly tell her about what's going on. Now that Ron knows that I like her and he's obviously against it, I don't know how I'm supposed to get anywhere with her. This is everything that I was afraid would happen. I can't be around her without worry about him, and I can't make Ron upset without hurting Ginny in some way as well," Harry explained.

She had nothing to tell him. "I'm sorry."

"Me too. Damn, I don't know why I didn't think about this earlier. For so long I thought that my only worry was the possibility of Ron finding out that I had sex with Ginny. I forced myself believe that I could truly have a romantic relationship with Ginny and not have it affect my friendship with Ron. I feel completely thick." He gazed at her books again.

"I don't think it's you being thick. I think it's you wanting to have your best friend and the love of your life. I can understand wanting that, Harry," she said.

"Well, I don't think I can. At least, I don't think I can anymore." he said quietly. "I didn't think about any of this, Hermione. I didn't think that any of this could happen."

"We both didn't think at all, Harry. We didn't think enough about Ron and Ginny. I didn't think about Ron's feelings," she said.

Harry gave her a sympathetic look. "Don't say it like that. It's not as if we ignored him. We wouldn't do that to him."

"But Harry, Ronâ€¦heâ€¦he said he." She couldn't continue.

"What did he say?" Harry asked.

Hermione quickly wiped her eyes again. The tears came out of her without warning. "He that he wanted me. I've thought about him saying it many times but actually hearing it did something to me. All year I've been trying so hard to make this game for him but apparently his feelings had always been there. I made all these plans, but I never had to. I guess it doesn't matter now. I ruined it."

"No, you didn't. Ron still has all those feelings for you. Being angry with you won't change that," Harry said.

"But it does. It changes everything. I'm so stupid, Harry. I'm stupid for thinking that this could actually work. I should never have done this. I can't believe that I allowed myself to form a relationship based on lies. I just want to take it all back," she sobbed. She couldn't keep her tears in. She continued to wipe them away and sniff but nothing worked. She knew that she was making a scene, so she quickly shot up and tried packing up her books. However, for some reason they felt so heavy in her hands, and she could not properly grip them. She dropped them on the floor and raced out of the library anyway. She walked as fast as she could and tried to keep herself quiet.

"Hermione! Hermione, wait!" Harry called. Hermione did not stop walking. She didn't want to speak to him. She didn't want to speak or do anything with anyone.

However, Harry caught up to her. He gripped her arm but pulled away just as fast. "Hermione, please, just wait up."

She turned around. "What do you want, Harry? What more can we possibly do?"

"Iâ€¦I dunno. I don't know what we're supposed to do, Hermione," he said.

The defeat and uncertainty in his voice added on to her anguish. "Harry, I know we shouldn't compare misery but-but this is really hard for me. It's too much, okay."

"I know it is, Hermione," Harry whispered.

She shook her head. "No, I don't think you do." She took a breath and tried to find the right words. "Harry, I know you understand that I love Ron, but I don't know if you honestly understand what I feel for him. What I feel for Ron is the strongest sensation in my life. It balances out everything else and his friendship helps to keep that balance in tact. He's my balance, Harry, but I did something to make him go away. I lost the strongest thing that I have to hold on to. I don't think you know what that feels like. I can barely understand it myself." Hermione put a hand to her chest and tried to control herself.

Harry looked at her in a way he hadn't before. "You're right, I don't understand it. I don't know what you're feeling and I get that this situation means something completely different for you than it does for me, but it doesn't mean that I can't relate to it."

Hermione heard the bit of anger in Harry's tone. "Harry, please, don't take it like-

"You know what? I'm really tired of people believing that I'm incapable of feeling anything or that everything is so fucking great for me. Everyone thinks that I'm some unbreakable force and I'm incapable of getting hurt," Harry interrupted.

She held her hands up. "Just wait."

"Ron is my best friend, Hermione. Other than you he's the only family that I have. He's always been my family. So, maybe I didn't lose my balance or the love of my life, but I lost part of my family. That means something, too." He closed his eyes for a moment and bit his lip.

She watched his face redden a bit and it made the slight bruise on his cheek stand out even more. Even Harry was too much now. "I know. I'm sorry. Harry, maybe we just shouldn't do this then."

He opened his eyes. "What do you mean?"

Her throat felt like it was closing in. She had to get away. "Maybe we should give each other some space. We are not getting anything accomplished like this. I don't know about you but I can't take any more arguing."

"I don't want to argue. I don't even know how to begin to deal with this without us fighting. I'm sorry, Hermione," he said hollowly.

She nodded. "It's okay. We both just need a bit of time to face everything."

"Yes, you need to deal with the pain that is so much greater than my own," Harry mumbled.

"Harry, stop it! I already apologized," she said.

"You know what Ron said to me?" Harry rushed, ignoring her.

She honestly didn't want to know but once more her curiosity won out. "What did he say?"

"Ron told me that I wasn't good enough for Ginny after I told him that I cared about her. He told me that I didn't deserve her and I know he meant it," he said softly.

Hermione started at him and swallowed the lump in her throat. "Well, you know what, Harry? Regardless of what Ron may think or say, Ginny loves you and she wants to be with you. I realize that it hurts but whatever happens, you still have her. You know that the person you're meant to be with wants you. I can't say the same, Harry. I can't say anything." Her voice cracked. She quickly turned away from him and walked back to the library.

Harry didn't follow her.

Days went by and nothing changed. Ron still wasn't speaking to her, she and Harry were barely talking, and her insides still twisted and hurt. It was a terrible loneliness for Hermione to get accustomed to. Her schoolwork was her only salvation but even that was a challenge. She was constantly around Ron but couldn't speak to him. She eat at the same table, attended the same classes, but he barely even looked at her. She had fought and gone days without talking to Ron in past, but it was never like this. Usually they were both just being stubborn and she knew that Ron didn't have true ill will against her. She didn't know what he was feeling now.

She slowly walked the halls to her last and worst class of the day, Transfiguration. Though it had always been her best and favorite subject, she didn't want to step foot into the room. She not only had to see Ron but also sat right next to him. Once her favorite part of class was now her biggest obstacle. Hermione sat straight and rolled her shoulders. She tried to focus on her spell, but it was hopeless. She had been performing poorly all hour and all week to be exact. All she could think about was that Ron was sitting right next to her. Sometimes their arms or shoulders brushed, but he never even looked up. She didn't understand how they could be so close together yet so distant from each other.

"Ms. Granger, are you still having difficulty?" McGonagall asked.

Hermione looked up from her pair of socks, which were still only just socks. "No, I'm not having any problems."

McGonagall gave her a firm look. "Well, you still haven't managed to transfigure your house cat. I thought giving you something easier would help, but it seems that you have not been able to make progress here."

Hermione felt her ears burn. The disappointment in McGonagall's voice and the shock in her eyes were overwhelming. "I'm sorry, Professor McGonagall. I'm not having a very good day." It was all she could think of saying. She didn't have anything else.

"Ms. Granger, it seems to be a little more than that. Are you reading the material?" McGonagall asked.

The burning in her ears traveled to her entire face. She felt terribly embarrassed but also rather offended and frustrated. Hermione always read the assigned readings. She usually read early and ahead. She always perfected the material ahead of everyone else and always stood up for McGonagall whenever other students insulted her behind her back. She did not understand how everything could change with a few bad learning sessions. "Yes, I'm reading," she said in a shaky voice. She couldn't look at her. For once she wanted McGonagall's attention off her, but she would not look away.

"Bloody hell!" Ron suddenly groaned.

McGonagall turned her attention to Ron. "Mr. Weasley, you know not use that language in my classroom."

"I'm sorry, Professor McGonagall, but I can't get the bloody spell to work," he groaned again.

McGonagall's eyes grew. "Mr. Weasley!"

"What?" Ron asked causally.

McGonagall's eyes narrowed so greatly that Hermione could almost not see the whites of her eyes. "Come with me to my office, now. Everyone else keep your eyes on your transfigurations. This will be part of your final exam," she barked before quickly leaving their table and marching to her office.

Ron sighed from next to her and rubbed his temples. Hermione watched him in awe. "You know that she's going to give you detention or at least double your Prefects duties, right?" It was the first real thing that she had said to him since he walked out on her.

He didn't look at her while packing up his things. "Yeah, I'll probably get both."

She let out a sigh of relief. She hadn't fully expected Ron to answer her. "Yet you said that stuff anyway."

He put his bag on his shoulder and finally looked at her. "Well, I reckon that she'll lecture me for the next half hour or so and will forget about the rest of the class. She'll be too angry at me to come out here and focus her attention on anyone else." He got up and slowly walked to McGonagall's office. Hermione sat in confusion and stared at Ron's empty chair. Her mind was buzzing over her first bit of conversation with him, but she was also confused about what he said.

Ron had been right. By the time McGonagall let him go class was over. Ron rushed out of the room as if nothing had happened. She didn't mind. She was happy to get out of class. It gave her the opportunity to really think about what had happened and what he

had meant. It might have been the first sign that he still cared about her in some way or at least acknowledged her presence. However, her free night was cut short by her Prefects duties. She looked at her schedule and realized that she had patrolling to do with Ron. It made her stomach go into even bigger knots. She gradually walked to the doors leading to the library where they always meet before their patrol. He was standing near the window with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the sky.

"Ron," she said.

He turned to her. "We've got the east wing tonight."

"Okay," she breathed.

They walked in silence down the hall. Ron was practically on the other side of the hall and as far away from her as possible. The only sounds came from passing students and their shoes against the stone floor. Hermione hated it. Patrolling had always been one of her favorite things about being a Prefect. While actually patrolling was not much fun, it was her chance walk with Ron alone and talk to him without interruptions or third parties. They would usually converse about the most random and off topic things that she would never consider discussing with anyone else. He would constantly make her laugh while letting out his frustrations and confusions of the day. Hermione took their walks as her chance to let out some of her own more secretive and embarrassing ideas and stories.

And almost every time they patrolled, Ron would beg her to let them skive off the last thirty minutes so they could sneak outside or go up to the Astronomy tower and simply sit and gaze at the sky. Hermione made him swear that he would never tell, but she always gave in and enjoyed it whole-heartedly. There was nothing more exciting yet calming to Hermione than breaking the rules to be even more alone and close to Ron.

She sighed. She never realized how close she actually was to Ron or how intimate their relationship had always been. She had more in common with him than she thought, and their broken friendship made her discover how much he was apart of her daily life and how much she depended on talking to him to get her feelings out. She had a terrible stirring in her stomach. She never realized how much she loved and needed Ron until she pushed him away. She turned to him. His hands were deep in his pockets again, and he kept his head down. Her body ached to move closer, and her heart begged to speak to him. It seemed as if weeks had gone by without talking to him instead of days. She had to do something before her heart refused to keep beating and her body quit working. She stopped walking.

"Ron," Hermione said quietly. He stopped walking as well but said nothing to her, and he didn't look at her. She slowly walked over to him. Her body wouldn't stop until she was right in front of him. It forced him to look down at her. For the first time in days their eyes connected and for the first time in days a bit of the pressure lifted from her chest.



"What do you want?" he asked gently. "We have a lot of ground to cover tonight."

She felt a bit lightheaded. Every inch of her was telling her to throw her arms around him and apologize, but she knew that she had to stay strong. "I-I just wanted to know what happened with McGonagall in her office. Are you in trouble?"

"Why do you care?" he shot.

Hermione opened her mouth to tell him that of course she cared. He was her best friend and she didn't like seeing him get into trouble, but she knew that it would cause more harm than good. She had to choose her words carefully. "If she gave you detention, then I need to know. I need to know if I will have to pick up extra Prefect work because you have detention and won't be able to do it yourself."

Ron stared at her blankly for a moment. "No, she didn't give me detention. She said that she can't afford to lose any able Prefects with so much more to do before the ceremony. You were right. She is making me help out more and is giving me extra Prefect duties. She did take ten points from Gryffindor, though. I reckon she knows I'd hate that more than sitting in Snape's office. I'm too desensitized to it."

Hermione chuckle slightly and contemplated asking her next question. She decided that she had nothing else to lose and went for it. "Why did you do it?"

"Do what?" he said.

"Why did you talk like that in front of McGonagall?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I was mad. I couldn't get the spell to work."

"But you know how she feels about swearing in her class. Why did you do it and not once but twice? You had to have been asking for trouble," Hermione said.

Ron rolled his eyes. "We already went over this."

"Yes, it was for the class, right?" she said.

He looked away. "Am I not allowed to do things for other people?"

"That's not what I'm saying. It's justâ€¦you've never done anything like that before," she said.

"Or maybe you've just been too busy planning and telling lies to notice," he snapped.

Hermione let out a slow breath. "Ron, please, we both know that's not true."

"Fucking hell, why is this a big deal? What does it matter?" Ron asked.

"I just want to know, Ron," she said.

He rubbed his neck. "You aren't making any sense. What exactly do you want to know? I've already said why."

"Well," she said slowly, "what did you mean afterwardâ€¦about her not focusing on anyone else?"

He stuffed his hands deeper into his pockets. "I didn't mean anything."

"Come on, Ron. You know what you meant and-and I think I do, too. Did you do it for me? Didâ€¦did you get in trouble, so she'd leave me alone?" She held her breath and waited for his answer. She looked him in the eyes and hoped that he would be honest and open with her. She knew that she didn't deserve it, but she wanted it. She wanted some sign that not everything was lost and scattered between them.

He opened his mouth but closed it several times. He finally rested his eyes on her. "You know it doesn't matter. This is the last thing that we should be worried about. We should get back to patrolling." He walked past her, but she ran up to him.

"Ron, you've never cared about patrolling once since becoming a Prefect," she snapped.

"So what? Sorry that I don't want to be out here all night," Ron snapped back. He began to walk again.

Hermione instantly grabbed his hand. "Ron, wait, please."

"What do you want from me, Hermione?" Ron asked.

She squeezed his hand. "I just want to know if you did it for me."

He gazed at her and shook his head slowly. "Does it really mean that much for you to know?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Fine. I did it for you. I saw the way she was making you feel over the stupid spells. I justâ€¦she didn't have the right to treat you that way and talk to you like that and especially in front of the class," he explained gently.

Warmness coated her stiff and cold body. Even more of the pressure on her chest seemed to fade. "It was worth getting into trouble?"

He grinned slightly. "I'm always in trouble. Besides, I know impressing McGonagall means a lot to you."

Hermione smiled and squeezed his hand even tighter. The gesture made her stop and become aware that they were holding hands. Ron looked down at their held hands. She did as well. It had been so long since they touched, but it felt as natural and safe as ever.

She loved it. Their contrasting fingers blended and were beautiful together. She could feel a bit of electricity strike between them with the simple touch. She didn't know something so small could mean so much. She didn't let go.

However, Ron slowly pulled his hand out of her grip. "Hermione, I don't want to do this."

She pulled herself away from her thoughts. "What is it that we're doing, Ron?"

He moved away from her and against the wall. "This. This is what we're doing, Hermione. I can't do this with you."

She ignored the returning pressure against her chest. "Ron, please, just give me a chance. We can talk."

He gazed at her. "Talk about what? A chance to what? Do you want to apologize to me again?"

"If you'll listen, then I will," Hermione said.

"But what else is there to say? What could you possibly say to make all of this go away?" he asked.

"Iâ€¦I don't know, but you have to let me try," she pleaded.

"Hermione, I can't-"

"Why not?" she interrupted. "Why can't I try? Why can't we try?"

"Because there's nothing to say. I've thought about for days what you or I could say to make this better or to make this disappear but there's nothing. Everything seems to come back to the same answer, and I don't want to go there again. I don't want to go through all this again with you." He rubbed his eyes roughly with his palm.

Her eyes burned. All she wanted to do was fix things. All she wanted was to be able to be with Ron and talk to him again. It didn't matter if it was as a friend or more. All she needed was her best friend back. "I don't want to go through this again either, Ron. This is killing me. All of this between us is breaking me up inside. I don't think you realize what this is doing to me. I think if you understood, you'd know that I never meant to hurt you. This isn't what I want. I regret everything, okay," she sobbed.

Ron looked at her and reached out. He slowly wiped away the tear that had escaped her eyes with his thumb. Hermione closed her eyes and let out a faint and shaky breath. It felt so good and so rejuvenating. The feeling was incredibly intense, and it made her shiver. She put her hand against his. "That's the problem, Hermione," he said gently before pulling his hand away once more.

She opened her eyes. "What is the problem?"

Ron moved closer to her. "For as long as I've known you, Hermione, you have never believed that I could understand you. You always think that I'm not able to feel anything in relation to you. You're wrong. I can see it, and I do understand. You aren't the only one here, Mione. You aren't the only one who feels things and is having a difficult time with this. It breaks me up just as much, but I don't know how to make it stop. It doesn't mean I don't want to, though. I just...I don't know how. If you would stop and remember that I was there, too, then you'd know that this isn't what I want either. This is the last thing that I want to happen to us."

She didn't know what to say. She was transfixed by his words and the low tone of his voice "Ron," she whispered.

He shook his head. "At this rate we are never going to get finished. I'm going to go down this hall and patrol the other side. You can continue straight. It will cut the time in half."

She had nothing to come back with. "Okay," she said in defeat. Ron gave her a nod before walking up ahead and disappearing to the other side.

Hermione slid down and sat on the floor. She leaned her head against the wall. It was her first conversation with Ron since their fight and she wasn't sure if it was for the better or for the worse. Her insides curled and twisted around and yet the sickness was not as strong. She didn't know what she had expected out of her conversation with Ron, but hope was certainly not it. However, it's exactly what she felt.

\*\*\*\*Oh, yes, a great place to stop. Now, I've got quite a few things to say about this chapter.

First, I realize that this was angst heavy. I understand that it was a lot of Hermione and a lot of Hermione's grief. I realized that Hermione was very different in this chapter than she's been in the past or different from what some people are used to reading her as. There's a reason. Because the HP books are from Harry's pov, whenever he or Ron would fight with Hermione, we'd get her crying or upset and storming off, but we never got a chance to really feel what she felt or get an explanation. I wanted to change that with my story. I am a firm believer in Hermione's misery and I don't buy that she's as strong as a lot of people like to make her. Yes, she's strong. I'm not saying that she's weak or anything. I just feel that on the outside she's made of steel but on the inside there's something softer. There's this terrible pain and vulnerability that I see. She takes so much responsibility on herself and because she really doesn't let it all out, it tears her apart. I love writing Hermione's sorrow. I don't like making her extra whiny or things like that but I love to make her feel human. I like making her feel agony. She's not immune to it. This chapter was all about Hermione realizing things. This chapter is all about Hermione seeing that she's not alone and that others can feel too. I think that some of her problem is her belief that because she's so intelligent and sometimes is put at a higher standard than others, that others aren't capable of understanding her grief.

Also, if you noticed, I plugged in the same theory for Harry. I believe that the two of them are mirror images of this idea that they have to "superior" because of their gifts and their downfall is that they believe others can't understand it sometimes. There's a lot of pressure that they put on themselves and it blinds them at times.

Now, I focused in on a lot of the ideas from Prisoner of Azkaban, Half Blood Prince, and Deathly Hallows to write this chapter. I took the reactions to different fights between Hermione/Ron, Hermione/Harry, and Hermione/Ron/Harry, and brought them into this chapter. DH probably most heavily influenced me for this chapter. After Ron left, Hermione was in such a bad place for a really long time. She tried to keep it together but you could tell she was completely heart-broken and torn. It was one of the most beautiful parts of the book. I loved that Hermione. I wanted to bring more of that out in this chapter for both her and for Harry as well. Now, I'll admit. I was probably a bit too biased because I love Ron the most and he's the best ever, so, I really wanted to make Hermione and Harry realize that what they did to him was wrong and I wanted them to feel the suffering and the burn without him around. I knowâ€¦mean, lol, but Ron's the man and everyone really needs to realize what it's like if he's not around. He's too important not to miss completely. I don't think it's OC for Hermione and Harry to be this upset either. In DH, they were completely gutted and cold without him. It was tragic but beautiful and heartfelt. Ron's so important to them. I wanted them to realize just how much.

Another thing, the tiff between Hermione and Harry is something I got from reading DH. While they had to work together, they sort of didn't want to be around each other and were upset with each other in a way after Ron left. Ron is a bridge between them and without him, Hermione and Harry's relationship falters a bit. I always thought this and believed in it but DH just confirmed everything. I didn't want to have them all clingy. It's not in their character regardless of what some people feel. Ron's absence is not code for "Hermione/Harry love time." I really enjoy the idea of them not being as close with the whole Ron situation going on. It feels right and canon to me.

Now, as for Ron. This is the side of Ron that I like to explore the most and the side I unfortunately see the least. When there's a fight between Ron and any of the other characters, too often Ron is just an idiot or is too insensitive or just agrees and gives in or whatever. It's almost like he's not smart or emotional enough to let himself be mad/upset and grieve. It's almost like some people believe that he doesn't have the right to. I think it's perfectly in character and right for Ron to stand up for himself and not forgive right away. He knows that he was wronged and though it's hard, he knows that he deserves some space to be upset. I don't get why some people think Ron's not good enough to be upset at his friends. \*sighs\* Anyway, my Ron is allowed to be upset. The Ron in my story has a bit more to him and has more love for himself. Yes, he's mad and hurt. Hermione did some major things to him and he's not over it. He's not ready to just forgive her. However, that doesn't mean that Ron does not care about her. It doesn't mean he doesn't feel what's she's

going through to some extent or doesn't still feel his love for her more than anything else. Ron is battling himself. He doesn't know if he wants to forgive or stay angry. He's torn between wanting to fix things with Hermione and wanting to prove to himself that he deserves to feel the way he does. He still wants to make Hermione feel good but he also wants her to know that she can't just say sorry and everything is over. He's not selfish, so apart of him feels like he shouldn't be as angry or stiff to her as he is, but he also wants to stand up for himself. So, it's a balance and a tug-and-pull of him inching closer and backing away. He has a mixture of feelings as well and more and more of them will be brought out as the story goes on.

One more thing about Ron, I completely understand that in this story, he's not the usually cheerful and humorous Ron that he is in a lot of other works and in the books. This is done on purpose as well. The Ron I'm writing, is the Ron I've always seen in the books but in small doses. I am letting it all out in my story. Reading some reviews, I understand why some people are questioning how/why I'm writing Ron this way, it's for good reason. Trust me, I love feisty, sarcastic, and happy Ron like everyone else, but for this story, and definitely for the first half and part of the second half, I want to show his other side that isn't seen as often. I want to show him more serious, dark, complicated, and grown up. He does have this pain and uncertainty about him that I want to explore. It's a bit uncomfortable for some people I think, because Ron is always the person of lightheartedness but I'm breaking away from that. Ron is still human and has issues. He has so many layers that should be peeled and explored. There's so much to the bloke that is amazing and I want to tap into as much as I can. Plus, I think those sides of him are beautiful and important to explore and bring out. However, once things are worked out, more of his old sass and joy will be brought in. I won't make him over the top, but he will be happier. I promise. :)

Lastly, I know there's a lot of emotions and decisions being made by these "teens" but I still believe that what they say and what they do is consistent to their character regardless of age. I hope the majority of you readers agree. I've thought about changing some things but there's honestly no way I can change how they act without feelings like I'm taking them a step back. This is real to me. This is right to me. All I can do is hope and pray that most of you can understand it and hopefully enjoy it.

Anyway, thanks for reading and I hope that all made sense, and, speaking of "as the story goes on," If you want the next chapter! You really need to if you want to read about!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 28

Thank you all for the reviews! I adore them all! Okay, I want to clear something up \*as usual\* lol. I've been getting some reviews lately on the matter. I know it's been a while since I've centered focus on Harry/Ginny. Now, I did make a warning a few chapters back that I was going to sort of put them on the

backburner while I piled on Hermione/Ron. However, I haven't forgotten about H/G at all. I will bring their relationship back into the story more but right now it's important that I develop R/Hr as much as I can. They are the prime couple in this story but that doesn't mean that H/G doesn't mean anything to me. I have great ideas for them and I'm excited to share them. I just need a bit of patience. They will be brought back in VERY soon. I promise!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Hermione lay in her bed and gazed at her music box. She watched the ballerina dance and the soft music soothed her. She needed all the comfort that she could get for today. The dorm room opened and a potent smell of flowers came in. It could only mean one thing. "Lavender, what are you wearing?" Parvati asked. She rolled her eyes. Whenever it was the weekend or a Hogsmeade day, Lavender always dressed over the top so for Parvati to make a comment, her attire had to be something.

"Do you like it?" Lavender asked with a giggle.

"It's nice. It really is, but why are you wearing it today?" Parvati asked. Hermione wished that she could close her curtains and muffle their voices but there was no way that she could get away with it without appearing rude.

"Well, it's W-Ron's birthday today," Lavender said.

The comment finally made Hermione sit up. She knew that it was Ron's birthday. She had been thinking about how it was his birthday ever since she woke up. She thought about how it was his birthday and how she would not get the chance to spend it with him. However, she didn't understand why it would be a big deal for Lavender. Looking at her outfit, Hermione understood why Parvati had been curious about it. In fact, it made her jaw drop a little. Lavender wore a very short black skirt, a tight and low cut maroon jumper, maroon knee socks, and black pumps. It looked very much like her Valentine's Day outfit but even more revealing and sexual, if at all possible.

"How does Ron's birthday justify what you are wearing?" Hermione asked before she could stop herself.

Lavender turned to her and placed a hand on her hip. "Well, I want to look nice for him."

"That's a little more than nice, isn't it? Besides, he's not even your boyfriend anymore," she shot. She was in a terrible mood and every little detail about Lavender seemed to make it worse.

She narrowed her eyes and her cheeks went pink. "I'm well aware, Hermione, but it doesn't mean that I don't love him anymore. I planned this outfit ages ago for his birthday, and I want to make him happy. I think this outfit will do just that. He's been off ever since we broke up. He must really miss me."

Hermione didn't even know where to begin her response. Luckily, she didn't have to. Parvati quickly cut in. "So, what's your plan?"

Lavender tossed her hair. "Well, I'm going to give him his gift and ask if he wants to go for tea somewhere. He won't be too busy with you will he, Hermione?"

She wanted to tell her yes. She wanted to tell her that she would be spending the day with Ron and would sip tea with him but she couldn't. It wasn't true. "No," she whispered.

Lavender smirked. "Good. It shouldn't be a problem then." She went to the full-length mirror that she had brought with her and had handy right next to her bed. She pulled lint off her shirt and kept readjusting her skirt. Hermione thought she looked tacky but a tiny part of her was jealous. Even though she was annoying and insanely loud, Lavender Brown was a very pretty girl. She feared that Ron would like her outfit and would want to go out for tea with her.

She had to turn away. She caught Parvati's eyes. Strangely, Parvati gave her a sympathetic look before turning back to Lavender. "Well, that sounds like a great idea to me. Curious though, why did you pick maroon? You never wear maroon."

Lavender laughed and began applying her makeup. "It's Ron's favorite color, so I think that he'll like the special touch."

Hermione rubbed her temples. Because Lavender was no longer dating Ron, she didn't feel obligated to ignore her obvious mistakes. "Lavender, maroon is not Ron's favorite color."

She didn't look at her, only giggled. "Shows how smart you are. Of course maroon is his favorite color. Mostly all of his pajamas are maroon. In fact, his favorite pair of pajamas is maroon. He has maroon jumpers and even maroon socks and mittens. Heavens, Hermione, I thought you were his best friend."

Hermione practically slammed the lid on the music box closed. She shot out of bed and walked over to Lavender. "I am his best friend. I'm more of a friend to him than you have ever been."

"Ladies, please," Parvati breathed.

Lavender put her lipstick down. "No, it's okay, Patty. I can handle this. Hermione, Ron isn't here to tell me to be nice to you so I would watch that mouth if I were you."

"I'm not afraid of you, especially since you know absolutely nothing about Ron and couldn't impress your way out of a potion vile," Hermione snapped.

Lavender gasped. "How dare you!"

"How dare you, Lavender! Ron's favorite color isn't maroon. He practically hates it. The only reason why he wears it and has so much clothing is because his mum makes it all for him, and he



doesn't want to put her out. All of Ron's siblings have a color that Mrs. Weasley like to keep to when she makes them clothes and gifts. Ron just happened to get maroon. So, he tolerates it, but it's for him mum. He certainly doesn't love it, and he loves those pajamas because his mum made them for him herself. It has nothing to do with maroon." Hermione took a breather and let her nerves calm. She was on high alert, and Lavender only added to her short fuse.

She hadn't talked so much to someone in ages in seemed and it wore her out a little. Visions of the day that Ron had told her the story about the color maroon and his favorite pajamas flooded her brain. It was a happy memory. It was a great memory between her and Ron. Hermione knew that Lavender didn't know the story behind anything in Ron's life. It made her angry that Lavender was ever given the opportunity to date him. She wasn't right for him. Lavender simply stared at her and crossed her arms. "W-well, whatever. I'm sure he'll still like it."

Hermione laughed slightly. "I'm sure he will, too." She walked back over to her bed, grabbed her bag, and headed for the door. However, she had something else to add. "And just so you know, Lavender, Ron's favorite color is orange. He loves orange because of the Chudley Cannons. It's been his favorite color since he was seven and that shirt that you thought was too violent of an orange is the exact shade that he loves." She slammed the door on her way out. Yes, Lavender may have been beautiful, but she'd never deserve Ron.

She sat at one of the tables in the Common Room and opened her book. It was a bit hard to write. She was still fuming over the stupidity of Lavender Brown, but she was also jealous that she could possibly spend the day with Ron. "Hermione, what are you doing?" Ginny asked.

She looked up from her books. Ginny was near the portrait hole. "Good morning to you, too, Ginny. I'm studying."

Ginny quickly walked over to her. "Why? Did you forget what day it is?"

Hermione didn't like the slight tension in her voice. "No, I didn't."

"So, why are you studying? It's Ron's birthday, and we're all supposed to go to Hogsmeade together," she said, sitting down.

Hermione held on to her book for support. She was well aware of the plan. She had helped to make the plan. "I know that, Ginny, but I can't go."

Her jaw dropped. "What? Of course you can go. You have to go. It's Ron's seventeenth. Even Fred and George are going to meet us there."

She was also well aware that the twins were going to surprise Ron at The Three Broomsticks. "I know they are, and I know how old Ron is today," she snapped. She went back to her book.

Ginny pulled on the spine of her book and slammed it against the table. "Then why don't you look at me and tell me what is going on? If you know so much, then why in the bloody hell aren't you coming?"

Hermione looked at Ginny. Her neck was somewhat red and her eyes were fierce. Ginny didn't know about what she and Harry had done, but it didn't mean that she couldn't find other ways to ruin her friendship with her. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be short with you."

Ginny nodded. "Okay. So, what is going on?"

She didn't know how to answer. It would have been easy and right to simply tell her that she and Ron weren't talking to each other, but she didn't have the strength to tell her why. "I just got word from McGonagall. She wants me to work on some more plans for the graduation ceremony."

"You're taking the piss, right?" Ginny asked.

A pit of panic came over her. She didn't realize that she was so transparent. "W-why would you say that?"

Ginny shrugged. "I ran into Harry this morning, and he told me that he couldn't go out today because McGonagall is making him work on some Quidditch regulations again."

"Oh, wowâ€¦yesâ€¦that'sâ€¦horrible," Hermione mumbled.

"Maybe Ron is right," Ginny said.

"Right about what?" she rushed.

"Well, that McGonagall is out to get him. Why else would she have you and Harry work today with her? She has to know that it's Ron's birthday or at least that it's a Hogsmeade visit. She must not want him to have any fun," Ginny explained.

Tightness burned her throat. She didn't want to think about Ron not having any fun on his birthday. "I'm sure he will."

Ginny gave her a look. "Please, I reckon the last thing Ron wants to do is spend the majority of his seventeenth birthday with his younger sister. He wants you both to be there. Is there really no way out of this? I already asked Harry, but he couldn't get out of it."

"I can't. I just got the schedule this morning. She'll never change it for something like this," Hermione said.

She exhaled deeply and ran her fingers through her hair. "This is brilliant. His best mates aren't even going to be at his birthday party. We made plans, Hermione."

"I know we did. I want to go, Ginny. You have no idea how much I do," Hermione said softly.

"Do you really?" Ginny asked.

"Of course I do," she said.

"I only ask because things between you, Ron, and Harry have seemed a bit weird lately and don't think that I haven't noticed." Ginny looked at her intently.

More panic rose inside of her, but she had to keep it together. "We're okay. Yes, we are having some disagreements about things, but it's nothing serious. At least, it would never be serious enough to keep me from wanting to be with Ron on his birthday."

"You can tell me what's going on. You've been really great helping me with what to do about Dean and Harry. I'd like to help you. We are friends, Hermione." Ginny grinned gently.

Hermione couldn't help but to smile back. Ginny was a good friend to her and Hermione knew Ginny wanted her happy but she couldn't tell her. Ginny would hate her for sure. "I know but it's really nothing serious, Ginny." She was already tired of saying that it was nothing serious. It was.

Ginny stared at her as if trying to read her. Hermione found it a bit unnerving. Her only saving grace was that Ginny did not have Ron's crystal blue eyes. She wouldn't have been able to keep her composure and handle her stare if she did. "Well, if you're sure that nothing is going on, then I should probably get going then. I know Ron is going to want to spend all the time he can at the new Quidditch shop with Harry's gift certificate."

"Oh, did you give it to him already?" Hermione asked.

"No, but I know my brother. He's lucky that I didn't keep it for myself. Ron's going to love it," Ginny said.

"Yes, Ron's face is going to be priceless," Hermione said with a laugh. She could already see Ron's eyes grow even bigger and light up even brighter than they normally did. Her heart sank a little. She ached to be there when he opened his gift.

"Do you want me to give him your gift?" Ginny asked.

"Oh," Hermione started. Her gift was a lot more personal. Ever since she got it she thought about how she'd give it to Ron and what she would say. She never imagined Ginny giving it to him. "That's okay. I'll give it to him later."

Ginny smiled. "Mmm, I understand."

"It's not that kind of gift," Hermione said with a blush. Though she wouldn't have minded if it was. In her wildest fantasies, she always pictured spending his birthday in Hogsmeade before going back to the castle for a fantastic and certainly hot night of being tangled between limbs and sheets.

She chuckled. "Whatever you say. I'll see you later on tonight. If you see Harry, tell him the same. I really wish you two were coming."

"Me too. I can tell you that Harry and I both really want go more than anything," Hermione said softly.

"It's been a while since the four of us have spent time together. Harry and I—we're rarely together now," Ginny said, looking down.

"It's not you, Ginny," Hermione reassured.

She cleared her throat . "I need to go. Ron's going to be gutted."

"Just do your best to make Ron happy today," Hermione said.

Ginny got up from the table. "I will but I know what he really wants today more than anything else."

"What?" Hermione asked.

She rolled her eyes. "Hermione, when will you open your eyes? All he wants today is you, and he's not even getting that. Don't hesitate to tell McGonagall that I said she should get fucked by Flitwick's wand."

Hermione frowned at her vulgarity. "Ginny, there's no need for that."

"There's plenty need. She ruined my brother's birthday." She left the table and walked out of the Common Room.

Hermione sighed and rubbed her eyes. She didn't want to cry. She didn't want to think about how Ron was feeling on his birthday. She didn't want to think about how because of her selfishness and stupidity, Ron would have a birthday without his best friends. She swallowed the lump in her throat and got to work. It was difficult to concentrate in the Common Room. People were coming in and out and all seemed excited and happy. Hermione couldn't stand it. Lavender had said nothing to her as she walked past her, still in her maroon outfit. Hermione even noticed Dean being dragged out of the room by Seamus. She wanted the day to be over.

"Hermione."

She looked up. "Harry." She had been trying so hard to concentrate that she didn't even notice that he was standing next to her.

"Um, can I sit here?" he asked.

Once again, she responded right away. They hadn't talked much since the day in the library, and there was a new stiffness between them. However, at the very sight of Harry, she felt better. For the first time all day she didn't feel so alone. "Sure."

Harry sat in the chair next to her and picked up one of her books. "Arithmancy, good choice."

"Yes. It's the best distraction I have," she said with a small smile.

"I tried doing homework, but I can barely focus when nothing is going on so trying to work now is pointless. I tried doing something for Quidditch, but I gave up," he explained.

Hermione nodded, feeling connected to Harry even more. He was the only person who could understand how she felt at the time. "I know. All I can think about is what Ginny said."

His eyes grew a bit. "What did she say?"

"Oh, only that Ron is going to be miserable today because we won't be with him. She hates McGonagall now. She's keeping both of us away from Ron today," she said.

Harry sighed. "I didn't know what else to tell her. She kept asking, but I couldn't tell her the truth."

"You don't have to explain it to me. I understand. I did the same thing," she said.

"It hurt to lie to her. She looked so disappointed. The last thing I want to do is disappoint her," he said.

"She really wants Ron to have a good time, but I don't think that's all. It's the one day that Ginny gets to be with you completely without any complications. I know that she was looking forward to it," she said.

Harry smiled a little. "You think so?"

"I know so. That's how I always feel about Ron's birthday. I can be all around him and it is never a big issue. I've been looking forward to it," she said quietly.

"I think I've been looking forward to his birthday for that reason. I want Ron to have a good time, but I also want to be able to spend time with Ginny and not have to worry about being obvious." Harry gave her a small nod before looking away.

They were silent for a while.

"I'm sorry, Hermione. I'm sorry for all of this and for getting upset with you the other day," Harry said finally.

"I'm sorry, too. I'm sorry for being so difficult with you. You're right. You're hurting, too," she whispered. "I talked to Ron a little and he really made me think about some things. He made me think about some things that I should have figured out a long time ago."

"He talked to you?" Harry said with a bit of hope in his tone.

"Yes, sort of anyway. It wasn't much, but it was enough," she said.

"Listen, Hermione, I don't want us to be like this. I know we did something horrible together but you're all I have, and I still need you on my side," he said.

Hermione felt more of the pressure on her chest fade. "I am your side, Harry. I want you on my side, too. I don't want this to tear us apart. There's already so much wrong. You're my family, Harry and you're right. It does hurt to lose family."

He reached across the table and squeezed her hand for a moment. "You are my family, too, Hermione."

She smiled and squeezed his hand back. A tiny piece of the hole in her heart closed up. "Did you see him this morning?" she asked.

"Yeah, but he didn't say anything to me. He was trying to act happy because everyone was saying happy birthday to him, but he left before anyone could ask what he was doing today. Ginny came to the room soon after and that's when I told her that I couldn't go. I gave her my gift though," Harry said.

"He's going to love it. I didn't give her mine. I know that I won't be able to give it to him today myself butâ€¦it doesn't feel right letting Ginny give it to him. It's something I have to do," she explained.

Harry smiled. "I understand, Hermione. Give it to him when he gets back."

Hermione gave him a look. "We're not exactly friends, Harry."

"It's worth a shot, Hermione. We have to fix this somehow. I know that we won't be able to keep lying about everything for too much longer. I don't think Ginny really believes us. She kept looking at meâ€¦with those eyes," he said.

"I don't think she believes us either, but it's not like Ginny to press the issue," she said.

"Maybe not to you. She expects more out of me. She expects me to tell her everything and to be patient," Harry said softly.

Hermione felt incredibly bad for Harry. She understood more of his strain every day. "Ginny still hasn't spoken to Dean?" Harry shook his head. "Well, she's not going to Hogsmeade with him, Harry. She will talk to him eventually. I don't think you have to worry, but I can't say the same about Lavender."

"What are you talking about?" Harry said.

Hermione sighed. "She's all fixed up today. It's in bad taste but somehow she still managed to look pretty. She wants to take Ron out for tea. She even got him something."

Harry didn't seem nearly as anxious about it as she was.  
"Hermione, do you honestly think that Ron still fancies her?"

"I don't know. He's upset and what if she-"

"Stop it. He's mad at us, but he hasn't gone mental. Lavender is out of his life. She can wear as little clothing as she wants to. It won't change how he feels. You have to believe that," he said.

"But she knows something is wrong between Ron and I. I just don't want her bringing me up and making him even more upset," she said.

"I don't think you have to worry. Ron loves you. This fight isn't going to change his feelings and neither will Lavender's cleavage," he cheeked.

Hermione really wanted to press the matter, but she was too tired and his comment was a bit too funny. She chuckled. "Fine, maybe you're right. Here." She handed him her charms book.

Harry took it and looked at it dully. "What am I supposed to do with this?"

She chuckled again. "Well, you use your hands to open it, and you use your eyes to read it. It's called studying."

He frowned but opened it anyway. "It's not like I have anything better to do."

For a while the two of them studied and worked in silence. In Hermione's opinion, it was the worst way to celebrate Ron's birthday but the best way to attempt to forget about everything. However, as the day turned to night and students started to come back, Hermione and Harry decided to change their location to the couch so it would seem like they moved and had done things. Harry brought out his Quidditch book and Hermione exchanged her books for table arrangements.

It didn't take long. Ginny and Ron came back through the portrait hole soon after the sun went down. "I thought you two would be at dinner," Ginny said. She took a seat next to Harry on the couch and smiled at him. He instantly smiled back. Hermione watched Ron cough faintly and Harry dropped Ginny's gaze.

"We already ate. McGonagall gave us sandwiches. Our meetings sort of overlapped each other," Hermione explained.

"Yeah, Ginny told me about your meeting with McGonagall, and yours, Harry," Ron said, sitting on the floor.

"It was the last place I wanted to be, Ron," Harry said.

They stared each other down. Ron shrugged. "I'm sure."

Hermione felt the stiffness creep over them. She had to break it up. "So, where did you go?"

Ron turned his attention to her. It was the first time that she had tried to strike up a conversation with him since their patrolling. She knew he had to answer her in front of Ginny. "We went to The Three Broomsticks and to the new Quidditch shop, but I didn't buy anything."

"Why not?" Harry piped up.

"Your guess is as good as mine. I reckon he wants to wait until you're there, Harry," Ginny said. However, Harry didn't look happy about the news.

Ron looked a bit uncomfortable as well. "I just didn't feel like buying anything. Besides, I was too preoccupied by Fred and George. They came to see me."

"That's great, Ron," Hermione said.

He rubbed his neck and sighed. "I guess."

Ginny laughed. "Oh, that wasn't the only thing that occupied Ron."

He looked at her. "Ginny, don't."

She rolled her eyes. "Please, Ron. I can't believe that you're not saying anything about it."

"Anything about what?" Harry asked.

Ron covered his face. "Lavender."

"What about her?" Hermione rushed.

Ron said nothing. Ginny stepped in. "Fine, I'll tell it. So, we were outside the teashop and Lavender came over to us. You should have seen her. She had on a disgustingly short skirt and something that vaguely resembled a shirt. She was dressed—well, like a slut really, and I knew that it was all for Ron."

"Ginny, don't say that," Ron said with a blush.

"It's true! She was dressed like some maroon nutter," Ginny said. Hermione couldn't help herself. She started to laugh. She laughed so hard that she snorted. She heard a chuckle and realized that Ron was laughing a bit himself.

"Well, she was very maroon," he breathed.

Harry scratched his head. "Why would Lavender wear so much maroon?"

"She thinks it's Ron favorite color," Hermione said.

Harry chuckled. "He hates maroon."

"That's what I tried to tell her," Hermione said.



"Wait, you saw her beforehand?" Ron asked.

She turned to him. "Yes, this morning when she was getting ready. I tried to tell her but she wouldn't listen." Ron kept his gaze on her. Hermione held it.

"Yes, well, she wouldn't listen to us either. She asked Ron for tea and when he said no she sort of went mad," Ginny explained.

"Oh, you're joking," Harry said.

"No, she's not. She asked if I wanted to spend the day with her, but I told her that I was spending the day with my sister. She thought that I was taking the piss out of her. After the fourth time I explained it to her, she gave up," Ron said.

"I think she thought the outfit would win Ron back but we all know better," Ginny said with a wink.

The little humor that was in Ron's features vanished. He looked down. "I just didn't want to have lunch with her. My day was already going lousy enough, and I didn't want her making it worse." The moment he let out his last word, his face changed. "Oh, I-I didn't mean it like that."

Ginny frowned. "I tried my best, Ron."

"I know you did, Ginny. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that. I had a good time, really," Ron said.

Ginny waved a hand. "It's okay. I know what you meant. I think I'm going to go change." She stood up and headed to the staircase.

Ron got up as well and went over to her. "I'm really sorry, Ginny. I honestly didn't mean it that way."

She smiled faintly. "I know, Ron. It's fine. I'll see you a bit later." She walked up the staircase.

Ron closed his eyes and sighed. He walked back over and sat on the floor in front of them. He stared into the fire and played with the laces on his shoes. Hermione didn't know what to do. He seemed so upset and conflicted. He didn't look any better off than they did. She snuck a quick glance at Harry. He was looking at Ron as well. It was the first time the three of them were together since Ron told them about his breakup with Lavender in the very spot he was in now.

"Ron," Hermione said gently.

"She's upset because she thinks that she let me down. Can you believe it? I acted like a arse to her, and she's taking the blame," he said. He kept his eyes on the fire.

"She knows you're a bit upset. I don't think she's taking it personally," she said.

"It doesn't matter. I couldn't even explain to her that it had nothing to do with her. It's not her fault. She's been great all day," Ron said.

"I'm sorry, Ron," Harry said.

Ron finally turned his head from the fire. "Yeah, me too, Harry. I'm sorry that my seventeenth birthday was shit. I'm sorry that my sister got lied to not once but three times today."

"You could have told her the truth. We don't expect you to cover for us," Hermione said.

"It's not for you, Hermione. It's for her. Do you honestly believe things will get better if Ginny knows what you two did? Now, because of your lies I have to lie to her, too. Nothing about this is simple," Ron said. He went back to looking into the fire.

"What do you want to do, Ron?" she asked.

"What do you mean by that?" Ron said.

"Well, if telling Ginny about this won't make things better, then what will?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I dunno and I don't want to talk or think about it right now."

"Ron, how are we supposed to make this better if we don't talk about it?" Harry asked.

He gave him a look. "Are you trying to lecture me about what's right and what's wrong?"

Harry sighed. "No, Ron, you know that's not what I'm trying to do."

"Then what the fuck are you saying?" Ron shot.

"Please, let's not do this. If Ron doesn't want to talk about this today, then we won't talk about it," Hermione said.

Ron stood. "No, it's okay. Let's talk. Let's work this whole thing out and shake hands. Let's go through everything again right now. It's my birthday, so it's not like anything important is going on."

Harry stood up. "Ron, please, why are you being this way? Can't you see that I'm trying here?"

"Ronâ€¦Harry," Hermione breathed. She didn't want them to fight. The last thing she needed was to see Ron and Harry go at it. They both ignored her.

"No, Harry, I guess I can't see what you're trying to do. All I can think about is what you did to my sister and how upset she is," Ron said.

"She seemed okay to me. Well, until you told her that you had a shit of a birthday," Harry said angrily.

"It wouldn't have been so terrible if you hadn't ruined everything beforehand," Ron said.

Harry threw his hands up. "Yes, please, tell me again Ron because I haven't figured that much out for myself! I know that I fucked up, but I'm trying to fix it. You won't let me. You won't even try to hear my side."

"What exactly do you want from me, Harry? What do you want me to try? Please, instruct me on how this is my fault, and I will be more than happy to make it all better for you. I'll do my best to make sure that you're seen as the hero once again," Ron snapped.

Harry shook his head. "There's no point in this. You won't even try to understand what I'm saying." He pushed past him and quickly headed out of the portrait hole. The moment Harry left, some of the anger in Ron's face vanished. He sat in the chair and covered his face with his hands.

Hermione watched with her lip bit. She didn't know what to say. The pressure against her chest came back. She had to get up before she lost it. She ran to her room and closed the curtains around her bed. She laid in silence and tried to block out the sounds of Ron and Harry fighting. It was never supposed to be that way. Ron and Harry's friendship had always been a constant in her life. She knew that they were angry at each other but seeing it was something else entirely. It was too much. She put a pillow over her head and tried to get to sleep.

She opened her eyes and turned over. She looked at her wristwatch. It was almost midnight. She was thankful. It had been a horrible day and now Harry and Ron's relationship was even more unstable. She tried to fluff up her pillow, but it was useless. She knew what she had to do to stop feeling so restless. She got out of bed and put a robe on over her gown. She pulled a wrapped gift from her trunk and quietly headed out of her room. She traveled to the sixth year boys' dorm and stared at the plaque. It had been so long it seemed since she was at the door, and she felt every bit of nervousness from it. She licked her lips and took a breath before knocking. The moment she was done she wanted to run back to her room but she knew she couldn't. She would never get any sleep if she did.

She raised her hand to knock again but the door opened. It was Seamus on the other side. "Bugger, Hermione, I thought you were Hannah."

"Why would Hannah have access to our password, Seamus?" Hermione asked, folding her arms.

"Ah, no reason. So, let me guess, you want Ron?" he asked with a smile.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. "Yes, I would like to SPEAK with him."

Seamus continued to smile. "Sure, hold on." He closed the door, and Hermione quickly adjusted her robe and took another deep breath.

Ron appeared on the other side of the door. Her body heated up. Once again he wore his rather small black Quidditch shirt and the ever so loose maroon pajamas. He raised an eyebrow. "Yeah?"

Hermione hadn't planned on what she would tell Ron. "It's not midnight yet and I was hoping thatâ€¦well, I was hoping that I could give you your birthday gift."

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "Hermione, I don't think-

"I could just give it to you if you want. Here," she handed him the present. Ron took it and looked it over in his hands. "Well, goodnight." She began to turn away, but Ron touched her shoulder.

"Wait, um, just hold on a minute. You don't have to go, yet," he said softly.

Even more warmth filled her. "Okay," she whispered.

He let go of her and closed the door behind him. "Come on," he said.

She followed him down the stairs to the staircase leading to the fifth years' rooms. He sat down next to the wall and she sat next to him. They were silent. Hermione tried not to stare at Ron, but it was of no use. He was so gorgeous, and she missed him to no end. It was entirely too hot for her robe now. She slowly took it off.

"So, did you really not enjoy your birthday?" she asked.

He shrugged. "It was okay. I know Ginny and my brothers really did try. I appreciate it butâ€¦it wasn't right, you know?"

He looked at her, and Hermione lost herself. She couldn't believe that they were talking and were so close. She couldn't believe that Ron wasn't yelling or trying to get away from her like he had done with Harry. "Yes, I understand. It wasn't right here."

"You didn't really have work to do to, did you?" Ron asked.

"No, I did homework and studied. Harry and I both did. We were trying not to think about what we were missing too much. It didn't work," she explained quietly.

Ron gazed at the gift and ran his hands all over it. "It didn't work for me either."

"Ron, I really wanted to be there and so did Harry. That's the truth," Hermione said.

He looked at her once more. "And I wanted you there. I wanted you both there."

A lump formed in her throat. "Really?"

He moved a bit closer to her. "Hermione, I've already told you. I don't enjoy this. I don't want to be this way with you or with Harry. I didn't want to fight with him, but I got so angry and I couldn't stop myself. I don't like feeling so furious at him, and I don't like being away from you."

She moved closer as well. Her body craved Ron's presence, and she needed to be near him and talk to him more than she needed air at the moment. "I don't enjoy it either, but I don't know how else it's supposed to be. I just don't know what to do, Ron."

"Neither do I. I kept thinking about you all day," he said.

"I thought about you, too. I always do," she whispered.

"How do I go on from something like this? How do we?" Ron asked.

She shook her head. "I don't have any answers, Ron. I haven't known the right thing for a long time. I think if I didâ€¦none of this would have happened. The four of us would have gone out for your birthday and you would have enjoyed turning seventeen. I'm so sorry for that, Ron." She wiped her eyes and sniffed.

Ron rubbed his neck. "I would have liked that so much more than trying to get rid of Lavender."

"So, you're not a fan of her maroon outfit?" she asked with a chuckle.

He rolled his eyes. "Bloody hell, that girl is barmy."

"I'm surprised that it didn't impress you," Hermione said.

Ron crinkled his nose. "Well, it was maroon and I meanâ€¦I've seen all that before from Lavender. It's fine, I reckon, but it's never been something that I found truly appealing. She tries a bit too hard. She never understood that."

"She didn't try to. She didn't even know your favorite color, Ron," Hermione cheeked.

He looked at her longingly and grinned. "But you do."

"Yes, I do," she said gently.

They stared at each other. Her heartbeat picked up a little. She finally realized how close they were. She could smell Ron's scent

and feel how warm he was. So much was wrong between them but at that moment Hermione couldn't feel any of it. She forgot about their problems. She felt apart of his world again, and she enjoyed every second of it.

Ron was the first to turn away. "Well, um, I should probably open this."

Hermione shook her head slightly and focused on what was going on. "Yes, go ahead."

She watched and held her breath as Ron took off the wrapping paper. He turned the frame around and instantly smiled. "Bloody hell," he whispered.

"Is that good or bad?" Hermione asked.

Ron looked up at her. "Where did you get this?"

She felt a bit of relief. "Remember when Fred and George took it? Well, they actually gave me a copy, and I held on to it all this time. I thought it would be a good coming of age present for you." He laughed and moved right next to her so he could put the picture on their touching knees. Hermione shivered slightly but focused on the picture. It was of her and Ron taken third year at their first Hogsmeade visit. They were sitting at Tea for Two with big smiles and even bigger blushes on their faces.

"Fred and George took the piss out of me all year after this day," Ron said.

"Why?" Hermione asked.

"They kept saying that we had gone out on a date this day," he said.

She wanted to say that she had always considered that day their very first date, but she held her tongue. "Of course they would. Wow, look at how young we are."

"Look at my haircut," Ron said, cringing.

"Hush, you look adorable," Hermione said.

"And you look the same. I think you'll always look like this," he said.

"Is that a good thing?" she asked.

Ron looked her over and then stared at the photo. His smile grew. "Yes, I think it is."

She felt her cheeks flush. "So, you like it?"

"It's great, Hermione. Thank you," Ron said.

"I'm just glad that I was able to give it to you. It's a good memory of ours," Hermione said.

"I can't believe this is us. So much has changed since then," Ron said. He ran his finger over his younger self. Hermione took her finger and ran it over her younger self. In the process, their hands touched. She put her hand over his and ran the tips of nails over his knuckles. She couldn't help herself. Everything felt so right.

"Not everything has changed," Hermione whispered.

Ron looked up from the picture and stared at her. He swallowed hard. "Yeah, some things have stayed the same."

She turned so she completely faced him but kept her hand on his. "Or maybe they've gotten better."

He put the picture down and faced her as well. He didn't move her hand away. "Yes, better and maybe more intense andâ€¦"

"Hot?" Hermione wheezed. She was talking more about her current state than anything else. Ron gazed at her so fiercely that it made sweat trickle down her skin. They were so very close and the sexual charge between them blazed and grew with an incredible force.

He licked his lips slowly. "I reckon hot works."

She let out a shaky breath. "Ron." She put her hand on his leg.

"Yeah?" he said, breathing heavily.

She began to shake, and she found it harder and harder to breathe. "I-I miss you, and I really missed you today."

"I miss you, Hermione." Ron said. "Even with everything going on, I wanted you today. I wanted you there with me."

She whimpered gently and slowly inched forward. She knew that they were in a fight. She knew that she needed to give him and herself a chance to work out their problems, but her body couldn't fight it. She looked down at his lips. "Maybeâ€¦"

He touched her face and tenderly ran his thumb across her mouth. She kissed his finger and electricity sparked through her skin. "Hermione," he said gently.

"Ron," she answered, closing her eyes. She felt the intoxication again and her middle was on fire.

"Wait," he said breathlessly. She opened his eyes. Ron was staring at her with a pained expression. He pulled his hand away. "I'm really tired. Iâ€¦I need to go to sleep."

Hermione's heart dropped. "I'm sorry. I-I didn't mean for that to happen."

He nodded. "It's okay. Neither did I."

She closed her eyes again as her entire face flushed. "Listen, I didn't mean to--"

He cut her off. "It's fine. I justâ€¦I don't know what's happening andâ€¦and I don't think it should."

"You don't think this should happen?" she croaked.

"Yes-I mean no. I meanâ€¦" he blushed furiously. "It shouldn't happen like this. I'm sorry, Hermione. I don't know what I'm saying." Ron's entire face and neck was red.

Hermione stood up and shook her head frantically. "Oh, no, you're right. I'm sorry. Um, this was a bad idea. I don't know what I was thinking. I wasn't trying to impose anything."

Ron stood up as well and tightly held the picture in his hand. "I'm sorry, Hermione."

"It's okay. We should go to bed. I should go to bed," Hermione rushed. "Happy birthday, Ron." She didn't even give Ron time to respond. She ran straight to her room. She sat in her bed and rocked slowly. She tried to slow her heart rate and cool her body down. She was on fire and her mind was in a frenzy. It had been such a horrible day and an even more confusing night.

Hermione ran a hand through her hair and exhaled deeply. She touched her lips and closed her eyes. It was then that she realized that she was smiling. Ron had missed her. He wanted her there on his birthday. Lavender's attempt meant nothing to him. The implications made her smile grow and body shiver in excitement. They were so close and the heat between them had seemed to return.

Things seemed to be returning or quite possibly...

They never really left.

\*\*\*\*Whew, that was rather toasty, lol. Okay, I have some things to say \*as always.\*

I really wanted Ron's birthday to be a factor in this story like it was in HBP. I also wanted something to happen on Ron's birthday to sort of bring Ron and Hermione closer together like in HBP. There were so many ideas that I had but then this one came to me and I stuck with it. I wanted something simple. I wanted something that would not seem like much to other people but for R/Hr have it mean everything. For me, when I read PoA and R/Hr went on the first Hogsmeade trip together alone, I was beyond excited. I've always considered it their first date and probably the first time they really felt the butterflies for each other because they were alone and totally engrossed in each other. I think it's a very special and intimate moment between them. So, I thought the picture would be a cute and ideal way to sort of jog their memories as to how they used to be. They're in a fight but they still feel everything for each other and small things like that can help mend them.



As for the argument between Hermione/Lavender regarding Ron's favorite color, I know it may seem like that was unimportant but it really is. It's a foreshadowing to some issues that will arise between Hermione/Lavender later, so, just a fair warning. There's still plenty of Lav Lav in store, lol.

Now, the contrast between where Ron is with Hermione and where he is with Harry, I believe that because Harry is sort of more of Ron's best mate and because Harry made a plan against Ginny to win her, Ron is going to take a bit more time to forgive him. It's how I've always thought it would be. It's not as if Hermione is less guilty or better, it's just Ron is more hurt by Harry. He feels there's more betrayal there because he trusted Harry more and really with Ginny. However, don't worry, I'm not going to leave Ron's relationship with Harry in the dust while he gets better with Hermione. I love the R/H friendship and I love writing them together, so, it will work out.

So, I hope everyone liked the chapter! We are slowly inching toward "it." lol. I think it would be very wise to review because um, there's just some stuff coming up soon that you all might want to read. ;) Thanks for reading lot and review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 29

Thanks for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry sighed and pulled the ball chest and brooms out of the shed. He took them to the practice tent and looked over the board. There was a lot that he needed to go over with his team, but he didn't feel like talking about any of it. He was exhausted. Ron still wasn't speaking to him. In fact, he was sure that Ron hated him even more after their latest screaming match. He hadn't meant for things to get so out of hand, but he couldn't help himself. He was sick and tired of feeling so badly for his poor choices. He didn't know why things had to be so hard. It didn't help that Hermione was still rather miserable. Granted, she seemed better but Harry could see the emptiness in her eyes and hear the dullness in her voice. To top it off, he still wasn't any closer to being with Ginny. Their current relationship was at an infuriating standstill.

For the first time ever, Harry wanted to go back to the Dursley's house. At least there he could lock himself up in his room and forget everything. At least there he didn't feel like he was stuck in a horrible quicksand of lies and guilt. He could deal with people who already didn't like him. He wasn't sure how much longer he could take having once best friends now so distant. He took the quaffles out of the chest and twisted one in his hands. No matter what he felt, he had to focus on the game now. It was the only thing left in his life that he could control and hadn't managed to ruin.

"Harry?"

He turned around and his body went into a twisted knot of pleasure and fear as Ginny poked her head into the tent. He was torn between loving her presence and fearing it because he was worried about her finding out. "Hi, Ginny, come in," he said.

She entered and Harry examined her expression. Every day he wondered if she was going to tell him that she knew about his lies or that she had decided not to finalize things with Dean. However, she didn't look as if she wanted to kill him. "Where's Ron?" she asked.

"What?" he said out of breath.

"Where is Ron? Doesn't he usually help you set up before practice?" She looked around as if expecting him to walk in any minute.

"Oh," Harry said, turning around and putting the quaffles back. He couldn't look at her. Ginny was too good at reading him. "Yeah, I guess. Um, I don't know. I think he's still in the castle."

"Harry, look at me," Ginny said.

He had no choice but to obey. She always knew how to get to him without even having to try. "What?"

She moved closer. The closer she moved to him, the more Harry wanted to touch her. He wanted to hold her and ask her what to do about Ron and Hermione. He wanted to kiss her and tell her how much he loved her and hated having to wait to be with her. Harry wanted so much, but he knew now that he might not ever get it or deserve it.

"What is going on?" she asked.

"I don't know what you mean," Harry answered.

She put her hands on her hips. "Don't do this. You know what I mean. What is going on with you and Ron?"

"Ginny, nothing is going on," he said.

"Of course something is going on. I've seen you two as best mates since you were both twelve. I've seen you two piss around, but I've also seen you two fight. I think I can tell by now when something is wrong, and the entire birthday situation did not exactly help you cover up whatever it is that you're hiding from me." She stared at him fiercely.

He didn't know how to respond. It was difficult to stand up to her when her eyes were piercing right through him. "Everything is fine, Ginny."

She looked as if she wanted to scream but she didn't. She took a breath and said calmly, "No. Everything is not fine. Something is

wrong with Ron. Something is wrong with you, and something is wrong with Hermione. What happened?"

A bit of anxiety rose in Harry. He wanted to tell Ginny the truth so that she could help, but he knew that telling her would destroy his last bit of happiness. It would ruin his chances of being with her. "Nothing happened," he said quietly.

"I talked to Ron you know," she said.

Harry gasped slightly. "You did?"

She nodded. "Yeah, when we were in Hogsmeade. I asked him about what was really going on between you all."

He tried not to look eager as he felt. "What did he say?"

She sighed. "Nothing. He told me the same thing that Hermione did. I know the three of you are in a disagreement about something."

"It's nothing serious," Harry said.

"I know. I've heard each of you say that, too." Ginny inched forward again. "I told him to forgive you."

"What would make you say that?" Harry asked, feeling a familiar warmth come over him.

She smiled. "It was his birthday, so I reckoned it was right to make whatever the argument was about not his fault. I told him that you and Hermione care about him deeply and whatever you said or did to upset him, he should let go. You three have been through too much."

If there was ever any doubt in Harry's mind about his feelings for Ginny or if she was the one, they vanished in that moment. "That'sâ€¦that's really nice of you to say, Ginny."

Her smile grew. "Ron's not completely innocent, I'm sure. I'll tell you the same thing. I don't know what's going on but I think you should forgive Hermione and Ron. Hermioneâ€¦wellâ€¦I know she can be a bit much at times, but it's always out of the best of mind. She just wants what's best for everyone. It took me a while to understand that. She always has good intentions."

"Yeah, she does," Harry said.

"As for Ron, I think you know him by now. He gets angry and out of line about things, but there's nothing he cares about more than you and Hermione. It just takes him a while to get himself together when he's upset. If he hurt you Harry, realize that he didn't mean to. There's a lot about Ron that people don't understand right away. My brother has a good heart, and it's huge. He's just stubborn and has a temper. They're sacred Weasley traits."

Harry laughed. "I've noticed that over the years," he said. He was a mix of emotions. He felt even guiltier hearing Ginny talk about forgiveness and about Ron. However, it also thawed out his heart. Ginny Weasley was the best. She was everything that he needed.

Ginny smirked and moved right in front of him. She took his hands into hers and locked their fingers together. Her hands were incredibly soft and small and her touch felt amazing. Harry wanted her so badly. "Harry, I know that I'm not as close to you three but Hermione is my friend, you are my friend, and Ron is my brother. For once, can you include me? Maybe I can help. I can give you my general advice now, but it would be a lot easier if I knew the whole situation."

Harry lost himself in her massive brown eyes. Maybe he could tell her. Maybe she would understand and help make things better. She already had so many great things to say. She may truly know how to fix things if he told her everything. He considered it for a whole second before realizing that he wouldn't take any more chances. Sure, he wanted her help but, it wasn't worth her hating him. He didn't want to burden her with his mistakes. If anyone was going to fix things it was going to be him. It was something that he had to do himself.

Reluctantly, he pulled his hands away from hers. "There's nothing major going on, Ginny. We'll work it out."

Some of the warmth in her eyes faded. She shrugged. "Okay, Harry. Fine. I should have figured this much."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

Ginny rolled her eyes. "Please. I'm not that thick. I know something is wrong. I think I know the three of you well enough by now, and I can tell that whatever is going on is more than nothing. See, I knew that I would get nothing out of Ron and Hermione. I reckon that I should have figured the same for you. If you don't want to tell me Harry, then that's your right, but it only proves my point that you don't trust me and obviously you don't see me as someone you can go to for help."

She was wrong in every way, but he couldn't explain it to her. It angered him that he couldn't tell the woman he loved about the biggest problem in his life. "Please, don't start this now. I've got enough going on without you getting on my case, too," he shot. He had too many emotions and worries on his shoulders to keep his poise stiff and calm. He was just so bloody tired of messing everything up and never knowing how to do the right thing.

"This is exactly what I'm talking about. What else is going on, Harry? You can talk to me. How could I ever be your girlfriend if you can't even talk to me as your friend?" There was anger in her voice.

All the reserve Harry had snapped off. "I don't know, Ginny. How could I ever be your boyfriend if you can't even tell your ex that you want someone else?"

Ginny's face paled a little. "W-what?"

He tried to keep his anger to a minimum. "Ginny, you haven't talked to Dean about me yet, have you?"

She shook her head. "No, I haven't."

He swallowed hard. "Well, do you ever plan to?"

Ginny looked back up at him. "Of course I do. I'm just looking for the right time, Harry. It's complicated. This isn't easy."

"Yeah, that's what you keep telling me, but have you ever considered that maybe this isn't easy for me? I understand how complicated it is. I'm right in the middle of it. Can't you see that?" he asked. He hated the weakness in his voice. He bit his lip hard.

"Oh, Harry," she said softly. She walked even closer to him. They were so close now that their bodies touched. Harry automatically wrapped his arms around her waist. He held her tightly as she buried her face in his neck. "I'm sorry," she said.

"I do trust you, Ginny. I really do," he whispered. Her hair smelled fantastic, and her body was so warm against his. It felt safe to hold her, and he missed every piece of her.

She held on to him tighter. "And I want you, Harry. I want you so much. I just need to do what's right. I don't want to fuck up anymore."

He closed his eyes and felt blood rush to his groin. Her lips against the skin on his neck made every inch of him heat up. "I don't want to fuck up anymore either, Ginny. That's not what I'm asking."

She pulled away and put a hand on his cheek. Her face was flushed. "I know it's not what you're asking, Harry. I know," she trailed off.

Harry lost himself in her eyes again. In fact, he lost himself in her everything. He couldn't hold back. He leaned forward and kissed her. She sighed deeply and hugged his neck. She pressed her lips as hard as she could against his.

He forgot where he was or what he was doing once again. He acted purely on passion and flicked his tongue against her lips. She parted them and let him explore her mouth. He instantly groaned and squeezed her hips. Ginny dug her nails into his neck and tugged on his tongue with her lips. They snogged viciously. Harry wanted more. It killed him to have to see Ginny, know what she felt like, but never get the chance to experience it again. It was wrong. He knew it wasn't the time to be greedy. He knew that he had to stop. He knew that he had to be slow and patient but he

couldn't. He was so tired of everything, and Ginny was all he had left. His hands went higher. He wedged them between their bodies and squeezed her breasts. She had on layers of gear but it was enough to make her jerk and moan loudly. Ginny in her Quidditch robes the sexiest image on the planet to him and them being alone in the practice tent only fueled his fantasy.

"Harry," she hissed, pulling away.

"Yeah?" he breathed with his eyes still closed. He wanted her body more than anything. Her body made him forget about everything wrong in his life, and he was desperate for a way out.

She pulled away more. "Wait. We can't do this."

He opened his eyes. "What?"

She pulled away completely. "I think I hear some of the teammates coming."

"Okay," he said stupidly.

She gave him a look. "So, I don't want them to catch us in here."

"But-but why? Why does it matter?" he asked. He knew why it mattered. He didn't want to get caught, but his frustration took over again.

"Harry, I don't know about you, but I'd rather not have the whole team watch us," she said.

He rolled his eyes. "Like you ever cared with Dean."

"Excuse me?" she said.

Harry knew that he had made a mistake but it was too late to take it back. He was hurt, sexually frustrated, and incredibly annoyed. "Is it the team that you're worried about or just Dean?"

Her jaw dropped. "How dare you say that?"

"There were plenty of times when Ron had to break you two apart. I've also had the pleasure of walking in on you and Dean plastered to each other. Why do you care who sees all of a sudden? Is it because you're with me this time? Do you not want to upset Dean?" His voice quivered. He hadn't meant to sound so cruel and immature but they were real fears, and he wanted answers.

She looked away from him. "I'm not going to do this with you right now. Believe whatever you want. What I have to say obviously means nothing." She left the tent without a look back.

Harry rubbed his forehead and kicked one of the benches. He groaned in pain and sat down. "Fuck," he breathed. There was so much going through him. No matter what he said or did, it was wrong. Ginny was right. The collective chatter from the team grew louder and louder until it reached the tent. They came piling in.

He tried to ignore the jumble of feelings when Ginny, Dean, and Ron entered and sat down. None looked straight at him while entering. He wanted to leave, but he knew that he had to continue. He cleared his throat and clutched his broom for support. It was going to be the longest practice of his life.

"Okay, I was thinking that we could go over some team defense today. We're getting closer and closer to the playoffs, and it's going to come down to skill to determine who wins and goes on to the finals." He looked around the room. Ron gazed at his shoes, Ginny played with the ends of her hair, and Dean stared at him as he always did. He couldn't take it. There was no way that he could make it through the entire practice while being pulled in three different directions. "Actuallyâ€¦no. No practice today."

"What?" Katie said. "You're honestly cancelling today?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

"Harry, we need to practice. It'sâ€¦fine," Ginny said awkwardly.

He shook his head. "No. I've been pushing you lot too hard lately."

"We can handle it, Harry," Dean said. "We're supposed to be pushed. That's your job as our captain."

Harry could detect the attitude in his voice. It sounded more like a challenge than an encouragement, but he let it go. "Great observation, Dean. You're right. I am the captain, and I say that we're not having practice today. It's important to train, but it's also important to rest. I don't want everyone to be burned out before the next match. It's only going to take a bit of weakness or lack of focus from us to have it tip in the opponent's favor. It's all they're going to need to take the championship away from us." No one seemed satisfied with his answer. "Look, it doesn't matter what you think. I said there's no practice. Now, go on before I add a hundred laps around the pitch to the next practice."

The team communally stood up and headed out. Harry watched them. He watched Ginny and knew that he had to apologize to her. He had acted tremendously childish, and he had to make things right. He thought about what he had said to her. He had been so selfish, and he had to do something right. He wanted to go after her, but there was something more important to do. There was something else that he had to try to fix in order for anything to be right again.

"Ron," Harry said. He turned to him but said nothing. "I need you to stay."

He gave him a look. "You can't be serious."

"I am serious," Harry said.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Fine." Harry walked over to him. He watched Ginny as she walked back across the pitch. His heart sank a

little. He had to make things right with her, but it would be for nothing if he couldn't help the situation with Ron. "So, what do you want?"

Harry tore his eyes away from her and looked at Ron. He hadn't spoken to him since his birthday. The last time they were in a room together, they had fought and he actually felt a bit nervous because of it. Harry didn't want that to happen again. "We need to have your practice session."

"What?" Ron said.

"You missed yours. Remember when you broke up with Lavender?"

"Yes, I remember, Harry. My memory isn't that horrible," he interrupted.

Harry kept his composure. "Well, that was your single session. You are the only person on the team who hasn't had at least one yet. It's important that we go over some things."

Ron raised an eyebrow. "You said that there was no practice. You said that we needed rest. Maybe it's your memory that's shit."

Harry usually would have laughed or given Ron a playful shove at his cheeky statement, but he suspected that Ron wasn't being funny. He was trying to make a point. "Ron, this is something that we have to do."

"Well, you can forget. I'm not doing it," he said simply. He turned away and began to walk out of the tent.

"Ron. Wait. L-look, you can ignore me and act like a prick whenever you want to outside of practice. However, the moment your feet touch the pitch and you put that Quidditch gear on, I am your captain and you will respect me." Harry hated that he had to use authority to get Ron to talk to him. He never thought that their friendship would ever be so broken down.

He turned back around. Anger was written all over his face. "Are you really going to use that on me?"

Harry stood his ground. "If you want to play on this team, then you will commit to your single sessions."

Ron chuckled. "Unbelievable." He was silent for a moment. "So, are we doing ground work or something in the air?"

Harry was taken aback. A part of him didn't think it would actually work, but he should have known that Ron's love for Quidditch would always win out. "Oh, um, in the air."

He didn't say another word. He tore out of the tent and Harry could hear a slight swooshing noise from his broom zipping into the sky. Harry quickly took a few breaths and collected his thoughts. He knew this was his one opportunity to talk to Ron without interruptions. He met him in the sky and simply stared at



him. Ron turned away and fiddled with his arm strap. "So what are we doing?"

"We need to go over your catching. Your blocking is great but your catching is off. You're not very steady on your broom when you get a fast quaffle. We don't have a backup keeper, so you need to stay in the whole game and not get knocked off your broom," Harry explained.

Ron looked as if he was trying to find a retort but he couldn't. "Yeah, I know what you mean. I slip a lot," he said reluctantly.

"I've noticed. Let's work on that," Harry said.

"How? I can't exactly control how fast a ball comes at me," he said.

"I know that, but you can control how you catch it and with which part of your body. It's all about keeping steady and keeping a firm grip. You're not using your chest and your biceps enough. Here, let me show you." Harry demonstrated how to properly hold the ball against his chest. "See, I have a better grip because of the slight hunch. Let's give it a go. I'm just going to keep passing the quaffle to you and you catch it. Try a few different ways to do it."

For the next hour the two of them practiced. It was like nothing Harry had ever experienced before. They didn't talk about anything else other than Ron's catching, and Ron rarely gave Harry his full attention. It was unreal. He had always felt a distinct easiness and delight when around Ron. It was gone now. He knew that he had ruined their friendship and it was too much to ask Ron to forgive him, but there was something greater on the line. Their time was finally up. The two of them flew back to the Quidditch tent.

"So, remember to use that holding technique in the next game. I want to see it used a lot in the up coming practices, too. We really need you to be in top form, Ron," Harry said.

"I will. It feels better to catch it that way anyway," he answered. The two stared at each other in silence. Ron was the first to look away. "Well, I'm gonna go."

"Wait," Harry said suddenly.

Ron stopped. "Don't tell me that there's more."

"No, practice is over," Harry said.

"Good, so there's no reason for me to stay," he answered. He started walking out of the tent again.

Harry closed his eyes and shook his head. He considered letting Ron walk off. He was worn-out and knew that getting through to Ron would be excruciating, but he thought back to Hermione and the dullness. He thought about the look in Ginny's eyes after his

claims. He couldn't stand it and he had to do something. "Ron, just stop for a moment!"

Ron turned around. "What do you want? I thought we went over everything."

"It's not about Quidditch," Harry started.

"There's really nothing more between us, Harry," Ron shot.

The remark hit him close to the chest. "Yes, there is and you know it. Ron, we really need to talk, please."

He leaned his broom against the wall and walked over to him. "What do we need to talk about? Do you want to apologize for the other day?"

"No," Harry said.

Ron crossed his arms over his chest. "So, you want to convince me that you meant no harm against my sister again?"

"No, this isn't about Ginny. This isn't really even about me," Harry said.

A bit of curiosity lit up Ron's eyes. "Then what is it about?"

"Hermione," Harry said simply.

Something came over Ron. He dropped his arms and his features softened. "What about her?" His voice was exceedingly gentler.

Harry had to choose his words carefully. "Ron, when are you going to talk to her? When are you going to forgive her?"

A bit of the hardness came back to his face. "Here we go again. Did she put you up to this? I should have known that this would happen sooner or later. I was beginning to wonder when you would try to make me feel guilty." He looked as if he wanted to take off again.

Harry moved after him. He snatched his arm. "For fuck sake, Ron, just listen to me. Stop running away. I'm trying to help, and you're going to bloody listen to me this time. There's no plan. This is me. Hermione didn't ask me to talk to you. I'm talking to you because it's the right thing to do. Hear me out, please!" The anger and impatience was too much. Harry let Ron go and half expected him to punch him again. However, he simply looked him over. There was something in his eyes that Harry understood. The wall that Ron had put up since their fight seemed weaker, and Harry could tell that it was getting to him. Ron was hurting, too.

He sat down on the bench. "Okay, I'm listening." There was almost desperation in his voice.

Harry sat down next to him. He saw the weakness in Ron, and he held on to it. It was his only way in. "Ron, how long are you

going to keep this up? How long are you going to not speak to her?"

He looked at his hands. "I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing here, Harry. I've never been in a situation like this before."

"Neither have we, Ron. We just want to make it better. Hermione is sorry. Can't you see that?" Harry asked.

Ron shifted in his seat. "Sometimes I think I do but thenâ€¦I wonder if it's just her trying to seem hurt. I don't know if she truly cares or not."

"Of course she cares. She wouldn't do that, Ron. This is honestly tearing her up. You know that she cares about you," Harry said.

Ron gazed at him curiously. "Do I? Harry, she lied to me. She's been lying to me all year. Every time I convince myself that she cares, I remember what she did. I don't know what to believe."

Harry felt terrible, but he had to keep going. "I know she did, but it was a mistake. She never meant to hurt you. You have to believe that she loves you."

"I try to. I try to think that she loves me, but it's not that simple. How could she do something like that if she loves me?" Ron snorted. "I don't know why I'm asking you. You did the same bloody thing."

"This isn't about me, Ron. This is about you and Hermione," Harry said.

"There is no me and Hermione. Don't you get it? I want to forgive her, but I don't know how. I want to still be mad at her but everyday I see her and I think about her moreâ€¦the less angry I feel. It's confusing, and it's eating me alive. I'm torn, Harry," Ron explained.

Harry wanted to give him a supportive pat on the arm or shoulder, but he didn't want to overstep his boundary. "I can understand that. No one is expecting you to forget. I don't even think Hermione wants you to, but you have to talk to her. You have to try to understand. You can't honestly keep this up. You can't honestly keep hating her."

Ron shook his head and looked at him sternly. "I don't hate Hermione. She hurt me and made me furious, but I don't hate her. I could never hate her. Iâ€¦it's not possible for me to. I don't even want to hate her. I justâ€¦I justâ€¦I don't know. I don't know what I want."

"I think you do," Harry said gently. "You want her, don't you? You couldn't possibly hate Hermione because you love her. Right?"

Ron's breathed heavily. He nodded slowly. "Yeah, I do want her and even with all of this going on and all that she did, I still love her, Harry. I still love her so fucking much. She got me a

wicked gift for my birthday, and I couldn't even tell her how much it meant to me because of this stupid fight. I wanted to give her a hug, m-maybe kiss her, and just be with her but I couldn't. Now, this I hate. I hate this more than anything."

The raw emotion from Ron made Harry's own eyes feel rather tight, but he held it together. "Then why are you torturing yourself? This is ripping you apart, Ron. Why are you trying to keep yourself away from her? I know she hurt you, but you're hurting yourself more by doing this. You're hurting her by pushing her away. She loves you and she wants you. She's sorry, Ron."

Ron closed his eyes and breathed in and out, trying to regain his composure. "I don't deserve to be lied to. I know that I'm not much and I've never been the greatest person but what Hermione did, what you and Hermione did to me, I don't deserve it."

Harry was caught between feeling incredibly guilty but also unbelievably proud of Ron. He loved that Ron was finally taking interest in himself and standing up for himself. It was a courage that he had never seen before. "We know you don't, mate. Believe me, what we did is the biggest mistake of our lives. I regret every second of it and so does Hermione. Sorry doesn't mean much, but it's all we have. You have to give her the chance."

"Why? Why does she or you deserve anything? You think you're the only one miserable or have made mistakes? You're not. I'm here, too. I've always been here. Bloody hell, do you think it's easy to sit here and listen to you? Do you think it's easy to talk to you? It's not. None of this is easy. I'm torn here. I don't want to care anymore, but I do. I don't trust you and-and I don't know if I can trust her. I don't know anything." Ron covered his face with his hands and sniffed loudly.

It was painful for Harry. Seeing Ron break down was awful. He couldn't believe that he could have hurt his best friend so badly. "Ron, please, listen to me." He placed his hand on Ron's shoulder. Expectedly, Ron moved away. It didn't stop Harry, though. "Look, I know you think that you don't know me anymore and maybe you're right. To be honest, I don't really know me to well anymore. I thought I did, but I guess I was wrong. Anyway, I still know you. I still know you better than I'd like to, and I know how much this is taking out of you. I know how much you love Hermione and how badly you want to be with her. I know that it's hurting you every time you brush past her, ignore her, or see that look in her eyes. I see it, too. Ron, I believe that you want to forgive her and you should. You have to give her a chance. It's the only way that you'll stop feeling like this, and it's the only way to make Hermione better. You want to make her better, don't you?"

"Of course I do," Ron said behind his hands.

"Then think about. Ron, you can't honestly stay mad at her forever and believe that she wanted to hurt you. She was in pain. Seeing you with Lavender hurt her every day," Harry said.

"She didn't have to lie to me," he added.

"I know she didn't. I'm not saying that it was the right thing. It's just...Ron, remember when you asked if I was shagging Hermione or when you kept wanting to know if she was really with Cormac or Krum?" Harry asked.

"Yeah. How could I ever forget?" he said.

"Well, remember that feeling you got? Remember that sickening fear that you felt? It's how Hermione felt seeing you with Lavender. It's how she felt when you came over to us hand in hand with Lavender and when she was snogged all over you. It's been really hard for her, too. It's been hard for Hermione to speculate and see. I think you can understand that. I think you know what it feels like to see someone you love but think that she wants someone else or is actually with someone else," Harry said slowly. His focus suddenly turned to Ginny.

Ron must have read his mind. He removed his hands. "Is this your way of getting me to understand what you did to Ginny?"

Harry snapped out of his thoughts. "No. I get that you won't or can't hear me out on that, but I said that this isn't about me. This is about you and Hermione. I want to help you two. I have to."

Ron raised an eyebrow, "Why?"

"I know you don't believe me or trust me, but I honestly do care about you and I care about Hermione. She's like my sister, Ron. She always has been. I want her happy, and I want you happy. It's all I ever wanted or tried to do. That's what all this was for. I'm not looking for anything else. I just want things to get better between you two." Harry tried to seem as sincere as he could. Inside, he was devastated that he couldn't help himself. He wanted Ron to forgive him as well. He wanted his best mate back and the chance to be with the woman he loved, but he couldn't ask for it. He had to think about the greater good. He had to make sacrifices.

Ron peered off and went deep in thought. "What should I do? I don't know where to start."

Harry tried his best to smile. "Start by talking to her. I'm not saying that you should simply forgive her and forget, but you won't get anywhere if you don't open up a bit. I know it's hard, but it has to be done. You have to make the first move, Ron. Hermione is ready to give up. She thinks that you hate her. She thinks that you don't want her in your life anymore."

"That's not true. These past weeks without her have been horrible. I can't stand it," Ron said.

"Then don't do it anymore. I understand that you want to keep your anger. She deserves to know that she made a big mistake, but you have to try and understand her. It's the only way to make this right. You want to make this right, don't you?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, I do," he said quietly. "I don't think being like this is worth it. I never wanted this, Harry. I didn't ask to be put in this position."

Harry sighed. "I know. I wish I had figured that out sooner. I wish that I would have stopped and been smarter. I realize that I haven't been a good friend to you, Ron. I know I ruined things but if you ever listen to me again, even if it's this last time, please, take my word. Hermione never wanted this. She never meant to cause you pain. It's not her fault. It's mine. She came to me asking what to do. I should have told her to tell you the truth. I should have been honest and told you to tell her about your feelings but I didn't. I was stupid. Don't punish Hermione or yourself for my lack of judgment."

He gave him a look. "What are you saying?"

"Ron, if you're going to hold a grudge, then hold it against me. I'm your best mate, and I should have been honest. I deserve this but not Hermione. She trusted me to help. I know you so well, and I gave her all the wrong advice. It's not her fault. I betrayed you. You're right about that but not about Hermione. All she did was love you and try her best to be with you. You can't hold that against her. I'm not asking you to forgive me, but I'm asking you to forgive her. She needs you, and I know you need her. All she wanted was you. It was all about you, Ron." The tightness engulfed Harry and he tried to hold on. He couldn't believe what he was saying, but he knew that it was right.

Ron looked down at his hands and rubbed them together. The longer he stared, the more his face smoothed over and the more he looked like the old Ron that Harry knew. "I want her, too. That part never changed. I kept telling myself that this was for the best, but I honestly don't know why. I reckon I've been scared this whole time. There was always something keeping me from her and now that there's not, it means something different. I'm not used to not having anything standing in my way."

"I know what you mean. It's easy to get comfortable in just imagining." Harry once again thought about Ginny. He saw his future with her slipping further and further away. He couldn't allow himself to think about it though.

"Harry, I want to make things right with Hermione," Ron said.

"Then make it right. She's waiting for you, mate. She always has been waiting," Harry said.

Ron grinned slightly. However, there was a bit of pain. There was still uncertainty and frost between them. "Harry, um, I don't know ifâ€¦"

"That's okay. Like I said, this isn't about me. I just want to help Hermione," Harry rushed. "I want to do the right thing as well. I-I'm going to tell Ginny about what I did. I think I have to now."

His eyes went massive. "Why? You can't tell her."

"Yes, I can and I need to. It's something that I have to do," Harry said quietly.

Ron seemed as if he wanted to say something, but he simply nodded and stood up. "Okay then. Well, I should probably go."

"Yeah, I need to clean up here," Harry said, getting up as well.

Ron grabbed his broom and opened his mouth slightly as if he wanted to say more. Harry wanted him to. He wanted Ron to say that he could be forgiven as well and that their friendship still meant something to him. He wanted Ron to tell him what to do about Ginny. He wanted Ron to tell him that their fighting hurt him and was driving him mad. It was how Harry felt. He couldn't lie to himself and say that things would be okay if Ron didn't want to be his friend anymore. "T-thanks for the talk and for listening," Ron said. "I...I hope the thing with Ginny goes okay."

"Yeah, so do I," Harry answered. Ron gave him another nod and left the tent. Harry sat back on the bench. Everything hurt again. He felt that swift punch to the stomach. Ron had nothing more to say about their friendship. He took a couple of more deep breaths and slowly put the Quidditch gear back in place.

It didn't matter. It was important that Harry helped his two closest friends. He knew that they still had a chance and could have a future together. That's all he wanted. It was all he needed. Even if he felt lower than he had ever felt because he truly believed his friendship was over with Ron, he knew that Hermione still had a chance to have Ron in her life and it was worth it. Even if Ginny never wanted to speak to him again after hearing the truth, at least he could say that he had been honest.

For the first time in a long time, Harry felt like he did something right. He felt like a good friend even if the friendship was over.

\*\*\*\* Before I go into my usual I want to say this: When I said that Ginny isn't going to find out about the game, I meant it. Just keep that in mind...

So, this chap was tragic/beautiful. I have been looking forward to this chapter for some time now. It's one that I knew I wanted to have from the very beginning. This is Harry at his best in my opinion. He has this "self-sacrificing" quality to him that has been seen in all of the HP books. It's haunting how he can just throw himself away to help others. It's also very beautiful. He does it for the people he loves and he'll do it for Hermione and for Ron in a heartbeat. Harry's always considered himself to be someone who's happiness isn't as important as his loved ones. He's got a lot of courage and "hero" to him that I adore. He's a good guy and I think this was very in character of him. It's something that I can easily see and understand him doing. I hope others can agree.

Also, I think if there's anyone who can talk to Ron and break him out of his shell it's Harry. Every time Ron had an issue in the books, Harry was there to help him through it. Harry is Ron's voice of reason and it won't stop just because of something like this. Harry thinks that Ron hates him and doesn't want his friendship but it's not true. Ron can pretend all he wants to, but he needs Harry. He needs his guidance and his help. Even if Ron doesn't want to hear it, he still wants to hear it. Make sense? Reading the part in Silver Doe when Harry talked about how Hermione cried for days and the two of them rarely talked inspired this chapter for me. Ron needs to hear that and he needs to hear it from Harry. Ron still looks up to Harry in a way and he takes his word for truth. Ron has so many ideas of what is the truth in his mind and hearing Harry's side really puts things in perspective. He hates this. He wants Hermione back and he wants Harry back but he has to take things one at a time and really figure things out. That's what he's doing. He's not forgetting about Harry but it's important that he fixes things with Hermione. Harry understands that. Also, I think deep down that Harry and Ron feel that gravity will slowly pull them back together anyway. Their friendship is too deep for it not to.

To go along with this. Please don't think that Ron is a jerk for not forgiving Harry or helping him with Ginny or seeming like he didn't care about what state Harry was in. He does care. He loves Harry and can see his pain. There's still some tension between them and some things that Ron needs to realize and work out before he can take that step into Harry's life again. So, yes, Ron is going to be there for Harry and help him but not at this moment. Their roles in their friendship will reverse to an extent as the story progresses so look out for that. They will be okay. It just takes a bit of time.

So, I really enjoyed this chapter. There's a lot about Harry that is coming out and will come out little by little in following chapters. He's really going to go on a journey and change. They all will. As you can see, things with Harry/Ginny are changing already. It's not all sugar and spice for them. There's still plenty going on. As for Ron/Hermioneâ€¦hmmâ€¦you'll have to review and see!

I will say this, Harry helped out more than he will ever realize. So, thanks for reading and review. Oh yeah, You really do want to review...lol

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 30

Thanks everyone for the wicked reviews! I decided to update earlier just because of it. ;)

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Well, Ms. Granger, I am sold. I've never had a student think of using salamander scales for this particular antidote before. This has to be one of the most excellent essays that I've read or will have the pleasure of grading," Professor Slughorn said.



Hermione beamed and sat up straighter in her chair. "Thank you, sir. I hope you don't mind that I'm handing it in early. I just want to make sure that you understand what I'm trying to say. If not, I'll want to start over."

Slughorn gave her a not-so-gentle pat on the back. "Nonsense, your paper is brilliant. You're my brightest student, Hermione. I will be looking forward to seeing you in my NEWTs class next year."

"Of course, sir. I would be delighted to continue my potions education under you," she said sweetly. Slughorn's already wide grin grew even broader. She knew that he took pride in his special students and in himself. Anything to boost his ego she was all for. She wanted a good letter of recommendation from him when she went out into the workforce.

"Yes, Ms. Granger, indeed! Well, I think we have spent enough time chatting. Why don't you run along and enjoy the rest of your day. I'll see you in class," he said, standing up.

Hermione stood up as well and felt better than she had in a long time. For once she was actually proud of something she had done. "Thank you again, Professor Slughorn. I'm glad that you're satisfied with my work."

"Once again, there's no need to thank me. You always put the time and effort in and you deserve your grades. Please, pass on some of your concentration aptitude to Mr. Potter. He's a good lad, but he could stand to be a little more like you in my class," Slughorn said rather seriously.

Some of Hermione's glory disappeared. Harry did seem more distracted and gloomy than usual. She knew things with Ron were still bad but she was beginning to suspect that there was more than the usual on his mind. She had to find out. "Yes, I'll pass on the message." Slughorn led her out of his office and to the door. When he opened it Hermione gasped. Standing before them with his hand raised as if wanting to knock was Ron.

"Merlin's beard, Ralph. You scared us," Slughorn said.

Ron's ears went pink and he scowled. "My name is Ron."

"Isn't that what I said?" Slughorn asked.

Ron opened his mouth as if he wanted to say something incredibly rude but Hermione stepped in. "Well, I'll leave you two to it. Have a good night." She walked without even a glance at him. It was the only way to keep herself together.

"Wait, a-actually I was looking for you. Parvati told me that you were here," Ron said.

Hermione stopped and turned around. "You were?"

"Yeah," he said softly. They stared at each other.

Professor Slughorn cleared his throat. "Yes, I have loads of papers to grade. Have a nice evening, Hermione and Rupert." He closed the door before Ron could correct him once more.

He kicked at the floor. "What a complete and utter tit. He still doesn't know my name."

"It's nothing personal, Ron. I don't think he knows that name of anyone outside of his Slug Club. I'm starting to believe you. I think he's a bit mad," she said.

He chuckled. "I told you so."

For the second time they stared at each other. They weren't close, but Hermione's body reacted to it. She remembered the night on the staircase. She remembered how close they were and how good it felt to be around him and talk to him. She remembered his finger to her lips. It was amazing. "So, you were looking for me?" she said softly.

Ron seemed to break from whatever thought he was deep in. "Um, yeah, I was wonderingâ€¦if we could talk."

"Is something wrong?" Hermione asked. She didn't know if she could handle another fight or breakdown. She was trying to get her life and her schoolwork back on track. Her situation with Ron had taken a major toll on her focus.

"No, nothing is wrong. Not really. I just want to talk to you," he answered.

"Oh, okay. Is this something you want us to be alone for?" she asked. She hoped that he would say yes. She wanted to be alone with him again. She wanted to feel the pulse against her middle and the sweat on her skin. She felt so bloodless sometimes, and Ron was her means to feel passion.

Ron dug his hands into his pockets. "Yeah, alone sounds good."

"Let's go to the classroom," she said. He nodded and the two of them walked in total silence. It was terrible. Hermione didn't know what to say or what to expect from him. She took it as a good sign that he was actually walking next to her.

"So, how was your party with Slughorn?" Ron asked randomly.

She rolled her eyes. "It wasn't a party. I wanted to go over my essay with him to make sure that I did it right."

"But it's not even due until the end of next week," he said.

"So. I wanted to get it out of the way. I have enough to worry about and that essay was at the bottom of my list in terms of necessity worries. I had to get clear of it to make room for other things," she explained.

Ron scratched his head in bewilderment. "Let me see if I'm understanding this correctly. You rank your worries? Why am I surprised by this? You probably have color coded charts and graphs."

"Oh, leave me alone," she said as angrily as she could. It wasn't easy. Ron was grinning at her. It was the first time since her game began that she felt completely normal around him. She almost forgot how nice it was to simply bicker with him as a friend. When they got to the room, Hermione reluctantly opened it. She didn't want their easiness to end. She looked around the slightly dark and stuffy room. Flashbacks to the day Ron had confronted her filled her mind and erased her visions of them on the stairs. She hadn't returned to the room since that day and now she knew way.

Ron leaned against the teacher's desk. Hermione tried not to think about Harry's destroyed structure sitting on top of it. "So, what do you want to talk about?" she asked. Ron dug his hands deeper into his pocket and didn't look at her. She couldn't stand the anticipation. "Ron, you wanted to talk."

He looked back up. "I know I did. I just don't know where to start."

She took her chances and leaned against the desk next to him. "The beginning is always a good place."

Ron sighed. "Well, I've been doing a lot of thinking, and I don't want us to be like this anymore."

"Be like what?" she asked a little nervous. She hoped that he didn't want to take their friendship back even further. They were just now starting to look each other in the eye and speak.

"Like this. I don't want us not talking or not being around each other. I don't like it, Hermione," he said.

She breathed a sigh of relief. She couldn't believe it. "Neither do I."

"I meant it when I said that I missed you. I do," he said.

"I miss you, too, Ron. I never wanted this to happen. I never wanted to—oh, I'll stop. I'm sorry," she rushed. She could already feel her tears and sorrow coming on, but she refused to let it through. She knew that he didn't want to hear it.

"No, don't apologize. I want to hear what you have to say. I'm listening." Ron put his hand on top of hers. The simple touch made her entire body tingle.

"I never wanted to hurt you. Out of everything you believe and out of everything that I did, it's most important that you understand that my intention was never to cause you pain. I would never purposefully hurt you. I mean that," she said.

Ron didn't roll his eyes or look away. He actually seemed to be listening to her. He kept her gaze. "I'm trying to understand. I don't think that you wanted to really hurt me."

It was only two sentences, but it was enough to make her lose it. Her body took over and before she knew it she jumped in Ron's arms and hugged him fiercely. "Oh, Ron, I'm so sorry. I'm so incredibly sorry. I never meant for any of this to happen. I shouldn't have lied. I should have been honest. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." She repeated it over and over until her voice cracked. Ron pulled his arms around her and tightly held her close to him. She wrapped her arms around his neck. "I'm sorry, Ron," she breathed again.

"I know. I'm sorry, too," he whispered. He held her tighter. Hermione moaned against his chest. Ron was firm, strong, and delicious. His body was home to her.

"What do you have to be sorry for?" she asked.

"I made you believe that I hate you. I don't. I couldn't hate you even if I tried. I don't want you to think that's how I felt or how I feel now," he said.

She pulled away slightly so she could look at him. "I did think that you hated me. You have a right to."

He shook his head. "No. Don't say that. I never wanted this. I never wanted to be angry with you or cause you this much pain. I didn't want this."

"I know you didn't. I know that you don't want to hurt me. I'm sorry that I said it. I was mad at myself for being stupid. I know how good you are. You're so good, Ron." Her words once again slurred. She couldn't control herself. He was holding her tightly, and his blue eyes were so focused on her. She could feel his powerful heartbeat vibrating against her body. She wanted to kiss him and touch him everywhere. It was almost too much to bear.

His hands moved down to her lower waist. He gently gripped her sides. She shivered and closed her eyes for a moment. "Hermione, I want to forgive you and trust you but it's hard. You really hurt me, and this isn't easy to do."

"I know and I completely understand," she said. "I just want to work this out. I want to make things better."

"I'll try. I can't stand being like this anymore. I-I need you in my life. I need you to be a big part of my life," he said.

A lump formed in her throat. Ron's words soothed her still aching body. She couldn't believe where things were going. Maybe there was a chance that she could still have Ron. Maybe he did still want to be with her.

"I need you, too. You're so important to me," she said. She thought about how he was still holding her but how weeks ago he

could barely look at her. For some reason fear crept up her spine and she pulled away from Ron. She began to shake but not from passion. Maybe she had been wrong about the events on the staircase. Maybe she was wrong about everything.

Ron wanted to make things right. He wanted to start over as friends. She thought that she had lost him but somehow he came back to her. He wanted to come back to her. She didn't want to jeopardize it. She didn't want to ruin a friendship that meant the world to her. Thinking back to their quick stroll to the classroom, she realized how easy and fun their small conversation had been. She thought about Ron, her best friend. The best friend she had always had and needed most. "Hermione?" he asked.

She broke out of her thoughts. She knew what she had to do. "Ron, I know that I said and did a lot of things this past year. It was all to get you to realize your real feelings for me."

"I know," he said quietly.

"And, um, yes, the truth is that I doâ€¦" she trailed off. She didn't want to scare him with the wrong choice of words. "I do fancy you, Ron, a lot."

He blushed and even smiled a little. "Yeah, about thatâ€¦I-"

"I agree. I think we're better off being friends. There are a lot of trust issues and complications between us, and the last thing that we need to worry about is any sort of relationship other than friendship. I'm sorry. I-I should have figured out sooner that sometimes it's better to just be friends. We work as friends. We work as friends, right Ron?" She had to stop talking. She felt as if she had no more air in her lungs.

Ron's blush faded along with his smile. In fact, he turned ashen. "Oh, yeah. Um, yeah, you're right. Yes, we work as friends."

Hermione's heart dropped, and the lump in her throat exploded. Stinging tears developed in her eyes. "I-I'm glad that you agree. We're friends andâ€¦" She couldn't continue. Her knees felt weak and her mind was cloudy. She studied Ron, but he dropped his gaze. He put his hands back in his pockets and swallowed hard.

"That's all we should be, I reckon. Things like this won't happen if we stay just friends," he said.

"Yes. I won't have to worry about hurting you, and you won't have to worry about hurting me," she added. She wanted him to stop her. She wanted him to tell her to shut up, and that they wouldn't possibly hurt each other again because their love and need for each other was too strong.

"Sounds like a smart plan," Ron breathed.

She turned around bit her lip until it hurt. It was the only way to keep from crying. She cleared her throat. "Yes, well, I'm glad that we're in agreement. It's good to be smart about things like this."

She didn't agree. One of the many reasons why she loved Ron so much was because she didn't feel the need to think or be smart all the time. She could be different. She could act on enthusiasm or humor, and it was okay. She desperately wanted Ron to pull her close to him again and tell her that she was wrong. She wanted him to tell her that he loved her and wanted to be with her. She couldn't do it anymore. She couldn't put herself on the line only to get hurt or hurt Ron. She had done enough. If Ron truly only wanted to be her friend, then she'd learn to deal with it. It was too important that they were friends again. She didn't want to risk losing.

"Yeah, I guess so. Um, I'm gonna go then. They're some things that I have to do," Ron said rather shaky.

Hermione kept her back to him. She couldn't bring herself to look at him. She was acting as strong as she possibly could be. Looking at him would only make her fall apart. "Okay. I'll talk to you later."

He was silent for a while. "I guess. Bye, Hermione."

She shut her eyes as tightly as she could. "Bye, Ron," she whispered. She didn't open them again until she heard the door close. She leaned against the desk and breathed deeply. She could not believe what just happened. She could not believe what she had just done. She wiped her eyes and stopped the hot tears from rolling down. "No, I'm not allowed to do this. I will not break down and cry in this room again. I did the right thing. I-I did the right thing," she repeated aloud. The more she said it the easier she was able to stop her tears. However, a pit of sick churned in her stomach.

Ron didn't stop her. Ron didn't say anything. He agreed with her choice. Whatever he had felt before was obviously gone now. She lost him. Hermione had lost her chance to be with Ron. It took her chanting her pledge a few more times before she was able to regain enough strength to leave.

She walked the halls slowly. She didn't look where she was going nor did she care. She had a load of schoolwork to do, but she didn't care about it. All she could think about was Ron and what had happened. She was incredibly torn. On one hand she and Ron were going to re-patch their friendship. They were going to some day be really close again. It made her smile. She had got what she needed. Ron was back in her life. However, it didn't cure the sickness. She couldn't pretend that the thought of only being friends with Ron didn't hurt. She couldn't imagine going through seeing him date another girl again. More frightening, she couldn't imagine finding another bloke who could possibly make her feel what Ron could.

"Hermione, I've been looking for you."

"Isn't everyone?" she said coolly, looking up.

Cormac smirked. "Hmm, you never cease to be saucy."

"What exactly do you want? I have work to do," she said.

"Can I walk with you?" he asked.

Hermione looked him over. She didn't see the point in arguing with him. He would end up following her anyway. "Sure." She didn't say a word to him as they walked. She didn't care. She had nothing to say to him. She snuck a glance at him and noticed that he was staring at her. She quickly looked away.

"You don't have to be this way. Regardless of what happened, I know that you still fancy me," Cormac said smugly.

She stopped walking and gave him a look. "Cormac, that's the point. Nothing happened. You made everyone believe that something did, but it doesn't change the fact that I didn't do anything with you. And for your knowledge, I don't fancy you. I don't think I ever have."

He rolled his eyes and chuckled. "I didn't say anything to anyone. You know that I wouldn't do that. I understand that you were nervous or whatever."

She felt the sickness rise in her throat. Only it wasn't from her misery. Cormac was literally making her feel ill. "It doesn't matter. We both know the truth and nerves had nothing to do with it. I need to go."

Cormac grabbed her hand. "Listen, I actually was looking for you. I want to ask you something. Please."

She pulled her hand away and sighed. She decided to hear him out. It wasn't as if she had Ron to hurry and get back to. "Go on."

He straightened the collar of his shirt and smiled. "I was wondering if maybe you wanted to give us another go. The weather is just starting to get really nice. We could spend some time together this weekend."

"I don't think so, Cormac," Hermione said.

His smile faded. "I won't expect anything. We can study or something. You like to do that."

"Yes, I like to study, but I don't know if I want to study with you," she answered.

"Why not? Are you really that bloody upset about the dance? I apologized," he shot.

"And I've already told you. I'm not interested. Cormac, I don't fancy you, and I know that studying together or whatever you have in store will lead your mind to think otherwise. We've already given it enough chances. I'm sorry." She actually felt a little guilty for being so frigid to him. Maybe there was no reason to be so mean to a guy like Cormac McInnes. Maybe he was the type

of bloke that she should have been looking for. Maybe men like Ron Weasley were only meant to be best friends.

Cormac's nostrils flared. "It's Weasley isn't it?"

"Excuse me?" she asked.

"You're acting like this because of Weasley, right? Is he still moping around because I took you to the dance?" Cormac asked.

Hermione didn't know how to respond. "What does Ron have to do with anything?"

He gave her a look. "Please, I saw him. He couldn't take his eyes off you that whole night. He was even more obvious and cringe worthy than usual."

"Look, I don't know what you're talking about, but this has nothing to do with Ron. I hope you're not implying that he's trying to make me feel guilty so I won't date you," she said.

"Granger, I'm not a wanker. I see how he looks at you and what he wants. You don't owe Weasley anything," he said.

"Just be quiet. I don't want to talk about this with you," she snapped. She didn't want to hear about Ron looking at her in an obvious way or what he wanted from her. They were friends. They could only be friends.

"If you ask me, the bloke is a nutter. I can't believe that he's not with Lavender anymore. I don't blame her, though. She probably tossed him off. He had his eyes fixed on you the whole night of the dance and barely looked at the fit piece of arse that he had on his arm. It's always been like that while they were dating. What a shame. He probably deserves to be alone if he's going to be that stupid," Cormac said with a chuckle.

Hermione frowned and couldn't believe that she had wasted her time and actually heard what he had to say. "You know what? Maybe you and Lavender deserve each other. Why don't you ask her to go out on a date with you? I'm sure that she'll wear something that's to your standard. It will be tacky and cliché. You know, a lot like your personality."

He reddened. "You don't mean that."

She laughed. "Cormac, maybe if you stopped walking around here as if you owned it, then you'd realize that not everyone is interested. I'm certainly not." She turned away from him and continued to walk down the hall.

"Well, at least Lavender would be fun. That's a lot more than I can say about you, Granger!" Cormac called.

She grinned and didn't even bother to turn around. "Yes, and at least Ron is a real man. That's more than could ever be said in relation to you," she answered back.



She continued to walk down the hall and regained the confidence in her taste in guys. She would never date blokes like Cormac. She would never let herself settle.

Hermione got dressed and thought about a good place to relax. It was finally the weekend and she could catch up on her reading. "Urgh! Where are my earrings?" Lavender whined.

"Probably under your bed. They always fall off your table and roll under there," Hermione said.

"Oh, shut up, Hermione! I don't need your help," Lavender snapped.

She sighed. Even when she tried to be nice to Lavender it only made her more fed up with her. Parvati got out of her bed and reached under Lavender's. "Lavender, Hermione was right. Your earrings are right here."

Lavender snatched them up. "I don't have time for this." She grabbed her purse and rushed out of the room.

"I don't see how you deal with that all the time. All I did was try to help," Hermione said.

Parvati smiled. "I know you did. Lavender is all right. She just gets bitchy when she's nervous."

"What does she have to be nervous about?" Hermione asked. She didn't know why she cared but she did. A girl like Lavender Brown never seemed nervous or afraid of anything.

"Well, she's got a date with Cormac today," Parvati said.

Hermione's eyes widened. "Are you serious?"

"Yes, this morning he caught her at breakfast and asked if she wanted to spend the day with him. She didn't really want to but she decided to go ahead," Parvati explained.

Hermione wanted to laugh. When she made the suggestion to Cormac, she hadn't been serious. "Wow, I guess that's good."

Parvati didn't seem as convinced. "I don't know. I think she's just rebounding. She's not over Ron at all. I'm actually surprised that she said yes. She hasn't stopped talking about Ron since they broke up. Actually, she hasn't stopped talking about Ron since they started dating. Now that they're broken up, she talks about him even more."

"Maybe it's for the best that she starts dating. She needs to move on," Hermione said. She felt uncomfortable with thinking about Lavender and her supposed love for Ron. It made the situation that much more complicated. She knew that she had hurt Lavender as well with her plans, but she didn't want to think about how much. She may have not liked Lavender very much, but she didn't want to break her heart.

Parvati raised an eyebrow. "What? Like you moved on? Don't you think it's a bit rich to say that?"

"Why don't you just get on with whatever it is you're thinking, Parvati," Hermione shot. She could hear the intensity in Parvati's voice. She was a lot more pleasant than Lavender, but she could be just as vicious.

"Relax, Hermione. I'm just saying that it might be a little hypocritical to say that Lavender needs to hurry up and move on from Ron when obviously you haven't," she said.

Hermione felt her ears burn. "That's really none of your business."

Parvati rolled her eyes. "I know it's not, but Lavender is my business and when you have something unkind to say about her, I have something to say as well. I may not have been smart enough to be in Ravenclaw like my sister, but I'm smart enough to see what's going on. Lavender was worried that you were going to try and steal Ron away from her. I didn't believe it for a second. You're not that type of person. However, I can't help but wonder something."

"And what's that exactly?" she asked.

"I thought Ron fancied you and the reason why he broke up with Lavender was so he could finally get a chance with you, but you're not with him. In fact, I hardly see you two around each other anymore. So, something must have gone wrong. When you went to see Slughorn, Ron asked me where you were, and he had a weird look on his face. I also know that Cormac was looking for you. He caught me in the Common Room and asked if I knew where you were. He was going to ask you out on a date, wasn't he? He was going to ask you out on the date he's having with Lavender right now, right?" Parvati asked.

Hermione didn't know how to respond. Parvati was right. She never realized how easy to read she was. "He's not my type, Parvati. I don't see why that makes something wrong with me."

"There's nothing wrong with it. I just find it interesting. You went to the Christmas ball with him. He obviously fancies you. He's smart, funny, nice, and completely handsome. You're lucky a bloke like that is interested in you, but he's not good enough, is he?" Parvati stared at her with her large, dark questioning eyes.

She felt her anger boil. "This isn't fair. I never questioned your decision to date Blaise. I was nothing but supportive. I know that Lavender is your best friend, but I thought that we were friends, too. Why does it matter? Sure, Cormac may be those things but they're things that I'm not interested in. Going to the party with him was a mistake. He's not right for me. He-he's not--"

"Ron?" Parvati helped.

She ran a hand through her hair and sighed. "No, he's not. Cormac will never be anything close to Ron, and I don't think anyone can be. It doesn't even matter what's going on between Ron and me, my feelings aren't going to chance."

Parvati's face softened. She grinned slightly. "You know, you and Lavender aren't so different. I'm sure she'd say the same thing."

Hermione chuckled. "Yes, well, I think it might be a while before we'd ever be able to discuss him together."

Parvati shrugged. "You never know. Hey, what are you doing with your hair?"

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "Nothingâ€!"

"Then come over here," Parvati said. Hermione opened her mouth but she stepped in, "Just trust me. We've been living together for years now. I think you know that I won't hurt you. Bring your brush."

She felt a bit uneasy, but she grabbed her brush and walked over and sat on her bed anyway. Parvati parted her hair and began to braid. "What exactly are you doing?" Hermione asked.

"It's a little female therapy. You spend so much time around boys that I worry you forget that you're not one of them," Parvati cheeked.

"I resent that. I don't mind having guys as my best friends, but I guess you're right. Sometimes it's a bit frustrating being the only girl in the circle," Hermione confessed.

"Well, let me know when you need girl time. That's important to balance it into your busy schedule," Parvati said.

Hermione doubted that she could be in the same room with Parvati and Lavender for too long without wanting to clog her ears. However, it was nice for her to offer. "Alright. I will." It was nice. For a while Parvati and Hermione talked about regular things that weren't as important or heavy in her life. It felt good. It made her feel more normal and helped clear her mind of guys. She left her room some time later. She walked down a corridor and decided to go the library. It was the best place to read. Just as she turned the corner, she bumped into Ron. "Oh, I'm sorry," she said.

"It's okay. I never look up when I walk. I'm sorry," he answered. He looked at her intently. "Nice hair."

"Parvati put it in this weird French braid. I think it looks a little ridiculous," she explained.

He tucked a loose strand behind her ear. "I think it looks good on you."

Hermione felt her cheeks flush. "Thanks." She surveyed him. She ignored the spike of pleasure she felt at seeing his tall and

lanky body in jeans and an undershirt. His broom was propped over his shoulder. "So I guess you're going to go practice?" she asked stupidly. She didn't know why she felt so nervous. She and Ron were repairing their friendship, and it wasn't as if she had never spoken to him until now. She was just so worried about losing him. She had to take her eyes off his crotch. His jeans were extremely too tight.

"Yeah, it's brilliant outside, and I really need to practice. Harry taught me some new techniques," he explained.

Her mind finally pulled away. "You talked to Harry?"

Ron shrugged uncomfortably. "Well, I had my practice with him the other day, so yeah. We talked about Quidditch and...some other things."

Hermione couldn't believe it. Harry hadn't mentioned speaking to Ron. "So, are thingsâ€¦!"

"Ah, no. I mean not really. I-I don't really know, Hermione. I don't want to talk about it," he rushed.

She nodded. "That's okay. We don't have to." They stood and looked at one another again. She felt so stiff around him. She hadn't only thought about him as a friend in years. In fact, she had never really seen Ron as someone who could only be a friend. He wasn't like Harry. Her feelings for him were not strictly platonic like they were with Harry. She could easily talk to Harry and not get distracted by him. Sometimes, all Ron did was distract her. Sometimes all she did while she was with him was think about being with him and how attracted she was to him. She had to learn to move on. She had to learn to change a little. "Well, I don't want to keep you. Maybe later we can get lunch or something."

"Or maybe you could come outside with me," Ron said.

"What? You mean to the pitch?" Hermione asked.

He grinned. "It's not forbidden, and I swear that you won't explode or something. It's really nice outside. You'll have the best natural lightening out there, I reckon."

She chuckled and thought about it. It sounded lovely. "But won't I make you nervous? The last time I wanted to sit outside with you as you practiced, you told me no because I make you nervous."

He blushed a little. "You do but only because I want to do really well in front of you. I think a bit of pressure will help."

"Oh, so, you want to impress me?" she cheeked.

"Possibly," he said smirking.

"I guess it will be okay. Just as long as you remember that I'm not going up there with you," she said.

"You're not ready for your Quidditch dÃ©but yet. I'll get you, though. I meant it when I said that you're going to take a fly with me. I'll take really good care of you," he said gently.

Her body heated up. She couldn't help but melt into his statement. "We'll see."

They began to walk to the pitch. Hermione felt a bit more at ease. It was hard not to get too caught up in Ron, but she tried her best. By the time they were at the benches she felt exhausted. She watched Ron attach the foot hooks to his broom. In the sunlight, his face turned faintly pink, and a bit of sweat glistened his skin. It was the first time that she realized how firm Ron had truly gotten since school began. His biceps flexed as he adjusted the hooks. It was so difficult not to want him or feel heat press against her body due to his sexiness.

He looked up and she turned away just in time. She opened her book. "So, don't get too hot up there."

"Yeah, I don't want to be out here too long. I just want to go over some new moves. I'm really hungry. We will definitely get lunch later," he said.

She smiled. "Yes, and maybe squeeze in a bit of coursework."

Ron rolled his eyes. "I figured you'd say that, but I have to agree with you this time. I should probably get started on my paper. Will you help me?"

"You know I'll help you, Ron. It's not a problem," she said kindly. Ron smiled at her. He gazed at her so beautifully, and Hermione felt her love for him grow inside her. He was her friend. He was her best friend. She couldn't think about him any other way anymore. It would be too much.

He looked her over and narrowed his eyes. "You knowâ€¦I think I take my statement back."

"What?" she asked, feeling nervous.

"I think I like your hair down better. It's better when it's all wild," he said.

"Really? You like my hair? It completely has a mind of its own," she said.

He laughed. "I noticed that over the years, and yes I like it. It fits. It's very you. I-I've always liked how brown and mad your hair is. It's nice. It'sâ€¦perfect," he answered.

"You think it's perfect?" she asked.

He grew more serious. "Yeah, it's a part of you so it has to be."

"Oh, I'm still perfect?" she teased.

"Always," Ron answered.

Her spirits lifted and soared high above her. She slowly reached up and untied her hair. She shook her head and let her hair flow down. Ron watched closely almost as if he was off in another world. She had seen the look before. "How this?" she asked gently.

Ron licked his lips slowly and took in her figure. She tried her best to breathe normally. "Yeah, that's better. You're really beautiful, Hermione." She blushed even harder. She couldn't speak. She only smiled. Ron returned it but quickly looked away and rubbed his neck. "Well, I should start. Look up every once in a while to make sure that the sun hasn't burned my skin off."

"I'll be watching, don't worry," she said. Ron gave her one more smile before heaving his broom over his shoulder and leaving the benches.

Hermione finally exhaled. Her heart was beating rapidly. Her skin was hot and damp, but it had nothing to do with the sun. She felt incredible. She watched as Ron moved to the practice shed to get a quaffle. Her smile only grew. He was her friend. He was her best friend, and she was madly and unconditionally in love with him.

She could never date Cormac or any guy like him. She could never give her heart, body, mind, and spirit to a man who wasn't Ron. No one made her feel as electric and alive as he did. No one would ever be able to. She knew that. She couldn't lie to herself, and she couldn't deny the facts. Even if she would forever be his friend, it wouldn't change how she felt. She would love him and want him every day. She could never just see him as a good friend. She couldn't imagine feeling for Ron what she felt for Harry. No, things were simply different. She was attracted to Ron. She was in love with Ron. She wanted Ron, and she would never stop.

The confirmation made a bit of the bliss disappear. She turned to her book as he went into the sky. She was in love with a man she would never have. She bit her lip and fought off the sadness. He was still her friend. They had been friends since they were eleven. His friendship was what she needed and what she was used to. Having Ron as her boyfriend had only really been a dream.

Hermione concluded that she would simply have to have her dreams to have Ron.

\*\*\*\*(First, I'll apologize in advance for the really long author's note that I'm about to write.) So, there's a bit of dramatic irony! We know Hermione wants Ron. We know Ron wants Hermione but those bloody prats just don't see it! Now, please don't throw things at me over this chapter, lol. Harry and Hermione are sort of both in the same mindset. They don't want to take Ron for granted anymore so they're both sort of taking a step back because they're so afraid of losing him. Hermione is worried that if she presses the idea of a relationship on Ron then he'll be less open to getting close to her and things will be awkward. She believes that Ron isn't ready. Ron, on the other

hand, thinks that Hermione doesn't want him anymore and that she truly does just want to be friends. So, he decided to back off too. It's this complicated and painful guessing game that they're playing because they're too afraid to take a leap.

I'll be completely honest. This chapter was never really a part of my plan. At least, not in the way it's written. This is something that I felt I had to add. I'll tell you why. This chapter really only served as my way of answering questions and suggestions that people have been private messaging me since the Christmas ball chapter and I mean like all the time. I love my readers. I love receiving reviews and private messages. I really do. And, I've been getting a lot from different people but they contain the same information. I keep answering them privately but my message isn't getting across I reckon. So, I decided to add this chapter as one big answer to all of them. There are three big ideas/questions that I'm getting from people so I decided to write this chap to finally put the ideas to rest. Like:

1. Hermione and Cormac. Why can't she move on with him a little so she won't just be waiting around for Ron? â€œ Well, they just don't work out. Cormac is too typical for Hermione and I personally have always seen him as a macho prick. Even if I found the stomach to put them together all that would happen is Hermione comparing him to Ron. Cormac loses. Ron wins, lol. C/Hrâ€œ|they don't work. Hermione only works with Ron. End of story.
2. I've noticed the subtleness between Parvati and Hermione. What is that about? â€œ Well, very soon there's going to be big changes and Hermione's relationship with Parvati is going to come into play. I wanted to introduce it a bit in this chap.
3. Maybe Hermione should try to only see Ron as a friend. It might help- Well, it's not that simple. She's had this love and attraction to him for almost as long as they've been friends. It's not easy to just "turn it off." In fact, Hermione can't. She thinks that she has to in order to really become a friend with him but it's impossible. Ron is so much more than a friend to her and to be his friend and to love him is also to be in love with him and feel attracted to him. It's all in one big package for her and she doesn't feel the same without that desire for him. She'll never stop wanting him. She can't ignore it and frankly she doesn't want to. Ron is the love of her life. There's no greater man to her. She doesn't want to not see him that way. I hoped this chapter sort of proved that.

I really hope this chapter addressed those issues. My main goal is to make the readers happy and clear things up while keeping my views intact. So, I hope everyone enjoyed this. I didn't mind writing it and I liked the way it turned out. :) I really needed to do this because it's important that I clear up those issues now. I want us all to understand each other! There's too much that's about to happen for there to be loose ends. Okay, so, I know what you lot are thinking. I can hear the collective groans/sighs. You're thinking that I'm going to go through this

whole new deal with R/Hr and add another ten thousand chapters about their angst and pain and speculation right? Hmmâ€¦well, as I said in the beginning, I don't like to give things away but I will say that if you believe the above statement, you probably shouldn't haveâ€¦

Thanks for reading and REVIEW! You may like what I have in store next... ;)

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 31

Thanks for the reviews! I am happy/relieved that mostly everyone enjoyed my last chapter and understood why it was needed. It was a blessing in disguise for me. It gave me a new perspective on things and made me re-think/write this chapter. I like it much better now.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Are you sure that telling Ginny is the right thing to do?" Hermione asked.

Harry sighed. "I think so. We're having enough issues, and I don't want this on my shoulders anymore."

She rubbed his arm and tried to be as supportive as possible. Harry looked awful. "I guess it's good that you want the air to be cleared."

He gave her a look. "You guess? What do you think I should do?"

"I don't know, Harry. I just don't know if telling her is really going to solve anything. It might make it worse," she explained.

"I don't know how much worse it could get. She's already mad at me for what I said about Dean. She already thinks that I don't trust her and that I'm lying to her. She's not even my girlfriend yet and already we're having relationship problems." He took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes.

She looked around the library and wished that Madame Pomfrey was around. Harry looked ready to pass out. "Harry, it will work out. Ginny loves you. Please, remember that. Can you blame her for getting a little upset with you? Dean is a really sensitive subject for her. She loves him, too."

"I'm bloody aware that she loves him. Her love for him is what's driving me mental. Her love for him is why we're not together and why we're having this fight to begin with. I just don't know what to do anymore," he said.

Hermione had been holding off on what she wanted to say for long enough. She had to let it out. "Harry, have you everâ€¦possibly considered that being friends is what's best right now?"

"You mean like you did?" Harry shot.



"Well, yes. Ron and I are just friends and it's fine. We're talking now, and the pressure is gone," she said. Yes, some of the pressure was gone but everything wasn't fine. Keeping a certain distance from Ron was weakening her a little more every day, but it was something that she had to do.

Harry saw right through it. "Hermione, you can say whatever you want, but I know the truth. Two people who are madly in love and in desperate need of each other don't just decide to stay friends and feel okay about it. It's shit, and you know it. No, I'd rather fight for my love. I'll bloody fight for this like I have to do for every other fucking enjoyment in my life."

She couldn't help but smile at her best friend. Harry had always been a fighter and never gave up on anything. She was glad that he wasn't going to stop. Quitting wasn't in him. Still, it hurt to see him so miserable. "What are you going to do?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. I need to talk to her. I haven't figured out what I'm going to say. I'm not sure how I'm going to explain everything to her."

"I'll be there to help," Hermione said.

"No. I need to do this on my own," Harry said.

"But it might be easier if I explain my part. It could be better for her to hear it from me," she tried.

He shook his head. "Hermione, I'm not mentioning you at all."

"What?" she asked.

"I'm only going to tell her about what I did. Why would I tell her about your game with Ron?" he asked.

"Why wouldn't you? Harry, I'm just as guilty as you are," she said.

"It doesn't matter. This is about her and me. She doesn't have to know about you and Ron. You two have enough going on," Harry explained.

"Harry," she pressed.

"Stop. I'm not going to bring you into this. You need to work on fixing things with him," Harry interrupted.

"There's nothing to fix. We're friends," she said.

He stared at her. "Exactly. That's the problem."

"It's not a problem. We were friends long before I ever thought to do this. Being friends is what we're supposed to be," she said. It pained her to say it. She didn't believe it at all.

Harry obviously didn't either. "Hermione, you can't fool me. Being friends isn't what you're supposed to be. Friends are how you start out before you date. You're supposed to be his girlfriend. Fucking hell, you're supposed to be his wife and the mother of his bloody children. That's what's supposed to happen."

She blushed and warmth engulfed her. Hearing Harry talk about her destiny with Ron made her spirits lift. It made her future with him feel more real. She had figured the same things. Fantasizing about her future with Ron, it always involved them being in love, being together, and raising a family. She wanted eternity with him. She wanted her life to truly begin with Ron and end with him old and still in love. She had to shake the vision off.

"Nothing is set in stone, Harry. We can only live day to day. It was never written that I would be with Ron," she said.

He gave her a look. "I can't believe you can sit in front of me and say that. After everything we've been through I thought that you would know by now that there are things just destined. Some things are meant to happen, Hermione."

"Shut up, Harry! You don't know what you're talking about!" she snapped. She didn't have the energy to hear any of his words.

He frowned. "See? You don't even believe your own lies. You can't tell me how you feel about him time and time again but then say that only being his friend is what you want. What happened to you? Why are you giving up?"

She felt a lump in her throat. She was never one to give up. She felt like a failure for doing it now. "Because I have to. Ron is back in my life. He wants to talk and be around me again. I can't ask him for anything else. I've taken him for granted once, and I lost him. I won't do it again. His friendship is worth it. I'd rather have him as a friend and suffer a little than not have him in my life at all. Can you understand that?"

Harry's eyes softened. "Yeah, I can. I know how much Ron's friendship means to you. It meant the world to me when I had it. I can't blame you for not wanting to press things. I think about that when it comes to Ginny all the time. I think that maybe I should just give in and let us be the way we are. I used to think about breaking this whole thing off all the time."

"So, what changed your mind?" Hermione asked.

Harry smiled slightly. "She did. When I kiss her or when she looks at me and smiles, I'm whole again. I feel fully alive. Friendship is great and I want it, but those few moments when it's just Ginny and me and we're in this place that's more than just friends are worth it. I can't give that up, Hermione, and I don't want to. I won't stop. I can't and I don't think you can either. You love Ron, and I know you want those moments, too."

"Yes, I do. That's not what this is about. I know that I'm not going to stop loving him, Harry. It's not physically, emotionally, or mentally possible for me to," she explained.

"Ron feels the same way," he said gently.

"Yes, but as a friend. He loves me as a friend," Hermione said.

Harry shook his head. "No. He doesn't. He's in love with you, Hermione, and he wants to be with you."

"If that is trueâ€¦then why didn't he tell me? Why didn't he stop me the other day? Why did he let me say those things? He obviously agrees with it," she said.

"Because he thinks that's what you want. He's just as afraid of losing you. I told you, Ron is putting up a front. He's hurting, too. This isn't what he wants," Harry urged.

She fought the tears. "Did he tell you this?"

"I'm finished betraying Ron. I'm not going to tell you what we talked about, but I will say that Ron doesn't agree with this. He doesn't just want to be your friend. He wants so much more than that," he said.

She sighed. "Well, it has to come from him and until it does, this is how it has to be. This is obviously how it's meant to be." Harry opened his mouth but she cut in. "I really don't want to talk about it anymore. Please, let's talk about something else."

"Fine," Harry breathed.

Hermione nodded and looked at his books and notes scattered on the table. "How is the essay coming along?"

"Terribly. I have no idea what I'm saying, but I have to work on it and complete it today," Harry said.

"Ron had a lot of problems on it, too. Maybe if you two paid more attention in class," she started. She looked at how dire Harry seemed and decided not to lecture. "I'll help you tonight, okay."

He smiled a little. "Really?"

"Of course I will. I don't want you to fail potions class. Maybe Ron can join us," Hermione tried.

"No, don't force him to talk to me. I'm giving him his space. He's got enough to worry about and I do, too," Harry said.

"I hate this, Harry. The three of us are friends. It's hard moving between you two," she said.

"I understand, Hermione, but there's really nothing that we can do. I want him back, but if this is what he wantsâ€¦then I have to respect that. That's what you're doing, right?" he said.

The reply shot close to her heart. She knew that she had nothing to say against it. She checked her watch. "I should probably go. McGonagall wants me to work on more draft plans for the graduation. It's going to take me hours."

"I'll probably be here all night," Harry said.

She got up and gave his shoulders a quick squeeze. "It will be okay, Harry. We'll work something out. I don't like seeing you like this. You're my best friend, and you mean a lot to me. "

He nodded and squeezed her hand. "Thank you. You mean a lot to me, too, and that's why this thing with Ron and talk about friendship is so hard."

"It's okay. Everything is okay," she lied. She gave him one more smile and went off to the classroom.

McGonagall was already waiting for her when she entered the classroom. "Good evening, Ms. Granger."

"Good evening, Professor McGonagall," Hermione said kindly. She tried her best to smile and not seem as exhausted as she was. Talking to Harry had taken a lot out of her. They went upstairs to her office and her heart fluttered ever so slightly. The last time she had been in the office, Ron had held her waist and almost kissed her. It seemed like ages had gone by since she thought her dream was finally going to come true.

"There's much to do tonight. The staff and I have to work on the invitations and finalizing the itinerary for the ceremony. I need you to go over these application procedures. The seventh years are going to be filing their applications next month and we need these finished," McGonagall explained.

Hermione looked at the very thick stacks of parchment on her desk. "I only have tonight to complete this?"

"I understand that it's a little overwhelming, so I'll send for another Prefect to help you. Although, I am expecting you to be able to handle most of this yourself," McGonagall said sternly.

"I can handle it. I hope I didn't give the impression that I couldn't," she said.

McGonagall's features softened a little. "Ms, Granger, I've noticed that your performance over the last few weeks has not been to your usual standard."

Her ears burned. "I'm not quite sure what you mean. I understand the material, and I perform the tasks."

"I'm not saying that your work hasn't been satisfactory, but I have noticed that your concentration has diminished," McGonagall explained. She took off her glasses and smiled slightly. "I'll be honest with you, Hermione. You are one of our main candidates for the Head Girl position."

Hermione's eyes grew. "I am?"

"The faculty and I feel like you possess the drive, responsibility, and skill to fulfill the duties required, but if you can't focus or if the stress of what you're doing now is too much, then I don't think you will be able to handle being Head Girl. Do you understand?" McGonagall asked.

She didn't know how to respond. She hadn't realized that her concentration was so poor or that it was noticeable. She couldn't believe that she was losing her chances at becoming Head Girl because of her stupidity and confusion about Ron. It had to end. "Yes, I understand. I'm so sorry for my lack of focus, but I can assure you that it has nothing to do with my jobs as a Prefect. I love the responsibility, and I want to help. I'm just—I'm fine. It won't happen again."

McGonagall looked her over. "I hope so because I would be honored to see the badge on your cloak."

"Me too," Hermione said softly.

After a bit more instruction, McGonagall left the office and Hermione sat and sorted through the piles. The more she sorted, the heavier the parchments seemed to get and she couldn't think. She dropped them on the table and rubbed her eyes. She cried softly and rocked in the chair. No matter what school had always been her sanctuary. Attending classes and mastering the material was her outlet. It always made her feel worthwhile and sane. Now, even that was slowly slipping away from her. She had wanted to be Head Girl ever since she heard of the title, and she couldn't believe that it was going to be taken away from her. She didn't know how she had let herself slip so far down.

There was a knock on the door. Hermione instantly stood and wiped her face. She quickly blew her nose and tried to make it look as if she hadn't been crying for ten minutes. The knocking continued. She rushed to the door and opened it. A terrible case of dÃ©jà vu came over her. "Ron, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"McGonagall sent me to help you. I was right in the middle of eating my pudding, too," he said with a pout. Hermione couldn't move. She didn't know why her body wouldn't respond to her pleas to move or why she couldn't stop staring at him. Ron rubbed his neck. "So, are you gonna let me in or not?"

She finally snapped back. "Oh, y-yes, sorry. Come in." She moved out of the way and let him in. She closed the door and quickly took a few deep breaths. It was all too much. There was no way that she would be able to focus now.

"Bloody hell, don't tell that is what we have to do," Ron said, looking at the stacks of papers on the desk.

"Yes, we have to sort through the applications and order forms. We have to get it done tonight," Hermione explained.

Ron gave a heavy sigh. "I swear that woman likes to torture us for her own amusement."

"No, she doesn't. It's something that has to be done and considering that we're Prefects, we have to do it," she said.

he flopped in a chair, and she sat next to him. "Whatever, I just want to get this over with. I want my dessert."

Hermione smiled. "Well, at least you ate something. I haven't had anything since lunch."

He wasn't really paying attention to her. He was staring at the thick piles of parchment. "Let's start. What should I do?"

"It's quite simple. We simply look at the heading of the application and find the name of the seventh year it corresponds to. Then, we seal them in envelopes. It's not hard just tedious," she explained.

Ron nodded. "I reckon these will come to us next year."

"Yes, and the sixth years will have to do them for us," she said.

He grinned. "Justice." He loosened his tie and took it off. He then unbuttoned the first two buttons on his shirt.

Hermione watched as if she was in a trance. "W-what are you doing?"

"I know that it's going to get bloody hot in here after a while, and I don't want to sweat too much. Why? Do you think this is too unprofessional?" he asked with a smirk.

"Not at all," she said quietly. "I guess I'm lucky because I have a skirt on."

Ron's eyes went to her legs, and her body heated over. Suddenly, it was extremely hot in the room. "Yeah, I think we're both lucky."

Hermione felt her face flush over. She sensed that he was flirting with her, but she was too scared to flirt back. She had to remain professional. "We should get started."

For the next few hours the two worked but Hermione found it extremely difficult to focus. She kept sneaking glances at Ron. He sat back in the chair with his legs sprawled out and twisted his wand between his fingers absentmindedly as he sorted through applications. He looked incredibly sexy, and it didn't help that she was sitting so close to him and could feel and smell his warmth.

"Hermione, wrong application," Ron said.

"Huh?" she said. She looked down at her work. She placed the wrong form with the wrong student. "Oh!" she whined.

"It's okay. Just change it," he said simply.

"It's not okay. This is the fourth time I've messed up. We're never going to get finished." She felt so useless. Ron was easily executing the task, but she could barely open the envelopes. It made her angry. It made her furious that Ron was okay but she wasn't.

"Yes, we will. We only have a couple of more stacks to do," he reassured. He sat straight, closed his eyes, and stretched. He groaned as he rolled his shoulders and popped his knuckles. Hermione bit her lip and watched. He opened his eyes, and she turned around just in time but knocked over her inkbottle.

"Damn!" she groaned. She quickly pushed the parchments out of the way before the ink got to them.

"Here, let me help," Ron said. He moved to the other side of her and kneeled. He picked up the bottle and the other scattered papers.

"I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm like this. I'm never clumsy or this incapable," she said.

"It's fine. You don't have to explain it to me. Besides, you're a witch. You can use magic to clean up the ink remember?" Ron said with a wink.

"It's more than that. I-I can't do this," she said.

He stood up. "Do what?"

She looked up at him and saw the slight fear in his eyes. "Ron, maybe I should finish this alone."

"Why? I'm helping," he said.

"I know you are and I appreciate it but itâ€¦it will be easier to concentrate and get this finished if I do it by myself," she said.

Ron frowned. "But McGonagall sent me to help."

"I'm aware, Ron. You have helped, but I'll finish up. This is my task. You've done enough." She checked her watch. "You'll be able to get your pudding if you leave now."

"But--"

"Just go, Ron. I can do this myself. I know you don't want to do this in the first place. I'll tell McGonagall that you were a big help. You won't get in trouble," she interrupted.

"I don't care about getting in trouble. I just want to know why you're making me leave," he said.

Hermione stood up. She knew why she was making him leave. He had to leave because she couldn't focus with him there. She couldn't look at him without wanting him, and it was too painful to realize that she would never be with him. Something was different. They were friends but there was a new wall between them. Hermione had to keep the wall up to stay friends with him. However, she didn't say any of it to Ron. There was no point. He didn't care and was okay with where they were. She had to do the same.

"I just want to do this by myself. I like having my own tasks. Don't take everything so personally," she said.

"Well, it's personal when you say that you can't concentrate with me here. What did I do wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing. You didn't do anything wrong. Iâ€¦I just don't want your help anymore tonight. I think it'll be for the best if you leave. Please, just go. It's for the best. I know it's for the best," she urged. Ron opened his mouth but she cut in. "Just go! Please!" If Ron didn't leave soon she would break down, and she didn't want to. She was tired of crying.

Ron sighed and shrugged. "Fine. I'll leave if it means so much to you." He headed for the door.

"It's not like that, Ron. I just think it's better if I do this alone. It's probably better for both of us," she said.

He stopped and turned around. His face was slightly red. "Why do you always do that?"

"Do what?" Hermione asked.

"Assume that you're right. Why do you always have to be right all the bloody time? Why do you think that you know every damn thing?" he asked.

She gave him a look. "What are you talking about, Ron."

"I'm talking about the fact that you always have to have the last word. You always think that you know everything and what's best for people. I hate to break it to you, but you don't. You're not always right, and you don't always know what's best," he said in a shaky voice.

"Are you really that upset about this? It's one assignment. You don't even want to do this. What is your problem?" she asked.

"You know that this has nothing to do with the fucking assignment!" he snapped.

"Then say what this is about because I don't know what you're getting at!" she yelled.

Ron walked a little closer to her. "It's about the fact that you've always had to be the one who makes the rules. Ever since I



met you, you've always assumed that you knew everything and had all the right answers! You don't. You have no idea, Hermione."

Hermione felt a lump form in her throat. Ron's voice was so shaky and heavy. She didn't know what was wrong. "What do I not have any idea about? What are you saying?"

He shook his head and looked away. When he turned back to her, there was a look in his eyes that Hermione had never seen before. It terrified her. "Why did you tell me that I would be better off with us just as friends? How could you possibly assume that?"

Her heartbeat picked up. She had not expected him to say that. "I was just doing what I thought was best for you. I thought it was best for us."

"But why? How dare you think that!" he shot.

"Because I didn't hear any complaints from you! If it was so wrong of me to suggest it, then why didn't you stop me! Why didn't you step in? You have a lot of nerve to blame this on me! Where were you, Ron? You stood right in front of me and agreed! You seemed fine with it. It's not all my fault! You were there, but you didn't say anything! I thought you were okay. You seem happy!" she shouted. The tears were in her eyes now. She couldn't keep her thoughts in anymore.

Ron put his palms to his temples and squeezed. "What exactly was I supposed to say? You wouldn't let me finish. You just went on and on like you always do. You had already made up your mind. There was nothing that I could say to change it. You wouldn't have listened."

"I don't know! I don't know what you should have done, but since you didn't I took control of the situation. Someone had to and like always it had to be me. We couldn't keep going on like that and you know it. Something had to change. I did what was best for you! I would think that you'd appreciate it. I thought about you first!" she cried.

He pulled at his hair and stomped. "See, that's exactly what I'm talking about! You assumed that was best for me, but you had no idea. You don't know. You never knew. You don't know anything about me, Hermione, because you never ask. You never even bother to ask what I think!"

His statement took her aback. "How can you say that? I think I know you well enough, Ron."

"No, you don't. If you knew me, then you'd know that it was wrong. You would know that the worst thing that you could ever possibly do is tell me that we can only be friends," he said.

Hermione didn't know what to say. She was confused and frightened. Ron had never opened up to her in such a way before. "Ron, I don't--"

Ron's lip trembled. "No, let me finish. You were wrong to say that I'm better off with us being friends. You were wrong to think that I've just been okay with everything." He turned away from her again. "You were wrong that day, too. You were completely wrong."

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "Ron, look at me. Please, tell me."

He turned back around and slowly moved closer to her. His eyes were watery, but he didn't let his tears fall. "You told me that I had no idea what it feels like to hurt a little more every day. You said that I couldn't understand what it feels like to have my chest cave in or like I'm dying. Do you remember that?"

It was her turn to look away. She had been trying to forget their fight in the classroom, but she could hear her voice clear as day saying those things to him. "Yes, I remember," she breathed.

"That day in the classroom you told me that I had no idea what it feels like to hurt so badly, but that's not true." he said faintly.

Hermione let out a shaky breath. "Ron, I'mâ€¦I'm sorry."

"No, don't apologize. You can't apologize for that. You can't apologize for always been so wrong, Hermione," Ron said.

"Then correct me, Ron! You keep telling me that I'm wrong, but you're not telling me why! You want to know why I assume things about you? I assume because you never tell me! You have never just told me anything. You always turn away, keep it hidden, or tell Harry instead of me. If it's that important, then tell me!" Hermione could barely speak through her tears. Her knees shook and her eyes stung. She didn't know how long she could last.

"You want to know? Do you honestly care?" he asked.

"Of course I care. Just tell me, Ron. Please, tell me! Tell me the truth," she urged.

Ron gazed at her. "The truthâ€¦the truth, Hermione, is that I know exactly what it feels like to hurt a little more every day. It's like my lungs can't work properly. It's hard to breathe and every breath I do take hurts so much." He closed his eyes and finally let his tears fall.

"Ron, I had no idea. I didn't," she whispered.

He opened his eyes. "Of course you had no idea! You just assumed that I was fine. You thought I was okay. You thought I was okay then, and you think I'm okay now but I'm not. You have never bothered to notice that every time I'm around you, I'm fighting everything inside me. I don't know rather to go forward or keep away. It's terrible," he said. "It's so hard for me to stay away with everything that I feel and want."

Hermione felt a pang in her chest. She knew exactly how that felt. "Ron, I don't know what to say. I've justâ€¦you've always seemed fine. I thought I was alone."

"You're not the only person who hurts," he said.

"I know that I'm not," she said.

"Then why did you make that game? Why did you assume that nothing fazed me, or that I was okay?" Ron asked.

"Because you seemed happy with your relationship. You were happy with Lavender!" Hermione shouted.

"Fucking hell, Hermione, don't you get it? Yes, I was happy with Lavender in the beginning but the reason why I dated her in the first place was to get over you. You think you've had it rough this year because I had a girlfriend. Well, how do you think I've felt for the last six years?" Ron asked.

Hermione shook her head. "What are you talking about? I haven't even known Krum or Cormac for that long."

Ron rolled his eyes. "Oh, please, you know I'm not talking about them."

"Then whom are you talking about? What are you saying?" Hermione asked.

"I'm talking about Harry!" he shouted.

"What?" she asked.

"I'm talking about how for the past six years I got to watch you and Harry and worry if you two would get together like everyone thinks and wants you to," he said.

Hermione couldn't believe it. The last thing on her mind at the time was Harry. She didn't know what Ron saw or thought. "Ron, how many times do I have to tell you? I don't fancy Harry. I don't see him as anything more than my friend. Why doesn't anyone understand that? Why would you think that?"

"It's not that simple. I see the way you are with him and how close you two are. Everything always seems so easy between you two, and he doesn't make you nearly as mad or upset as I do. He always knows what to say and how to act. He's fucking Harry, the chosen one, Potter. He's the hero. I don't know what you would ever want with a prat like me when you can have him. He's always been a step ahead of me and a step closer to you. He's always been better and faster and smarter-

"Ron, stop it! You don't know what you're saying. None of that is true. I have never thought any of that," Hermione interrupted.

"It's always felt true. I've had this terrible pressure on my shoulders and this sickness in my stomach since I was eleven," Ron explained. "I've had to watch my two best friends get closer

why I felt further and further away. Do you think it's easy to not feel jealousy or anger toward Harry because he has a better chance with you than I do? Do you know how pathetic and guilty I've felt year after year?"

"Ron—"

"And you know what makes it worse?" he asked. He didn't even give her time to answer. "Having to compete with Krum. Viktor Krum, the Quidditch super star. What could I ever possibly do to match him? Harry was plenty enough but then Krum stepped in. Since fourth year I've had to watch and see how you are with Harry and then with Krum's letters."

Hermione held a hand out. "Ron, let me explain. Harry and Krum—there was never anything there."

"Well, I didn't see it that way." He chuckled harshly. "And then bloody Cormac McLaggen came along."

"I've already apologized for that. Cormac means nothing to me," she pressed.

"Yeah, well, you did a good bloody job of making it seem like he did. He was probably the worst of them all," Ron said.

"Why?" she asked curious. She didn't understand why someone so insignificant like Cormac bothered Ron so greatly.

"Because he's an arsehole!" he shouted. "Harry I can understand. Krum I get but Cormac is such a terrible person. He's awful to me and completely wrong for you. He wouldn't treat you right, Hermione, and yet you went after him—"

"I didn't go after him, Ron. I never wanted him. I know how vile he is. It was a mistake," Hermione said.

"I didn't know it at the time. I figured if you fancied someone like Cormac, then I would never stand a chance. I'm nothing like him," Ron said. "And the fact that he's so terrible to me made it worse. I didn't understand how you could fancy someone who's always been a prick to me."

"I'm sorry, Ron. I was wrong. I know that. You have to believe that I'm glad you're not like him. Cormac is annoying, egotistical, and rude. You're not like that. I would never want you to be like that," Hermione said.

"I have nothing to offer you, Hermione. I want to make you happy, but I have nothing. I don't have any of the things that they have," he said.

"Yes, you do! Ron, you've always had exactly what I need. It's you. I want you. I want you so badly that it hurts," she sobbed. She tripped back until she hit the desk. She sat on it and tried to control her tears.

He moved right in front of her. "I want you, too, Hermione. You have no idea how badly I ache for you. I've always been aching for you."

His words cut through her tears and warmed her body. "Oh, Ron, you're wrong about them. Harry, Krum, and Cormac—they mean nothing. Harry is my best friend and I do love him, but only as a brother. Krum and I barely have anything in common. We could never be more than pen pals. I don't care how great of a Quidditch player he is, and Cormac is such an arse. I can't stand him. He scares me, and I don't feel safe with him. I only feel safe with you," Hermione explained. They were so close and her body reacted to it.

Ron gripped her arms. "Hermione, I thought you wanted them."

She shook her head. "Whatever I could feel for any of them is nothing compared to you."

He put his forehead to hers and rested his hands on the desk. His breathing hitched, and his face was a deep red. She felt her heartbeat pick up. "Fucking hell, I never know what you want. Please, just tell me what you want. Don't play any more games, and don't say what you think you have to or what you think is right. Please, just tell me what you want. Tell me what you need."

Hermione squeezed her hands on top of his. She felt dizzy. "I—I want you, Ron, and I want to be more than just your best friend. I—I want to be your girlfriend. I want to be able to hold you and touch you and be with you. I love you as my friend but so much more. I'm in love with you, and I need you as my everything." Her voice was hoarse and every word felt heavy, but it felt incredible to let everything out.

Ron's eyes widened. His hands moved to her waist, and he held on to her tightly. He licked his lips. "Then have me. Hermione, I love you so much. I always have been in love with you, and I've always wanted to be with you. Please, take me. I'm yours. I will always be yours. I want to be, and I want you to be mine. I need you to be mine. I want to be with you and feel you from the inside out. I need it all. I love you, Hermione. Please, have me."

She didn't know what to say or what to do. All that kept repeating in her mind was Ron's confession. All she could see were his large, kind, blue eyes. Her head buzzed from hearing him say that he loved her. She could smell his hint of apple, and his lips were inches from hers.

She decided not to think. She closed the gap between them and brushed her lips softly against his. Every hair on her body pricked. Her heart pounded so violently that she was afraid it would explode. Ron kissed her back and tightened his grip on her waist. It made her moan. Her moan made Ron moan. Her body shook, and it felt amazing. It was everything that she thought it would be but more. Hermione had to pull away. She was out of breath, and Ron's was as well. He breathed roughly. She was so dizzy and

there was a light ringing in her ear. She put a hand on his cheek. It was piping hot.

Ron grinned. "Iâ€|I was right about one thing."

"Hmm, what's that?" Hermione asked.

He licked his lips again. "Your lips are soft."

Hermione whimpered. She stared at Ron, and he stared right back. Almost as if being shocked the two of them pounced on each other. She wrapped her arms around his neck and he wrapped his arms as firmly as he could around her waist. The kiss was slow and gentle at first, but it quickly sped up and got heated. The couple groaned and clutched each other, pressing their bodies tightly against each other. Hermione pulled her legs around Ron's waist and took his bottom lip in between hers. She nibbled and licked it. Ron groaned and squeezed her hips.

"Mmm, Hermione," he mumbled.

He brushed his tongue against her teeth and she opened her mouth. That was when everything changed. As soon as their tongues met, any reserves Hermione had disappeared and so did Ron's. She moaned loudly and dug her fingers into his neck. "Hmm, Ron, this feels right. It's so good," she muttered in his mouth.

She could not describe it. Ron's mouth was insanely warm, and he tasted wonderful. Their tongues duelled and pressed against each other's. Hermione was finally able to capture his suck on it. She figured right away that she liked sucking on Ron. The implication made her blush, but she didn't stop it. Ron moaned and put his hand on her knee. He squeezed it. Hermione jerked and pulled on his hair. The snogging became more heated and more desperate. Bottled up feelings that had stayed hidden for years poured out of them.

She couldn't think. Kissing Ron was like nothing she had ever experienced before. Ron was strong and demanding, but she felt safe and in control. She also noticed that somehow she knew what Ron would love and he seemed to be able to read her desires. They kissed harder and faster until both were sweaty and panting. Hermione couldn't take it. Every feeling from Ron seemed to electrify her body and she absorbed him. The electricity between them was overpowering.

Ron leaned forward and reached his hand higher on her leg. His hand barely touched her thigh, but it was enough to make her groan and lose balance. She fell back against the desk. A horrible crash made them jump and Ron immediately pulled away from her. Hermione got off the desk and look behind her. Parchments and ink were scattered all over the desk and floor. She wiped her mouth and looked at him. He was even more out of breath and sweaty. Her lips tingled, and her body was on fire. She was soaked in every way.

Ron ran a hand through his hair. "Um, we-we probably shouldn't do this in here."

She nodded repeatedly. "Yes, you're absolutely right." They stared at each other. Her eyes fell to his groin. She could see the slight bulge against his trousers. It was such a distracting vision. "Soâ€¦where should we go?" She dragged her eyes back up to his face.

If at all possible, his blush increased. "Ahâ€¦we can go to my room."

"Aren't your mates in there?" she asked. Though she wanted to be alone, the taste of Ron was intoxicating and she would consider snogging him with the others in the room.

"I'll just tell them to piss off. I haven't used my passes yet," he said.

"What do you mean by passes?" Hermione asked.

Ron chuckled. "Well, it's something we started third year. Every new school year we each get two free passes to have the room to ourselves with no questions asked. I haven't used any yet." She looked at him confused. He rolled his eyes. "It was Seamus' idea, and he's already used both of his. Does that clear up anything?"

"Oh, right, I understand," she said quickly. She looked around the room. She wanted to leave but she had to straighten up and finish. "Okay, well, why don't you go clear them out and I'll finish up here."

"I can help you," Ron said.

She smiled. "I know you can, but it will only take a few minutes. I'll be right there. I promise."

He gazed at her longingly. She knew that he wanted to kiss her again. She wanted him to but she was afraid that she wouldn't be able to stop if they did. "Okay, but you better be bloody quick."

"Yes sir," she breathed. Ron bit his lip. He grabbed his tie and hurried out of the room.

As soon as he shut the door, Hermione fell back against the desk and put a hand to her chest. Her heart was beating rapidly. She was sweaty and lightheaded. It felt like a dream. It didn't seem real, but it didn't matter. She quickly picked up the scattered papers, cleaned up the ink, and tried her hardest to finish. Her hands shook and she couldn't concentrate.

Somehow, she was able to get finished. Before she left the room, she looked herself over in her mirror. Her face was beet red, and her hair was a mess. She also had the biggest smile on her face, and she seemed to have more light in her eyes. She squeaked and hurried out of the room. She was on her way to see Ron. She was on her way to see him alone and ravish him. She didn't understand how hours ago she was barely his friend and nowâ€¦

"What are we?" she thought to herself. Her curiosity momentarily beat out her desire. Sure, they snogged and confessed their love but neither mentioned anything about a relationship. Hermione actually felt nervous as she reached the Common Room. She tried to hide her smile and tone down her blush but it was impossible.

"I fucking knew it!" Seamus said as she walked in.

"Hush, Seamus," she said with her chin slightly pointed in the air. She ignored the cheers of her fellow classmates as she walked past them.

"Tell Ron to give us more warning next time. I didn't even get time to grab a quill. I have potions to do," Neville said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Hermione answered.

Seamus and Neville rolled their eyes. Her grin broadened, but she quickly sobered up when she saw Lavender at the corner desk. She was glaring at her. Hermione turned away and went up the stairs. She felt a little more nervous as she reached the door. She didn't know rather to knock or open it. Everything was new and rather scary. She decided to just open the door. She poked her head in.

"Hello?" she said.

"Yeah, you can come in," Ron said. She closed the door behind her. He was sitting on his bed and seemed just as nervous as she was.

She sat next to him. "Your friends are rude," she said.

"They're your friends, too, and I know they are. It's my fault," he said. "I did go a little mental when I told them to leave. I justâ€¦I want us to be alone."

Her heart fluttered again. "I understand. I want us to be alone, too."

"Good," he breathed. He rubbed his hands on his legs repeatedly and looked at the floor. He cleared his throat. "Listen, um, if I was tooâ€¦much back in the office, I'm sorry."

"It's okay. You don't have to apologize. I felt the same way, and I enjoyed it," she said.

He looked at her. "You did?"

"A lot. I didn't want to stop," she said.

"I didn't either. I've never felt so intense like that before. It was scary but amazing," he answered.

She melted at his statement. "I agree," she whispered. They continued to look at each other. Ron took her hand and held it. Her body relaxed, and she was able to think again. "Ron, what are we?"



"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, I know how you feel and you know how I feel, but what are we to each other?" she asked.

Ron shrugged somewhat. "Well, what do you want us to be?"

"I asked you first, Ron. What do you want? What you want is important, too. What am I to you?" she answered.

He grinned. "I guess you're my girlfriend."

She raised an eyebrow. "You guess?"

He rolled his eyes. "Bloody hell, yes, you are my girlfriend. I want us to be together. I want us to experience things as boyfriend and girlfriend. Is that thorough enough for you, professor?"

She laughed and felt more at ease. "Yes, that's fine. I want those things, too."

He put her hand to his lips and kissed her knuckles. "Good." She couldn't hold back any longer. She leaned forward and kissed him. It was soft and calm but enough to make her body go into a frenzy again. Cloudiness fogged her brain and everything was on high alert and tingly. She pulled away and lost herself. Ron was so beautiful. He was smiling at her passionately with his open ocean eyes and perfectly lush lips. He was hers, and she was his. They were together. After years of guessing, hoping, crying, and fretting, she had him. Ron loved her. Ron wanted her. Ron needed her. He was the man of her dreams, and he came true.

The revelation took her breath away. A lump clogged and burst in her throat. Tears poured down her face. She couldn't stop herself. Ron immediately wrapped his arms around her. "Hey, what's wrong?" he asked.

She held him back and buried her face against his chest. He smelled so warm and sweet. "Nothing is wrong. I justâ€¦I've wanted you for so long. You mean so much to me, and I almost lost you. I love you, Ron. I love you so much. Iâ€¦I justâ€¦" She cried harder. She didn't know why she couldn't control herself.

"Hermione, come on. Move up with me," Ron said soothingly. He moved back against the bed and settled against the headboard. Hermione lay against his chest and wrapped her arms around his neck. He held her tightly. It felt incredible but she couldn't stop crying.

"Hermione, you don't have to worry. Hey, come on. I've got you. I've got you now, and I'm never letting go of you. I promise that I'm not going anywhere. I'm right here with you, and I love you. I love you so much," Ron said tenderly into her hair. He kissed the top of her head and stroked her hair with one hand and rubbed her back with the other.

She shivered and moaned slightly. She relaxed more. She had never felt safer or more loved in her life. She soaked up every bit of Ron's grace and took it for herself. "I love you, Ron."

"I love you, Hermione," he whispered. Hearing Ron say the simple words made her feel lightheaded again and the tingling sensation took over. She kissed his neck and closed her eyes. She was warm, safe, and completely exhausted. It wasn't long until she fell asleep in his arms.

Hermione opened her eyes and sat up. She was still in Ron's bed, but he was nowhere in sight. "Ron?" she called, rubbing her eyes. She checked her watch. She hadn't been asleep for too long. A bit of panic came over her. "Ron?" she called again.

The door opened. "Sorry, I didn't mean to take so long. Seamus and Neville wouldn't let me come up without telling them something." Ron kicked the door closed. His hands held a tray of food.

The panic immediately ceased and was replaced with excitement. "What did you tell them?" she asked.

"Nothing. I told them that they could no longer tease me about not having the bollocks to snog you, but that's about it. I respect your need to keep everything so annoyingly private," he cheeked. He set the food in front of her and took a seat on the bed beside her.

"Thank you. Wow, this looks great. How did you get it? Isn't dinner over?" Hermione asked, admiring the roast and mash.

"I have a couple of connections. Well, they're Fred and George's connections but I doubt they'll mind. I'm bloody starving, and I know that you haven't had anything since lunch. I reckon you need to re-build your strength," he said with a blush.

She blushed as well. Sure, she was hungry but snogging Ron took more out of her than anything else. "That's sweet, Ron."

He took a large bite of roast. "No problem."

Hermione moved her mash around her plate. "I'm sorry for earlier. I didn't mean to let it all out like that. I don't want to scare you."

"Hermione, it's okay. You didn't scare me. I understand completely. I had a moment right after I left to get food. This is all a little overwhelming, and it's all happening so fast," Ron said.

She nodded. "Exactly, things went from nothing to everything in such a short amount of time. It's a bit terrifying."

"Terrifying?" he helped.

She smiled. "Yes, plenty terrifying, but I don't mind it. I like it like this."

"Me too. It feels right," he added.

They grinned at each other for a while before eating. There was a comfortable silence between them. Hermione kept looking up at Ron just as he was staring at her. They giggled and blushed, and she felt younger than she had in years. For once, she felt her age. After she finished she wiped her mouth and contemplated. There was a question burning inside her. She was afraid to ask but had no choice. She took a deep breath. "Ron."

"Yeah?" he said through a mouthful of pudding.

"I need to ask you something," she said.

Ron swallowed hard. "Okay."

"I've been wanting to ask you this for a while now," she said slowly.

He swallowed hard again. "Yeah?"

"Why did you forgive me? Why did you want to be friends again? I'm not complaining or anything. I just thought that you would never want to talk to me again, but out of nowhere you came to see me and told me you understood. Why?" She hoped that she hadn't ruined a good thing and said too much.

"Honestly?" Ron said. She nodded. He sighed. "I always wanted to be friends again. Even right after the fight we had, I wanted to patch things up but I couldn't. It was hard for me not to, though. Every time I saw you I wanted to talk to you and make things better. It's like that night we patrolled but even earlier that day in class. I especially want to work things out on my birthday."

"Really?" she asked a bit high-pitched.

Ron smirked. "Yeah, it was a little selfish of me, though. I really wanted to kiss you more than anything else."

She looked down and blushed. "I wanted you to. I wouldn't have stopped you."

He took her hand. "Yeah, but I was scared and confused. It's how I've been this whole time. Then I talked to Harry."

Her jaw dropped a little. "When?"

"I told you. During our practice session we talked about some things, and it was all mostly about you. I'm surprised that he didn't tell you," he said.

"He wanted to keep your confidence," Hermione said.

Ron shrugged. "Anyway, he's a lot smarter than he gives himself credit for. He helped me realize how your reasons weren't that far from my own. He helped me see that what you did is sort of

what I was trying to do with Lavender. For so long I tried to tell myself that it wasn't the same, but it sort of is."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I dated Lavender because she's nice and I knew she liked me. I even fancied her a little," Ron said.

"Oh," Hermione said. Her heart dropped to some extent. Being Ron's girlfriend now made statements like that feel a bit weird.

"It was never anything serious. It was nothing more than how I used to fancy Madame Rosmerta, honest," he reassured.

"I thought you still did fancy her," Hermione cheeked.

He rolled his eyes. "Shut it. Honestly though, I thought it would be okay. I did want to date. I was tired of being alone, but I can't lie and say it was my main reason for being with her. I felt like such an arse because while Lavender had real intentions with me, I was mostly trying to get over you. I wanted to prove that I didn't need you, and I wanted to stop hurting and feeling so miserable when you and Harry went off alone or when you two would talk and I'd feel so out of it. I hate that."

"Believe it or not but I can understand. I get jealous sometimes. You and Harry were so close and it's never been like that with me and you or even me and Harry. I can understand your worry," she explained.

"It's different. I was sure that you wanted Harry and that he fancied you. It's what I've believed since first year," Ron said.

"You-you've liked me for that long?" Hermione asked.

Ron rubbed his neck. "Hermione, I think I loved you even before I realized that I could love someone who wasn't a family member and even before I really noticed girls." He shook his head and cleared his throat. "I know it sounds pathetic."

She took his hand. "No, it doesn't. I think I've always been that way, too. If it makes you feel any better, I noticed you before I noticed Harry. Sure, I saw Harry Potter on the train but my attention was more on the adorable ginger with dirt on his nose."

He laughed. "That's probably when it happened for me. Thanks for letting me know by the way."

"Any time," she said sweetly.

He squeezed her hand. "Well, I noticed you long before Lavender. I've always thought she was nice. A little annoying, yeah, but she is really nice. So, I figured it would be good to give it a go. I didn't think that you and I would ever get together. It was okay at first. I didn't hurt as much and I did have fun with her but the longer things went on, the more I thought about you and the less I thought about her."

Hermione was impressed. Ron was good at hiding his feelings. She never noticed a thing. "Oh..." was all she could think of to say.

"Yeah," he said lowly. "I told myself that my feelings for you would go away and that I could move on. I couldn't. I loved you and that didn't change. I never felt anything remotely close to that with Lavender, and I never even wanted to. It's not her fault, though."

"I'm sorry, Ron. I didn't know. I couldn't see it," Hermione said. "I really did think she made you happy."

"She sort of did in the beginning. It was nice having someone interested in me and what I had to say. She was really good about that, and I tried my best to return it. That's where I kept losing it. I didn't feel right being so close to her, telling her my secrets, and touching her. I wanted all those things with you. Even if I never got the chance to, I wanted it all for you," he said.

She felt tears again. "That's how I feel, too, Ron. That's how I always felt. It's why I couldn't do anything with Cormac or anyone else. I want it all saved for you. You're the only person that I can get close to in any way."

He moved over to her. "I'm glad. Lavender, she cared too much, and I didn't care enough. I stuck with it anyway to prove that I didn't need you. It's selfish and mean, but I couldn't help myself. It hurt too bloody much to see you and not have you. I have always wanted to be with you, hold you, and tell you how beautiful you are. I've always thought about telling you how badly I want you but I never could. It was really difficult to hold it back and Harryâ€¦"

"There was never anything between us. Anytime we were alone we talked about you and Ginny," Hermione said. "Harry wants Ginny and not me."

Ron shifted and frowned. "Yeah, I got that much. It's not the point, though. After I found out about the game I was furious, but I could never get too angry. I did the same to Lavender. It sounds awful, but I think I may have used her a little. I stayed with her ever after I knew that I didn't feel anything for her. I stayed to prove that I was fine but I wasn't. I always thought about you. Even when I wasâ€¦alone with Lavender, you were on my mind."

Hermione's body heated over. "Iâ€¦always think about you when I'm alone."

He chewed in his lip and his breathing hitched. "I do the same about you."

She closed her eyes for a moment and moaned softly. She couldn't begin to let herself process the vision. "That day over holiday when we were by the fireâ€¦I'd never felt so good before."

"Yeah, and the time in McGonagall's office. Well, the time before this time. I wanted to kiss you so badly, Hermione. I always want to kiss you," Ron said.

"I always want to kiss you, too," Hermione said.

"And that's exactly why I felt so horrible. Snogging Lavender felt like a chore. It was okay in the beginning but after a while I was numb to it. I always lied to her, and pretended that I was having a good time when I wasn't. I think that's where what you did and what I did come together. I never meant to hurt Lavender. It just happened. It was bound to happen. She's a nice person, and it's not her fault. She was just never the person for me and, I knew that going in." Ron took a breath and rubbed his eyes.

Hermione rubbed his arm. "It's okay, Ron. You had good intentions. You weren't purposely trying to trick her. You were right. That's exactly what Harry and I did to you, but I never meant to hurt you."

He looked away. "I saw you, you know. You must have thought that I ignored you after our fight but I didn't. I could tell that it was killing you. Like that day when McGonagall was all over you, it was likeâ€¦like I could feel your pain. I know that sounds mental but I could. It was so powerful, and it hurt so badly. I couldn't breathe or concentrate on anything. I didn't want to see you in that much pain again, and I didn't want to be in that much pain."

"Everything just blended together," she said quietly, thinking about how much her body and soul had hurt.

He looked back to her. "I missed you so much, and I couldn't bloody take it. I needed you in my life again, and I wanted more. I planned to tell you that I wanted more than friendship, but when you said we should just be friends I let it go. It was never because I didn't want to be with you. I just didn't want to push anything. As much as I want you, it's important that we're still friends."

Hermione looked at him in a light that she hadn't before. Ron was right. She didn't know as much about him as she thought. "That's exactly why I said that we should be friends in the first place. Your friendship means the world to me. I don't want to lose it. I think it's another reason why I'm so scared right now. I don't want our friendship to fall apart."

"Neither do I. I won't let that happen," he said firmly.

She moved the tray off the bed and scooted as close to him as she could. "Ron, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for what I did and all the assumptions that I made. I love you so much. I hope you can forgive me."

He put his forehead against hers and clutched her waist again. "I love you, too, but I won't say that it still doesn't hurt or that I don't have some issues. I do. It's still hard for me to take in everything and forgive it all, but I understand it better now and

I want to get past this. I need a little time, but I want to be with you while I work this out. I'd like us both to work this out."

"Of course. I'm here for you, Ron. I'm not expecting you to forget or rush into anything. I just want you to know that I'm here to help you," she said. He grinned beautifully. She still couldn't believe that it was all happening. Suddenly, she chuckled.

"What's so funny?" Ron asked.

Hermione put her thumb to his mouth and rubbed off crumbs and jam from dinner. "You're such a messy boy. Didn't your mother teach you any manners?"

He smirked. "Yeah, but my lack of table manners adds to my charm."

"Oh, Ronald Weasley," she breathed.

"What? Are you gonna punish me for it?" he asked with an eyebrow raised.

Hermione's body burned and pressure throbbed against her middle. "I think I should. I am in charge, aren't I?" She ran a hand through his silky hair and tugged on it a little.

"Mmm-hmm," Ron answered, closing his eyes. "I'm good at taking orders?"

She licked her lips and lightly pushed him back against the bed. He smiled and bit his lip and she settled on his groin. Her middle throbbed harder. She could feel his excitement. "Yes, I remember. Well, I guess as your punishmentâ€¦" she trailed off and bent down. She kissed the tip of his nose. Hermione didn't know where the sensuality or aggressiveness was coming from, but it felt natural and right. Everything about her being with Ron and the things they did felt natural and right.

"Yeah?" he said. He reached up to kiss her, but she pulled away just in time.

"As your punishment I want you to snog me until your lips go numb." She blushed harder than she ever had. She felt a little embarrassed but mostly eager.

Ron moaned a little. "Hmm, this is my punishment?"

"It could take awhile," Hermione whispered. She lowered again but stayed just out of reach.

He raised his neck and gripped her sides. "Love, it's my plan to make this last for as long as possible."

He reached up and she finally let their lips connect. They moaned and sighed as they snogged. She comfortably lay on top of him and tangled her fingers in his hair. Ron's hands gripped and pinched

her sides from time to time. The only sounds came from their passionate snogging and breathless whispers of "love you" and "this feels so good." Hermione couldn't believe it. She couldn't believe that she had Ron. He wanted her and he loved her. They were together. She had won even without the game. There was so much to think about and still so much to talk about but at the time it didn't seem to matter.

She was snogging Ron and it was all she cared about at the moment. She had nothing but time to think and worry about the rest.

\*\*\*\* No notes this time, only love and happiness. :) I really hope you all enjoyed this one. Thanks for reading and don't forget to REVIEW if you want the next bit.

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 32

Thanks for all the reviews! Ah, I'm still smiley, lol. I'm really sorry that this took so long. I'm having a career shift and it's taking a lot of my time but I'm back to a normal schedule so this shouldn't happen again!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Hermione opened her eyes and sat up. She smiled and stretched slowly. She felt better rested than she had in ages it seemed, even though she had gotten very little sleep. She and Ron had spent most of the night talking, gazing, and snogging. The thought made her grin. She never pictured herself having the patience to kiss for hours, but last night had proven her wrong. Ron had proven her wrong. Someone stirred and she faced her roommates. Thankfully, they were both still asleep. She did not want to ruin her already perfect day by having to see their scowls and hear their complaints.

She quickly hopped out of bed and got dressed. It was the weekend so there was no need to be up so early, but she felt wired and oddly excited. She crept out of the room and took a moment to review her options. Everything felt different. She wasn't sure if she was supposed to go up to Ron's room or just wait for him. She stood awkwardly at the staircase leading to his room for a while before deciding to wait. She walked downstairs and her heart skipped a beat. Ron was already on the couch. She took a moment to take him in. It still didn't seem real. Her lips tingled and her excitement outweighed her need to stare at him. She softly cleared her throat. Ron looked up at her and grinned.

"Hey," he said gently.

"Hi," she answered. She walked over and sat next to him. It felt strange. For a moment, she thought that it had all been a dream and that Ron was just being polite to her in the morning as he always was. She stared at him, and he started right back. She didn't know what to say. So much had been revealed the night



before and she suddenly felt rather embarrassed. She rubbed her hands together. "Soâ€¦!"

Ron leaned over and lightly pressed his lips against hers. Hermione instantly sighed and closed her eyes. She kissed him back and was amazed that it felt just as magical and intense as their kisses had felt the night before. He pulled away. "Good morning, Hermione."

Hermione relaxed and took his hand. "Good morning, Ron." They softly giggled and blushed in nervousness and anticipation. "I guess this means that it wasn't all a dream," she added.

He kissed her fingers. "No, it wasn't a dream. At least, I couldn't have dreamed it. I didn't get enough sleep last night to be able to, but I'm not complaining about that."

Her heart melted. "I agree. I actually feel quite rejuvenated." She leaned against the cushion of the couch and gazed at him. He looked right back at her. It was wonderful, and she felt so close to him. She didn't even have to speak. She could look into his eyes and see what he wanted. Finally, the wall between them was gone. She saw Ron and his emotions clearer and easier than she ever had before. She hoped that he could read her easier as well. She moved her eyes to his lips, and her mouth watered. She wanted to kiss him again and the best part was that she could. Ron was her boyfriend, and she didn't have to hide her desire.

"Hey, come here," she whispered.

Ron moved closer to her, and put his forehead against hers. "Do you need something?"

Her body heated and the spark between them intensified. Any time they were close, Hermione felt their spark grow. "Yes, I don't think I quite got your message with that last kiss." She rubbed her thumb across his lower lip.

He chuckled. "Is that so?" He shyly stuck out his tongue and licked her finger.

Hermione's cheeks flushed. His tongue was incredibly warm. She tried to stay focused. "I mean it was okay. I understand that it's a good morning, but I was wondering if you could turn it into a great morning." She licked her lips and glided her now wet thumb across his upper lip. She had no idea that she had such a developed sensuality or that she loved being suggestive, but she didn't want it to stop. She enjoyed showing that side of herself to Ron.

Ron lightly kissed her finger and gave it another lick before pulling it away. "I reckon I can do that for you."

She felt heat and pressure push against her middle. "Good. Don't hold back."

He moved his arm so it was on the other side of her waist. She leaned back against the couch and spread her legs slightly so he

could put his knees in between. "Oh, you don't have to worry about that," he said against her mouth before pressing his lips against hers again.

Hermione closed her eyes and put her hands on his neck. He put his hand against her cheek and eased his tongue into her mouth. She immediately whimpered. A shockwave of energy shot through her. Kissing Ron was easily her new favorite thing to do in the morning. She didn't understand how she had gone so many years without it. She slid his tongue between her lips and absorbed the taste of him. Ron moaned and moved his hand from her cheek to her arm. He ran his fingertips up and down her skin. Her hairs pricked and her body burned. It felt so good. Everything about Ron felt amazing.

"For fuck sake, Ron. Every time I come in here you are snogging some girl."

He laughed in her mouth and pulled away from her. Hermione and Ron looked up. Standing next to the couch was Ginny. Her arms were crossed over her chest and she was smirking. "Do you need something, Ginny? Bloody hell, every time I'm in the middle of something with Hermione, you have to show your pasty face," Ron whined.

Hermione pulled on his earlobe. "Ronald, be nice."

Ginny laughed. "I know that you're not calling me pasty, copper knob. Anyway, it's not my fault. I'm just making yet another observation."

"Well, you made it. You can go now," he said.

"Can I say one last thing?" she asked. Ron rolled his eyes but nodded. "At least you're snogging the right girl this time. I'm glad that you finally came to your senses, big brother." Ginny smiled him.

Ron returned it. "Thanks."

"I'll leave you to it then." She gave Hermione a wink before leaving out of the portrait hole. Hermione felt her appreciation and love for Ginny grow in that moment.

Ron moved off her. "Is it strange that I haven't seen Ginny that happy in a long time?"

"No. Ginny cares a lot about you. She's happy because you are happy," Hermione said.

Ron gazed at her affectionately. It was so full of love and joy. It blew her away. He reached out and tucked hair behind her ear. Hermione closed her eyes and shivered slightly at his sensual maneuver. "I am certainly happy," he said delicately. She opened her eyes. Warmth came over her. Ron touched his stomach. "Not only am I happy but I'm also bloody hungry. Being up this early is murder. Do you want to go to breakfast?"

She chuckled and rolled her eyes. "Yes, that sounds great. I need to get my shoes. I'll be right back." She leaned over and gave him a small kiss. Even their small kisses charged her body. She got off the couch and walked to the staircase. She turned around. Ron was still looking at her. "Ron," she said softly.

"Yeah?" he answered.

A bit of excitement came over her. "I love you," she said.

He grinned. "I love you, too, Hermione." The lightness came over her again. Just like the night before, an airy feeling clouded her mind and her body instantly relaxed. That one statement was incredibly powerful to her. She couldn't believe how one statement could do some much to her.

When she got back to her room and opened the door, Parvati was on the other side. "Oh, sorry, Hermione."

"No, it's okay. Let me get out of your way," she answered.

Parvati gave her a look. "Actually, I was going to go looking for you. I need to talk to you."

Hermione mentally sighed. She didn't want to but she needed to get the bickering over with. "Sure." She walked back into the room and sat on her bed. Parvati joined her and closed the curtains around them.

"I don't want to wake Lavender," Parvati said.

She shook her head. "Look--"

"No, let me go first," Parvati interrupted. "I just want to say that I'm really happy that you and Ron are together. I think it's great."

Hermione searched her face for sarcasm. She could not find it. "Are you being serious?"

"Yes. I've thought that you two would end up together for a long time," Parvati said. "It's been rather obvious."

She frowned. "I don't understand. What about Lavender?"

Parvati sighed. "She's my best friend. I'm going to support her no matter what I personally believe. I want her to be happy, and Ron made her happy. It doesn't mean that I couldn't still hope for the best with you and Ron. I told you before. I'm not out to hurt you."

"I'm sorry. I guess I didn't see it that way. Thank you," Hermione said. "It means a lot that you're happy for us."

"Yes. I don't want there to be any more drama than there has to be," Parvati said.

Hermione knew what she was getting at. "You mean with Lavender?"

"As you can imagine, she was beyond hysterical last night when you and Ron went to be alone," Parvati said.

"Am I supposed to feel bad for that?" Hermione asked. She started to regret talking to Parvati. Ron was waiting on her, and she didn't want to waste her day fighting about Lavender.

"That's not what I mean. I'm only telling you because I want you to know that she's upset," Parvati said.

"I know she's upset. I know that I will get an earful when she wakes up. Thanks for the warning, though." Hermione reached to open the curtain but Parvati grabbed her wrist.

"I need to ask you something," she rushed.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "What is it?"

Parvati stared off for a moment as if she was looking for the right words. "Can you please be gentle with Lavender? She took the breakup really hard, and she's still not over it. So, I know you being with Ron is a lot for her to process right now. I'm a little worried about her, and I don't want her to have a complete breakdown."

She looked at her in disbelief. "You must be joking. You want me to be gentle with her, like the way she was so gentle with me? What, am I supposed to feel guilty or not talk about Ron or show affection toward him to make her feel better?"

"No, I'm not saying that at all. Hermione, I know that she was never very nice to you when dating Ron. I'm not stupid," Parvati said.

"You're right. She was horrible. She threw it in my face whenever she had the chance and made me feel terrible for being his friend. She knew that I fancied him, and she tried her best to make me suffer for it," Hermione explained.

Parvati shook her head. "I'm so sorry about all of that, but you have to understand. She's not like that naturally. She was scared and insecure. I'm not excusing her behavior, but I want you to know why. I saw how she was to you. I understand what you must feel about her."

"If you understand, then why are you asking me this?" Hermione asked.

Parvati looked at her intently. "Because I'm hoping that you'll have a bit more compassion. Lavender is my best friend, but she lacks the compassion and empathy that you have."

Hermione felt weird hearing Parvati talk about her in such a way. "Parvati, I don't need you to compliment me."

"I know. I'm not just talking, though. Look—Ron is yours. He loves you. You two were always meant to be together. Lavender

knew that. She saw how Ron was with you and then with her. It didn't matter, though. She loved him anyway. I don't think she could help herself. Can you understand that?" Parvati asked.

Hermione couldn't lie. She understood completely. "Yes, I get it."

"Maybe it wasn't in the best way, but Lavender did really love him. She still does. She's hurting, Hermione. You can be okay now, but she can't. I'm hoping that with everything you have been through, you can understand what it's like for her and what it is going to be like for a while," Parvati said. "I'm not saying that you have to kiss her arse. I am simply asking you to spare her the grief that she gave you. I love Lavender, and I want to help her. Now, to do so it's going to take a bit from you."

She looked Parvati and saw the honesty and worry in her eyes. She was right. Hermione could easily understand what Lavender was feeling. She had already been there. She also admired Parvati's loyalty to her best friend. It reminded her of Harry. That more than anything else made her see reason. After so much pain, Hermione didn't want anymore. She did not want any more drama and tears, not even for Lavender. "Okay, I understand. I will try but you should probably talk to her about this, too. I'm not going to let her walk all over me."

Parvati exhaled in relief. "Thank you, and I will. I'll talk to her over and over again."

"Okay, well, I'm going to go. I'll see you later," Hermione said. She climbed out of bed and looked at Lavender's sleeping figure. She would try to be civil, but something told her that it wasn't going to be as easy as Parvati thought. She didn't want to think about it too much but already it was taking over her mind. However, her mood automatically improved at seeing Ron still waiting for her on the couch. She smiled. "I'm ready."

He got up and walked over to her. "Finally, I was going to send for help." He hugged her, and she held him back. Hermione rested her head against his chest. She listened to the strong rhythm of his heart and took in his delicious scent. They held each other in silence for a moment. Hermione felt her soul lift and connect to Ron. His stomach grumbled. She pulled away.

"We should probably go eat before you pass out," she said, rubbing his stomach.

"Yeah, I almost fell asleep there for a moment," he cheeked. He held his hand out. "I know how you feel about all of this public display. I've seen you yell plenty of times at people for it. Though, I'm hopingâ€¦maybe just for today that you will finally abuse your power and let us do the exact thing that we're supposed to stop other people from doing."

She laughed. She had always been strict when it came to couples showing their affection, but she couldn't lie to herself and say that it had been the last thing on her mind. "Okay, but only for today." She took his hand and laced her fingers with his. She

looked up at him timidly and blushed again. Ron blushed as well. He tipped his head in the direction of the door and the two of them walked to the Great Hall.

She didn't know why she was nervous. It wasn't as if they were the first couple to ever walk to breakfast hand in hand but for some reason Hermione's stomach would not stop jumping. They opened the door and walked over to their regular bench. She looked around. It was mostly underclassmen eating and no one really paid them any attention. However, as they passed the Ravenclaw table, Luna's already large eyes widened and she said extra sweetly, "Good morning."

"Good morning," Ron and Hermione said together. They sat down and Ron let out a heavy breath.

"What?" Hermione asked.

"We're lucky. No one from our year is awake yet. You have no idea how horrible it was for me last night. Usually it's Seamus and Dean tag-teaming everything, but Neville has taken over Dean's place with flying colors. He was almost as bad as Seamus." Ron jabbed a very large piece of sausage with his fork and jammed most of it into his mouth.

"Ronald Weasley, you are going to clog your arteries," she breathed, taking a napkin and dabbing the side of his greasy mouth.

He swallowed and smirked. "What? Is this going to be a new thing now? You're going to start keeping me clean?"

She threw the napkin at him. "No, you can do that yourself."

"But I'm sure you can do it better," he said, almost purposely letting jam smear on his mouth as he took a bite of his bread.

"Oh! Stop it. You're doing that on purpose. Is this going to be a new thing? Are you going to be more infuriating than usual?" she shot.

Ron chuckled. "No, I just like to see you fired up. I reckon I should tell you that I've always found you incredibly irresistible when you're fuming." He slowly licked around his mouth and cleaned up the jam.

Hermione watched and felt her anger fade. "You're taking the mickey, aren't you?" He shook his head slowly. "Well, I guess I should tell you that your messy habits are annoying."

"But?" he said softly.

"Charming sometimes," she finished.

They stared at each other and Hermione almost muscled up the nerve to kiss him but very loud sniggering interrupted her confidence. Ron did not even look up. He closed his eyes and swore. "Shit. Here we go."

"There they are," Seamus called. He and Neville came racing over and sat right across from them. "Just look at them, Neville. They must be feeding each other."

"Bless them. It must have pained them to go this long only being able to stuff their own mouths," Neville added. The two burst into laughter again.

"Don't you prats have anything better to do?" Ron asked.

"What could be better than watching Hogwarts finest during their feeding time? Blimey, sausage, jam, and hardboiled eggs are nice aphrodisiacs but especially the sausage and jam. I like the message you're sending out with that, Ron," Seamus said.

Hermione frowned at his immaturity. "Seamus, when will you grow up? We're just eating."

"You shouldn't have said that," Neville said under his breath.

Seamus' eyes lit up. "Yeah, we'll I reckon Ron's been eating more than you have or are you saving that meal for dessert?" Hermione blushed and looked away.

"Seamus, mate, you have every right to be jealous that Mione and me are in the same house while you and your girlfriend aren't, but don't take it out on us. Why don't you take the rest of my sausages and find a nice, dark area where you can be alone with them," Ron said with a wink.

Neville and Hermione looked at Ron before bursting into laughter. Seamus gave him the finger. "Piss off, Ron. I'll see you lot later."

Hermione wiped her eyes and finally stopped laughing. "That was actually very clever, Ron. It was horrible but clever."

He shrugged. "Sometimes you have to be blunt with Seamus."

"Oh, it's all in good fun. Everyone was the same with me when I started dating Luna. It's only fair," Neville said. He smiled at them. "But seriously, I'm really happy for you two. I knew this would come sooner or later."

"Thank you, Neville. I recognize you now," Hermione said.

"Ah, I'm just sort of filling in. Seamus has been really upset lately because he and Deanâ€¦oh," Neville said.

"It's okay, Neville, you can tell Hermione," Ron said. Hermione raised an eyebrow. "You have girlfriend privileges now," he explained.

"And I thought girls were bad about these things," she said.

"I know. It's a little ridiculous, but it's worked for this long," Neville said. "Anyway, Dean hasn't really been talking to Seamus lately. In fact, he's shut himself off from everyone."

"Where is he now?" Hermione asked.

"In the dorm along with Harry. The two of them should start a support group," Neville said. She gasped quietly. She had totally forgotten about Harry. She promised to help him with his paper and hadn't even spoken to him since their talk in the library. "Well, I'm gonna go sit with Luna. It's really nice to see you two like this."

"Thanks Neville," Hermione and Ron said together. He got up from the table and walked away.

Hermione rubbed her eyes and felt guilt seep into her. "What's wrong?" Ron asked.

She looked at him. "Did you talk to Harry this morning?"

"Not really. When he came back to the room last night we sort of talked. He told me that he was happy for me or whatever. He had his curtains closed when I got up this morning. Please, don't look at me like that," he urged.

"I'm sorry, Ron. It's justâ€¦what are you going to do about Harry? You heard what Neville said. He's shutting everyone off like Dean," she said.

"I think I know what Harry and Dean are like. They are my roommates," Ron snapped. His hard composure immediately changed. "Look, I'm sorry for that. I don't mean to get upset with you, but this is really complicated okay. You don't understand."

"I thought you didn't like that phrase?" Hermione said.

"This is different, Hermione. Our situation is a lot different than my situation with Harry," Ron said.

"It doesn't matter. We need to work this out," she said.

"I know that. I'm fully aware that something has to change. I'm just-"

"You're just what? What are you waiting on?" Hermione interrupted. "I hate being like this. I really do."

Ron's face grew more and more red and his composure more fidgety. He rubbed his neck. "Hermione, I'm sorry. I know that you hate being like this, and I do, too. I'm aware of the same things that you are. I'm justâ€¦really happy right now. Can we please at least pretend like everything is okay for today? I promise that tomorrow we can go back to arguing and feeling stressed out. I just want one peaceful day with you."

She couldn't help but smile. She nodded and realized that Ron was right. "Yes, of course. I'm sorry."



"It's fine. I just want us to have a little fun." He moved closer to her and put his hand on hers.

The idea of fun with Ron lifted her spirits. "Are you finished here?"

"No, I barely finished my plate, and I need at least two rounds to satisfy me," he said.

She smiled and squeezed his hand. "I'm going to head back upstairs. I want to talk to Harry."

"I won't be long," he said. He pulled his hand away and brought it to her knee. He rubbed his thumb across it and looked into her eyes.

Suddenly, none of her worries seemed to matter. "If your second helping still doesn't satisfy your hunger, then I could possibly help you out."

"Hmm, maybe I should skip trying here," Ron whispered.

She bit her lip and moved away from him a little. "Like you could resist."

He looked her up and down. "I can give it a go." She shook her head and he pouted. "Have you always been this much of a tease?"

"I resent that," she said, swatting his arm. He held on to her hand and brought them close again.

"Can I at least get some sort of parting gift?" he asked.

She looked around, still afraid that teachers were staring at them. "A small one." She closed the gap between them and kissed his lips gently. She only let Ron melt against her mouth for a few seconds before pulling away. "See you soon."

"Okay," Ron breathed.

Hermione got up from the table and slowly walked out of the hall. She watched as her redhead went back to his sausages with a content look on his face. As happy as she was, there were things that kept her from enjoying her new relationship to the fullest. She walked up to Ron's dorm room and knocked on the door. Dean answered. "Hey, Hermione."

"Hello, Dean. How are you?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Not as good as you are, I reckon. Congratulations by the way. You and Ron together are wicked."

"Oh, thank you," Hermione said. "Is Harry here?"

Some of Dean's happiness faded. "Yeah. Come on in."

He opened the door and let her in as he stepped out. "You don't have to leave on my behalf," she said.

"It's fine. I need to go," Dean said. He closed the door behind him.

"He really was leaving," Harry said from his bed.

She walked over and sat next to him. "Are you two talking now?"

Harry chuckled. "I don't know if Dean and I will ever really talk again. We exchange enough words to make it seem like we don't hate each other, but that's about it."

"Dean doesn't hate you, and I know that you don't hate him," she said.

He shrugged. "Whatever we feel for each other, I know that it's not pleasant. Anyway, that's enough about me. How are you?"

Hermione almost cringed at the tone of his voice. The guilt was overpowering. "Harry, I am so sorry about last night. I didn't mean to forget about you but so much happened."

"You don't have to explain anything to me. I completely understand. After a while I figured that something must have happened. I went to put my stuff again, and Seamus and Neville told me about it in the Common Room," he explained.

"What did they tell you? Seamus has been so obnoxious about it," she said.

"He's only getting started, Hermione. It wasn't too bad. He just said that Ron had finally used one of his passes, and it wasn't for Lavender. How is she taking it, by the way?" Harry asked.

"I don't know. I haven't spoken to her. Parvati asked me to be nice to her," Hermione told.

Harry nodded. "I think you should. There's no need to make more people mad at you than need be. Trust me."

She looked at him and saw how empty he was. She could barely recognize him. "I'm sorry."

"For what?" he asked.

"It's not supposed to be like this. Everything isn't supposed to be this bad," she said.

"Nothing is bad, Hermione. You're with Ron. I'm actually shocked that you're not a puddle of girly bliss right now. How can you be so upset? Wasn't last night amazing for you?" he asked.

"Of course it was amazing. Ron and I did a lot of talking. You were right about everything, Harry. You know so much about him, and it's all true. I'm really happy, but that's not what I'm talking about." Hermione took his hand and held it tightly

between hers. "I'm talking about you. Things weren't supposed to work out like this for you. I hate seeing you like this."

He didn't meet her eyes. "Don't feel sorry for me. You know that I don't like that. I'm okay."

"I wish that you would stop this. I know you're not okay. I can tell and so can everyone else. I want to work things out with you and Ron. I want to work things out with you and Ginny. We're a team, Harry. It's not right that I'm in a better place and you're not," Hermione said.

Harry looked away. His heavy green eyes held the truth. He couldn't hide from her. "I know that you want to fix everything, but sometimes you have to realize that it's out of your control. Ron and I—I don't know how to explain it, but things are better. We aren't talking really but something between us feels different. As for Ginny and me, I think space is probably what we need. I'm been so wrong about a lot of things when it comes to her, and I really do need to give it some time."

"I don't think you should be acting this way. It's bad for you," she said.

He pulled away from her and stood. "Hermione, I'm doing just fine. I've been taking care of myself for this long, and I'm going to keep on doing it. I want you to think about your life, and I want you to enjoy being Ron's girlfriend. He's yours now. I can't say enough how happy I am for you. Believe it or not, but this is the most important thing to me. This is what I wanted. You and Ron are happy and are happy together. It's all that I really need."

Hermione knew that Harry's words were supposed to make her feel better, but all they did was remind her of the kind of person that Harry was and had always been. He would sacrifice himself until the very end and would always put himself last. It was a double-edged quality and one that she knew she couldn't fight with. "Okay," was all she was able to say.

He smiled slightly. "Good. I'm gonna go eat something. I still need to finish that essay. Are you waiting for Ron or something?"

"Yes, he'll be up here soon," she said.

"All right. I see you later," Harry said.

"Wait." She walked over to him and gave him a hug. "Thanks for talking to Ron. He told me that you did."

"It's not a problem," he said. He pulled away. "Don't you start that. Everything will be okay."

She smiled and wiped the frustrated tears that wanted to break through. "I know. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. Just stop worrying. For me, please," he pleaded. She nodded. He gave her hand a squeeze before leaving the room.

Hermione lay back on Ron's bed and hugged one of his pillows. She wanted to listen and believe Harry. She did want to enjoy her day with Ron, but it was so hard to be totally happy with one of her best friends while the other was obviously in pain. She closed her eyes and tried to shake off the bit of dread.

She opened her eyes looked around. Ron was at the foot of the bed flipping through a magazine. She sat up. "You have to start waking me up."

Ron grinned. "I don't mind. It's nice seeing you so peaceful."

"Come here," she said. He crawled up and lay next to her. He propped himself on his elbow, and she lay on her back and snuggled close to him. Hermione moved hair out of his eyes. "Did you enjoy your breakfast?"

"Yes, but it wasn't nearly as fun to wipe my own mouth," he cheeked.

"I thought I told you about that," she muttered.

He laughed and kissed her forehead. "I'm sorry. Did you talk to Harry?"

"Yes, did you?" she asked.

"Hermione," he started.

"Just promise me that you'll talk to him," Hermione said.

"I promise that I will. I mean it," Ron answered. She sighed and eyed him. She loved being so close to him and being able to smell him and touch his skin. He was so soft and freckly. She ran her hand over his face and down to his neck. "Hmm, that feels really good."

She leaned up and kissed his neck. She nibbled and sucked on the skin. "You taste really good."

Ron moaned and let her ravish his neck before taking her arms. "My turn," he said. He slowly got on top of her and snogged her deeply. It was her turn to moan. She wrapped her arms around his waist and let the airy feeling take over. It was such a warming experience. He pulled out of the kiss and kissed her jaw and earlobe.

"Oh, Ron," she moaned. "Is this what we're going to do all day?"

"I dunno. Do you have something else in mind?" he asked against her neck.

She pulled on his hair. "No. This is fine."

He looked up at her, and she lost himself in his bright blue eyes and lush lips. "I love hearing you like this. Fucking hell, I love you. Have I told you that today?"

She traced his mouth. "Maybe once." He rose up and kissed her mouth. He held still for a while before he took his spot back and they intertwined their fingers and legs. She gazed at him and he gazed right back. "Is something on your mind?"

He shrugged. "I'm not sure."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Um, I want to ask you something, but I'm not sure if I should," he said.

"Ron, whatever it is you can tell me. Part of us getting better means that we have to be open with each other," she said.

Ron took a breath. "How is Lavender?"

Hermione was taken aback. She was not expecting that question. "I don't know. I haven't seen her all day. She was still asleep when I got up."

"Oh, okay. I was just wondering. I thought that I might catch her in the Great Hall or something." He blushed. "I'm sorry. It doesn't matter."

"It's okay, Ron. I'm not angry. I honestly haven't seen her, but I'd imagine that she's probably not the happiest of people today," she answered. She felt a little torn. She was moved by Ron's concern, but she was also a little worried by it.

"That's what I figured. I don't know what I'm thinking. I justâ€¦I don't know. I want to say something to her. I don't know if I should or what I'd even say. The thing isâ€¦I was with her for a while, and I feel like I should say something. What do you think?" he asked.

Hermione wasn't sure of what to say. She had no idea where Ron and Lavender could go from where they were now. It all felt a bit too complicated and uncomfortable. "I don't know. The mature thing would be to say something."

He searched her face. "Look, if you don't want me to, then I won't. I'm not thick. I know things are complicated, and I don't want to make it worse. You are the most important thing to me and nothing is worth upsetting you or hurting us."

Her love for Ron once again heightened. There was so much more to him than she ever realized. "Ron, talking to Lavender won't upset me or hurt us. Now that I'm thinking about it, it will probably be really smart if you talk to her. It could help mend things. I should talk to her, too."

"I can't believe I'm saying this, but I should ask Ginny for her advice. I don't know how she's handling the whole Harry and Dean thing. I thought a lot about what you said earlier. I do want us to enjoy our relationship, but there are a lot of other things going on. I feel like I can't get a break," Ron explained.

"I understand. I really do. This is our first day as a couple, and I've spent most of it worrying about everything else. I don't want it to be like this," she said.

He sat up and so did she. He sprawled out his long legs and curled them around her body. He ran his hand through her hair and rubbed her cheek. "We're not normal, are we?"

She laughed. "No. I think any hope for us being a normal couple passed a long time ago. Ron, can I ask you something about Lavender while we're on the subject?"

"Yeah," he said softly.

"When you told us that you broke up with her, you said that she said some awful things but you never said what about," she started.

"Hermione, do we have to?" he asked.

"If you don't mind. I'd like to know what she said," she finished.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I have a feeling that it was about me, and I want to know what she thinks about me before I go any further with trying to be nice to her." She hoped that Ron would understand. Lavender wasn't leaving any time soon, and she wanted to know what went on in her head.

Ron sighed and rubbed his neck. "Well, it wasn't that she said awful things about you. It was more of speculation about you and Harry, but I guess there was some truth to it all."

"What about?" Hermione asked.

"She kept saying that you and Harry had never been happy for me. She said that you and Harry were always mean to her. She yelled at me for always taking your side and for being blind. She said that you weren't really a friend to me because you were trying to break up my relationship, and she said the same about Harry," Ron explained.

"Ron, this is going to sound mental but we weren't trying to hurt her. We never went in thinking that," she tried to explain.

"Yeah, I get that. I didn't just let her talk. I defended you two. That's when it got really terrible. She asked about our holiday and all the times we worked together. She wanted to know if I had been cheating on her or if you had convinced me to go behind her back. She thought that I had been with you the whole time that I was with her. I didn't know what to say," he said.

She didn't understand. "Why? That's not what you were doing."

He gave her a look. "I'm not so sure. Maybe she was right. Throughout our entire relationship she always asked and wondered

where my head was. She thought that I was with you, and I was with you. Even when I was as close to Lavender in every way that I could be my mind was still on you. I think she knew that. Lavender likes to act really barmy all the time, but she's got a lot more to her."

She nodded, feeling her own confession on her lips. "Ron, I didâ€¦want us to do things when you were with her. I know it's wrong."

He rubbed his neck. "So did I. It's another reason why I got so angry about the game. You're the only person who could make me like that. I think a part of me is scared of all this and trusting you again because you do have a lot of power over me. Harry knows it, too. It's a reason why I still can't look at him and not feel angry. I hate being taken advantage of."

Hermione felt tightness in her throat. She wished for nothing more than a time turner. "I'm sorry, Ron. I had no idea about any of these things. I know it seems like I'm so well put together, but I'm not most of the time. I'm just as confused and lost as you are, and I'm scared, too. I feel so much for you, and it makes me lose myself sometimes. I would have never done all that for anyone else."

He took her hands. "Yeah, I reckon we both just act when the other is involved."

"I want to think more, and I'm going to do my best to be open with you. I just want us to get to a comfortable place with each other. I love you more than anything, and I want to help fix things. You know me. I always have to help fix things." She kissed his freckly fingers.

Some of the worry on his face disappeared. "I want to make things right, too. Please don't think that I don't, but I want us to be okay first."

"And I believe that's going to take mending things with Lavender. I understand that, Ron. I honestly do," she said. "Do you want to try today?"

"Gods, no. It's still my one day of normality or at least something close to it. Come on," he said. He pulled on her and helped out of bed.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"It's beautiful outside, so I want us to enjoy the weather. It's the one day that I'll be able to snog all over you without you having to be deduct house points from me," he said.

She laughed. "I'm not that bad."

"Hermione, I thought you might try to get us expelled when we slept together in the Common Room," he cheeked. She suddenly flushed with color. He smirked. "Yeah, that was one of my favorite days, too."

She melted. "Have I told you that I loved you today?"

"Um, I could do with some reminding," he said as they left the room hand in hand.

\*\*\*\*Yeah, I know a weird/terrible place to stop but it had to be done, lol. This was one of those transitional chapters. Already I've received a lot of private messages about R/Hr and how they're going to be now. I don't want to tell too much but just know that for me, I like to keep them the same. I think that's what gives R/Hr the charm that it does. They are still two very different people. They still bicker and still approach things differently, but they're in love and are together. So, yes, some things about them will be different but for the most part I'm not going to change them. They'll be more open and sweeter but I'm not changing how they are. Also, I won't pretend that everything is okay now that they are together. There are still things that need to be worked out and problems around them.

Now, about Lavender. One thing that's different between J.K's Ron/Lavender and my Ron/Lavender is that my R/L has more feeling to it. Ron just isn't passive about Lavender like he was in HBP. There's more to it in my story and you'll find out what I mean. Don't worry. Nothing is going to happen between them so please don't ask or get upset, lol. R/Hr from now on but like I said chapters ago, Lavender isn't finished yet!

One more thing, if people were expecting this chapter to be full of R/Hr love/passion/fluff and whatnot, I'm really sorry. This wasn't the chapter for that but believe me, now that they are together, I can open my goodie bag and give all you readers the R/Hr juice/candy! So, not to worry. It's all coming. And speaking of goodies, if people are wondering about Harry, Harry/Ginny, and Harry/Ron, don't fret. It's all back in now. So, the chapters will be a bit more balanced and Harry's storyline is back as a main course! This doesn't mean R/Hr is finished. It just means Harry's story will be focused on as well.

So thank you all for reading and review!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 33

Thanks for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry yawned and flipped through his potions notes. It felt incredibly late, but there was still light outside. It seemed as if he had been studying for hours. He closed his notes and looked in front of him. Hermione's eyes zoomed sentence after sentence, and she almost looked to be in a trance. She probably was.

He wanted to roll his eyes. Though it was her usual study hour, Harry knew that the last thing she wanted to do was sit in the library with him. She had only been dating Ron for a few days but



already they were different. They could pretend that they still had their will, but Harry knew better. All the couple wanted to do was be around each other so they could giggle, bicker, and flirt like mad. In that respect, not much had changed since the two got together. The only difference was that now Hermione usually snogged Ron after swatting him for saying something offensive, and Ron gave in to Hermione's demands quicker. Yes, his two best friends were happy and in love, and he could barely take it. Jealousy was a bloody bitch.

"Harry, do you want to go see the nurse?" Hermione asked, shaking his arm.

Harry finally snapped back and focused. "Sorry?"

She frowned. "You've been staring at me blankly for almost three minutes. Do you want to go see the nurse?" She put a hand to his forehead.

He moved away. "No, I'm fine. I'm just bored. You know that I hate studying."

"Yes, you and someone else I know," she said with a wide grin.

It didn't take much for him to figure out whom she was referring to. "Why aren't you with him?"

"I already told you. He has Prefect work to do for McGonagall. Besides, it's our study time," Hermione said.

Harry finally let his eye roll out. "Please. You don't even need to study, and I know you don't want to be here. I'm sure you'd have more fun measuring Ron's bits."

She gasped and pinched his arm. "Harry James Potter, you know me better than that. I enjoy studying and spending time with you. I told you that dating Ron wouldn't change that."

He felt a little better. It was comforting to know that someone still cared about him and wanted to be around him. He had been feeling so isolated lately, and Hermione was the only person who still saw him as someone she could trust. "Thanks for that. It means a lot to me. I really mean it." Harry didn't want to say too much more. He didn't want Hermione to know how gutted he truly felt.

It didn't matter. She could read him as easily as she could read the book in front of her. She leaned over closer to him. "Harry, he misses you."

"Blimey, Hermione, let's not start this again," he groaned.

"I'm only trying to let you know that Ron really wants to work things out," Hermione said.

"Yeah, I get it. It's all you seem to want to tell me these days. Thanks for letting me know once again," he snapped.

She looked at him with a hurt expression. "I'm only trying to help."

"Well, maybe you should stop. For fuck sake it's not like I need Ron to breathe. I'm fine. I'll be fine," Harry rushed, packing up his books. He was exhausted and sick of looking so pathetic to Hermione and everyone else. He never realized how desperate he was without his best mate.

"You don't have to act this way with me. I swear you and Ron are so stubborn that it makes my head hurt," she said.

"It's probably a sign that you should find something else to worry about. Why don't you put some of that energy into fixing Lavender? She's not looking like her usual sunshiny self." As soon as Harry said the last word he sighed. "I'm sorry, Hermione. That was a prick thing to say."

Hermione shrugged it off. "No, it's okay. You're probably right. I finally have Ron, but I should be spending most of my time trying to work things out with his ex girlfriend."

"Welcome to my life," Harry breathed. "I'm sorry."

She smiled a little. "Me too. I honestly don't mean to nag you about this. I just want to help. It's so strange to be in between you two. I didn't like doing it in fourth year, and I don't like doing it now."

"You don't have to do it. We didn't go through all this just so you could worry about me and Ron." More and more frustration came over Harry. He didn't know why he couldn't control it. He didn't know why suddenly the sight of Hermione and her pity made him want to scream.

She put a hand on his shoulder. "Harry, you need to calm down. Why are you acting this way? What did I do wrong?"

"You didn't do anything wrong. I just think that you should be grateful. You finally have what you want. Just fucking enjoy it," he said, brushing her hand away and getting up.

Hermione's eyes softened. "Oh, Harry, is this more about Ginny?"

"There's no point in talking to you. I'll see you later," he cut in. He grabbed his bag and hurried out of the library. He was furious but he didn't know why it felt so intense. Hermione hadn't said or done anything new. She was always curious and eager to help. It had never bothered him so much before tonight. He felt guilty for the way he treated her and for making her worry. He was just so bloody tired of always being the downside to everything.

He didn't want to go to his room and face Dean or anyone else. He decided to head up to the fifth floor. The Prefects' bathroom was one of the best places in the castle to sit and be alone. As he made his way down the hall the door to the bathroom opened and

Ginny came out. He instantly started to turn around but she spotted him. "Harry?" she said.

He turned back to her. "Oh, um, hi."

She crossed her arms. "What are you doing up here? Did you want to use the bathroom?"

"Um, yes, but if you are that's fine. I just wanted to sit and think," he said.

"No, you can go ahead. We need to take full advantage of the fact that Hermione and Ron give us the password every time. I've never seen a loo so posh, and it's not right for those prats to have all the fun," she cheeked.

He chuckled. "Yeahâ€¦!"

They looked at each other in silence. Harry didn't know what to do. The last time he had been alone with Ginny he ruined everything. He had barely spoken to her since then. She was the first to look away. She cleared her throat. "So, how are the love kittens? Are they still all over each other?"

"Not right now but I'm sure they will be soon. I think it's a bit rich that Hermione gives everyone else such a hard time when she can barely keep her hands off Ron," Harry said. Already he could feel some of his anger melting away. He always felt at home talking to Ginny.

Ginny laughed. "Yeah, I've come to expect it from Ron but Hermione has surprised me. It's good, though. I'd rather it be her he's all over than someone else."

"I agree," he said softly.

They gazed at each other once again. "So, do you want to come in? I'll sit with you if you don't mind," she said.

Harry nodded and walked over to her. He could see the slight anticipation in her eyes. "I don't mind."

She smiled. "Okay." She muttered the password and opened the door.

They sat in the large tub area side by side. He felt nervous flutters in his stomach. He never knew what to expect when he was alone with Ginny. His mind said one thing, and his body always said another. However, he knew what he had to do this time. "Ginny, I'm sorry for how I acted during practice. I didn't mean to hurt you or accuse you of anything. The last thing I want is for you to feel like I don't trust you. I'm really sorry." He could feel his confidence build a little. He knew that he had to tell her about his game. It had to be the right thing to do.

"I'm sorry, too. I was being vague about everything on purpose. I just honestly didn't know what to say. You were probably right. There is some truth to what you said." Ginny took a breath and

ran her hands through her long, thick, rich hair. Harry knew that he could spend hours watching her hair alone. It complimented her and heightened her radiance. She was perfect to him. She was perfect for him.

It didn't distract him from her statement, though. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

Ginny shrugged and looked away. "There might have been some truth to what you said about me not wanting Dean to see us."

His body stiffened. "What was true?" She repeatedly shook her head and stared off as if lost in thought. Harry couldn't stand it. "Ginny, answer me."

She finally stopped and looked at him. "I didn't know what to say when you asked. I was angry and scared because you were right. I didn't want Dean to walk in and see us snogging. I didn't want him to see us all over each other."

Harry's breathing hitched, and his body began to shake. "Iâ€¦I don't get it. Why? Why didn't you want him to see?"

She roughly rubbed her eyes. "I don't know."

"Don't bloody give me that. You do know. Just tell me why. Tell me why it bothers you to think about Dean knowing about us. What is the big deal?" Harry's voice rose with every word. His anger returned and mixed with the fear that chilled his body.

"I don't know. I don't know," she repeated. She couldn't keep her tears back. They slowly poured out of her eyes.

It killed him to see her so upset and crying. All he wanted to do was make her better, but he had to know. He was done to speculating and obsessing over what was wrong. "Ginnyâ€¦do you," he swallowed the lump in his throat, "do you still have feelings for Dean?"

Ginny stopped crying. She looked at him and Harry could see the pain all over her face. She nodded slightly. "Yes, I think I do."

Something smashed inside his brain. Hearing Ginny say the one thing that he had been so afraid of cut through all hope that he had. "Oh, well, I reckon it's better that I know then."

He started to get up but she grabbed his hands. "No! Please, don't leave. It's not what you think. It's not what you're thinking at all."

He pulled away. He couldn't stand to feel her skin on his. "How would you know what I'm thinking? I'm aware that you assume to know a lot, but there's no way that you can know what I'm thinking as well."

"Just stop it, okay. I'm sorry, Harry. Please, let me explain," she urged.

"What is there to explain? You are still in love Dean. You still want him and apparently whatever you feel for me isn't enough to get over that. There's nothing missing. I get it now," Harry said. He stood up and headed for the door.

Ginny ran over to him and pushed his back against it. She gripped his arms. "No! You are going to listen to me. Let me explain because you don't understand. I told you that this wasn't easy."

"You never had to tell me that! How many times am I going to have to say it? I understand how hard this has been. I'm in this, too! You've been so bloody caught up in your damn desire for Dean to realize that I'm just as much apart of this as you are!" he yelled.

She let him go and stomped her foot. "This is exactly what I'm talking about! You understand nothing. Whatever you think is going on with my feelings for Dean is wrong! Let me explain it."

"Then fucking go on ahead. Explain to me why you've been lying to me," he said. He felt sick. He sounded exactly like Ron had when he was yelling at him. Everything was blending together and Harry couldn't tell what was what.

"Oh, Harry," Ginny said softly. She put her hands on his face but he shook them off.

"Don'tâ€¦don't do that," he muttered through his teeth. He couldn't stand her touches. He had to keep his nerve. It was always so difficult for him to be mad and aggressive toward her. It seemed like the angrier he was at her and further she moved away from him, the more he wanted her and felt the need for her.

"Stop it! Harry, I haven't been lying to you. Everything that I have ever said has been true!" Ginny said.

"Oh, so you love me and want to be with me, but you still want Dean? How does that make sense? How can you want to be my girlfriend, but you're too ashamed to have your ex see us? Explain that," Harry ordered.

She ran her hands through her hair again and pulled on the strands. "I don't know. It's not what you think. I don't want Dean. I want you. I really do want you butâ€¦but I still love him. I don't want to hurt him, Harry. It doesn't have to do with you, and I'm not ashamed of you. How could you say that?"

"I don't know, Ginny. Maybe it's because you just told me that you don't want Dean to see you touching me. Fuck! Fucking Dean Thomas!" Harry wanted to find Dean and hex him to a thousand pieces. He wanted to feel his knuckles connect with Dean's jaw. Never had Harry wanted to fight someone more. Not even Malfoy had ever produced such viciousness from him before.

"It's not his fault, Harry. It's mine. I thought that I was over everything. I'm sorry. Please, I'm sorry," she said.

"Listen to yourself. So, I'm not even allowed to be mad at him? Are you mental? Ginnyâ€¦Iâ€¦why am I not enough?" he asked. The question raised something from his heart. His eyes stung slightly. He could hear Ron's voice telling him that he wasn't good enough for Ginny. It played over in his mind until he felt like he could no longer stand.

His knees gave in and he slid down. He took off his glasses and buried his face in his hands for a moment. Ginny kneeled beside him. "Harry, you're enough. You have always been what I want. Nothing has changed."

"Everything has changed. How can we ever be together if you still want Dean?" he asked.

"I don't want Dean! I love him, yes, but I don't want to be with him. I'm just so afraid of losing him. He's always been so great to me, and I don't want to ruin whatever friendship we can still have," she explained.

Harry rolled his eyes. "So, this so called friendship is worth us? How can you have the nerve to say that to my face?"

Ginny's expression changed. She no longer looked miserable. In fact, a bit of rage took over her expression. "How can I have the nerve? If my memory serves me right, you feel the same way about Ron."

"Excuse me?" he asked.

"You have no problem putting our relationship on hold and hiding your feelings for me from Ron. In fact, you're the one that told me that you don't want Ron to hate you over this," she explained.

He went over it in his mind. She was right, but it wasn't the same situation. It couldn't have been. "Ginny, there's a big difference between what you're feeling and what I'm feeling."

"And what is that?" Ginny asked.

"Ron is my best friend and your brother. He's been a major part of my life since I was eleven. What you have with him and what I have with him means something. Dean is justâ€¦it's not the same. He's your ex and my friend maybe but that's it. You can't bring Ron into this." Harry was actually getting tired of everyone bringing up Ron. Things were bad enough without having to hear his name.

She gaped at him. "You are unbelievable. I can't believe that you think that you have more right than I do. So, you wanting to protect Ron and preserve your friendship is important, but me wanting to preserve mine with Dean means nothing?"

"I didn't say that it didn't mean anything," he said. "I just don't think that you being ashamed of me and me wanting to not piss your brother off are the same thing."

"Fuck you, Harry! How do you think I feel? I tell you that I want you and that I love you, and I reckon the only thing on your mind is if Ron will approve. You care more about what he thinks about our relationship than about what I think about it. How do you think that makes me feel to know Ron has more of an influence over your feelings for me than I do?" Ginny asked. "How do you think it makes me feel to know that the one man I love more than anything else cares more about my brother than me?"

Harry stood up. "What in the bloody hell do you want from me? Do you want me to feel guilty for caring so much? Fine, I do! I'm aware that I'm a coward when it comes to this. I know that I'm fucking weak sometimes. I can see how much it hurts you, and I fucking hate it but I can't help it. Yes, I care about what Ron thinks about our relationship. I wish that I didn't but I do. It doesn't mean that what I feel for you isn't powerful or the most intense feeling that I have ever felt. I just can't ignore his feelings. You two are the best parts of my life and it means a lot that you're family. I love your family, Ginny. I feel like it's mine, and I don't want to do anything to lose it."

"Harry," she started.

"Ginny, you're right. I feel like a bloody idiot for getting so mad at you. I'm a hypocrite. Maybe what you're doing is like what I'm doing, but it's not exactly the same. I really care about Ron, and I want him and I to be friends, but I realized that my fear isn't stronger than my feelings for you. I told Ron that I loved you and wanted to be with you. I told him that I've been in love with you for a long time and that I was lying when he'd ask if I had feelings for Cho."

She raised an eyebrow. "You didn't have feelings for her?" she asked.

"Not really. I..." he trailed off. It was the perfect time to tell her about his game, but he no longer felt the need to. He didn't see the point anymore. "I thought I did but there's nothing there."

"You could have fooled me," she said gently.

"Yeah, I know. I just wanted to try something. I was so tired of Dean, and I was sick of him having you. He still has you, Ginny. You still love him. That is the difference between our situations," he said.

Ginny stood and leaned against the door. He could tell she was afraid to come near him. "Is that why you're fighting with Ron? Am I the reason why you two are like this?"

"No, it's not your fault. It's mine. Me telling him my feelings for you is part of it, but there are some other things going on. Anyway, that doesn't matter. I want you to understand that I don't take it back. It felt amazing and right to finally tell him what I felt for you. I would do it all over again if it meant that everything was out in the open, and I could finally be with you." He relaxed a little and sighed. "I do want to be with you,

Ginny. I love you so fucking much, and you're worth it. If anything would be worth Ron and I being distant, it's you. You have no idea what it means for me to say that."

"Harry," she said again. She walked over to him.

He looked down at her and felt every fiber of his being pull toward her. "I don't know if you can say the same about Dean. He was your boyfriend. He was the person you lost your virginity to, and I can't compete with that. For me it was never a competition with you and Ron. He's my best friend, and I want you to be my girlfriend but what about me and Dean?"

"I don't know. I don't know what you two are. I honestly want you. I want to be with you and love you and do all the things that I've wanted to do for ages but I'm scared of what it will do to Dean. I still love him," she confessed.

"I know you do," he said.

She wiped away a tear that skidded down her cheek. "I'm not sure if I'm ready to go there with him. He still wants me, Harry."

"I know that, too. I see it, Ginny. I have to live with him," he answered.

She held on to the cuffs of his shirt and pulled him close to her. "I don't want him to. You have to believe that I don't want Dean. I want you so badly. You have no idea how much I think about you and how hot I get thinking about all that we've been through already."

He put a finger to her temple and traced down the side of her face. "I think about you all the time, Ginny, and there's not a day that goes by where I don't think about what we did, what I want, and how I need it all again."

She moaned slightly. "Harry, I'm sorry. I don't know what to do. I'm so afraid of telling him. I don't want him to hate me. I don't want him to be hurt."

He understood how she felt, but it didn't make the pain go away. He wanted her not to care at all. He wanted her to feel the same hatred toward Dean that he did. "Maybe he won't."

She looked up at him. "Do you honestly believe that?"

"No," he whispered.

She buried her face against his chest and held on to him tightly. "I don't know if I can handle it. Dean means so much to me."

Harry couldn't take it. It was too much to hear her moan and cry over Dean. He hated it. He hated Dean. He pulled away from her reluctantly. "Then maybe you shouldn't worry about it."

"What-what do you mean?" she asked.



He gazed at her and hoped that he didn't look as defeated as he felt. "Maybe you shouldn't worry about upsetting him. If you're so scared of losing him and if it means that much to you, then maybe we shouldn't do this."

"Harry, please, don't," Ginny said.

He ignored her request. "Maybe you and I should wait this out. Maybe in time things will change."

"Don't! Don't tell me that! Please, just give me some more time," she said.

"No, it shouldn't have to be this way. You shouldn't feel forced into anything. I honestly didn't know that your feelings for Dean were so deep and that it bothered you so much to think about hurting him. I honestly don't care about how he'll react to it, but if it means something to you then it has to mean something to me," he explained.

"Don't do this. Do not give me your noble Harry Potter rubbish!" she said. "Are you trying to make me feel worse?"

"No. I'm trying to understand. I'm trying to be supportive and still stand here in front of you," he said.

"I don't want you to be supportive. I don't want there to be anything to support. I just want you, Harry. I don't want to feel this way. I don't want to wait anymore," she said.

"And you think I do? Ginny, there's nothing I want more than to have you but we can't keep going in circles. If you aren't ready to change with Dean, then we have no choice. I'm sorry. I never meant to rush you or make you feel this way. I honestly didn't know. I don't know anything when it comes to you." The fury was back and Harry felt himself slipping further away from her.

"Harry, please, I love you. You know that. I love you so much and I want you more than anything else. I'm just scared really scared." She put a hand to her chest.

He looked at Ginny and finally saw how small she really was. He had always seen her as a pillar of courage and power but for the first time she looked her age and seemed smaller. It hurt. He wanted to make her better, but he didn't know how. "I'm sorry," he finally said.

"I'm sorry, too," she mumbled through her tears. He held her again. She grasped his back. "I'm so sorry, Harry. You're gorgeous and so fucking amazing. I really do want you."

Usually her compliments made him feel taller and reddened his ears but now it only reminded him that he wasn't good enough. "Just not right now," he breathed, slowly pulling away.

Ginny didn't even bother to challenge him this time. She just hung her head in defeat. "I didn't think that it would be this hard. I didn't know that he meant this much to me."

Harry had to leave. He couldn't stand to hear her any longer.  
"Yeah, neither did I."

For the third time they stared at each other. Ginny's eyes were red and puffy. She was paler than usual and looked so unlike herself. It didn't matter. She was still beautiful. He felt his body react to her presence and he wanted her. He wanted her so much.

They inched forward and pressed their mouths against each other's. Harry knew it was wrong. With all the complication and fighting he knew that the last thing he needed to do was tempt himself and kiss her. He needed to do the right thing. He needed to be smart but the pressure was too much. For some reason it felt like this would be his last opportunity to have her. So, he decided to take full advantage of it.

He kissed her deeper and harder until she was moaning and pulling on the back of his shirt. He walked forward and didn't stop until she was against the wall. He pulled away from her mouth and nibbled on her neck. His hands held on to her wrists. "Hmm, Harry," Ginny groaned. She broke free of his grip and brought their lips together again. He loved it. Ginny was with him. She enjoyed what he was doing to her. He had her.

"Ginny," he panted between kisses. He was sweaty and could hardly breathe. One of his hands went to her thigh. She lifted it and wrapped it around his arse. He moaned and pushed against her. She clung to his neck and whimpered. She licked the corner of his mouth and pushed back.

Harry knew what would happen if they didn't stop. A million thoughts ran through his mind. He wondered if she knew the verbal spell because he doubted that she had potion handy on her this time. He wondered if he could make himself last longer and if against the wall would be the best place. Though, as soon as the vision of him shagging her against the wall of the Prefects' bathroom came into focus he stopped and pulled away. "We can't do this," he said.

She was out of breath and sweaty as well. "I know. I'm sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Nothing is wrong with you. We just can't do this. Ginny, I don't know what to do. Do you?" he asked. He hoped that she did. He hoped that she had a way out for them and that their relationship could mean more than just arguing, speeches of love, and sex.

"No, I don't," she whispered.

He bit his lip hard and turned away from her. "Then I should leave." She didn't say one word. Harry hurried past her and opened the door. He turned back to her. She was staring at floor. He wanted to tell her that he loved her no matter what, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. He walked out of the bathroom and closed the door. He walked the halls feeling numb. He was

sure that if nothing else he would have Ginny. Now, he didn't even have that. His stomach grumbled, but he couldn't go to dinner. He went back to the Common Room and sat on the couch. He put his face in his hands again and breathed deeply.

"Are you okay?"

He jumped. "Fucking hell, don't do that." He turned to his left and saw Lavender curled up in the chair next to him. He hadn't even noticed that she was in the room.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. You just lookâ€¦ill," she said.

He eyed her. She wasn't bubbly and bright like usual. Even her voice sounded different. He wondered if he appeared the same way. "No, I'm fine. Anyway, I can say the same for you."

She flipped her hair. "Well, it's a bit obvious what's the matter with me. Then again, it's your fault so of course you would know."

"It's not my fault that Ron is in love with Hermione and not you. I can't control his feelings any more than you always tried to," he shot. He was in no mood to be nice or sympathize.

Lavender pouted. "You are really rude to me, Harry. You have been all year."

"You haven't given me much of a choice. It's not like you have been the nicest person either," he said. It was strange bickering with Lavender. He had hardly been alone with her ever and now they were sitting next to each other and were carrying on a fraction of a conversation.

"I would have been nicer if everyone hadn't been out of get me. Ron was my boyfriend and now Hermione has her hands all over him. She thinks that she's so clever but she's not. This was her plan from the start, and I wouldn't be surprised if you were apart of it," she said.

"Yes, you've caught me. How much better off are you really for it? Shit, Lavender, Ron is happy so give up. You have toâ€¦you have to move on. You have to give up." It didn't feel right to say. He wouldn't let himself think about it.

Lavender glared at him and sat up. "Wow, it's nice to know that the fate of the Wizarding World is in your hands."

Harry knew that she was just being a bitch. He knew that she actually couldn't read his mind and know that his weakness had been a constant worry of his for months. "Ta, Lavender. I can certainly see why Ron was so upset when he broke up with you."

Her jaw dropped. "How dare you?"

He didn't answer her. He got and walked to his room. There was no one else inside luckily. He closed the door and flopped on his

bed. Minutes went by but he didn't move. Nothing made sense. He didn't know how so much could happen in a year. He couldn't remember when it all started but he knew there had to be an end. The door opened and Ron came in. As soon as he saw Harry he stopped. "Sorry. I didn't know that you were in here."

"It's okay. This is your room, too," Harry said.

Ron gave a half smile and walked over to his bed. They were silent as Ron changed out of his school clothes and Harry stared at his bed. He wanted to ask how the meeting with McGonagall went or if he had ran into Lavender. He wanted to know if Hermione had said anything about their previous argument or if he had managed to get the potions course work completed. However, he knew that he couldn't. He was in no shape to get into yet another fight with another person who meant more to him than his own life. Twice in one day was enough.

Ron finished up and lunged his school bag over his shoulder. Harry held back his laughter. He knew that Ron hated studying or getting work done ahead of time, but being Hermione's boyfriend changed him a little. Now, he had no choice but to agree with her. It was funny and he wanted to bring it up. He almost considered it but Ron was out the door before Harry could make eye contact with him again.

Harry put a pillow over his head and closed his eyes. Every day summer at the Dursley's seemed more and more like a vacation.

\*\*\*\* Yeah, hmm, this came out differently than I thought it would but I must admit that I really like it. This is more of my style of writing. Up until this point I wanted to make this story pretty canon to HBP but now it's all about my vision. This is probably one of the darker chapters that I've written so far but I'm proud of it. While this second half of the story is going to be lighter and happier in a lot of ways, it's also going to be darker and more intense in a lot of ways as well. That's just how I like to write.

Like I said, Harry is going to go through a lot of changes for the rest of this story and I enjoyed writing him like this. I feel really comfortable writing Harry and bringing out his hidden and darker emotional side. It feels natural to me.

About Harry/Ginny, this is honestly how I see them. I've gotten reviews and private messages in the past saying that I'm making them too intense, sexual, or grown-up. I don't agree. I find their relationship very intense, passionate, sexual, and aggressive. I write them how I honestly think they would act in this situation. Being together is really hard for them with everything going on but an easy way for them to show how they feel for each other and their love for each other is through showing physical love. They feel like it's their only means of expressing their feelings right now. I got this idea from Deathly Hallows when Ginny was going to like give it up to Harry in her room because she didn't know what else to get him for his birthday. So, I think it fits. Anyway, I know, poor Harry once again but this is all a part of the process and I promise that

things will get better very soon. So, don't worry about Harry/Ginny and Harry/Ron. It will all come out before you know it.

Speaking of Ginny, I hope people can at least sort of understand her position. She can't just turn off her love for Dean even though she's in love with Harry. Things don't work that way. Also, I'm lucky that I have a best mate who was in a similar situation to Harry/Ginny so I am able to get real ideas and their fight in this chapter was actually inspired by such information that I gathered. There's something really realistic about the situation that Harry and Ginny are in and I want to make it as authentic as possible. For my story, Ginny and Dean's relationship was something real and Ginny just can't erase it. She loves Harry but she does have a lot of fear. Dean's a big part of her life and Harry is simply tired of it all. His anger and loneliness is rather building and it doesn't help seeing Hermione and Ron so happy. So, there's a lot that is going on with him. It will work out though. I promise.

So, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. I actually think that it came out nicely. Thanks for reading and REVIEW please!

CHEERS!

#### CHAPTER 34

SO SORRY THIS TOOK FOREVER! I'm having a lot of real life issues right now and it's keeping me really busy and anyway from my writing, but I'm trying to get back into the groove. I love this story and all the followers of it! Don't worry I haven't given up and I don't plan on abandoning this!

Thanks for all who keep reading and reviewing. It's all for you lot!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Hermione moved her eyes and started reading a new paragraph. She was two-thirds into with her new book, and she wanted to be finished with it by the weekend. "I technically asked you to be my girlfriend, right?" Ron said out of nowhere.

"Umâ€¦I think so. Well, you told me that you wanted me to be and I agreed but those words weren't actually exchanged though. I don't believe either of us really asked the other anything formal. Why?" she asked.

He shrugged and looked over the letter he had been writing for the past ten minutes. "Mum is going to want every detail and know that I was a gentleman."

"You should probably leave out the heavy snog on our teacher's desk if you want to sound like a gentleman," she said, blushing.

He grinned broadly. "I did. She'll want to know that I made it special or something. If not then she may make you break up with me just so I can ask you again properly."

Hermione laughed and removed her legs from his lap. She pushed off the headboard of his bed and crawled over to him. "Aww, you're writing to your mum about us? That is so adorable, Ronald. Can I read it?"

He tickled the bottom of her feet. "First, shut it, Hermione. It's not adorable. Second, no, I'm not saying anything major or giving any real details. I'm only telling her the general idea of what happened. I don't even want to, but I know that if I don't tell her and she has to find out from Ginny first then she'll have my bollocks. Mum gets excited about these things. Bill told me that one time he made a mistake and brought up Charlie's girlfriend in a letter. Mum wrote Charlie two letters the very next day. The first asking all about the girl and the second one yelling at him for not telling her."

"Then I figure it's smart that you're writing her now. I think you'll be in the clear. Your mum already knows so much about me. No worries there," she said.

Ron looked over the letter again. "Yeah, I reckon she'll cry out of sheer joy. I don't think she liked Lavender very much."

Hermione wanted to say that she could easily understand why but she remembered her agreements. "Hopefully her feelings about me won't change. I like the way I get along with your parents now."

"I don't think they'll change. You're amazing, and you're mine so either way they'll have to put up with you," he said with a wink.

Hermione melted. Ron was such a sweetheart when he wanted to be. She leaned forward and kissed him. He pulled away with a moan. "What was that for?"

"I don't need a reason," she said pointedly.

He gave her a look. "Of course you do. You can't just kiss these lips without permission or a really good reason."

She swatted his arm and kissed him again. She made it harder and deeper. Ron held her waist and kissed her back. She was the first to pull away this time. "Oops," she whispered.

Ron licked his lips and shook his head. "See, you should not have done that."

"Oh, and why is that?" Hermione asked, feeling her body heat up.

He rose to his knees so he was looking down at her. "Well, now you'll have to be punished."

Hermione trembled and felt a burning sensation in her stomach. She didn't know what was wrong with her, but she rather liked the idea of being punished by Ron. "What do you have in mind?"

He put his hands on either side of her and nudged his head forward. She moved herself back and lay against the pillows. Ron

settled on top of her. "I'm not sure. I'm usually the bad one. Do you have any ideas?"

She laughed again and ran her fingers through his hair slowly. He kissed her forearms as they passed by his mouth. "Wow, that's impressive, Ronald. You're really good at intimidation. Are you seriously asking me how I would punish me? The twins will be proud." He tickled her stomach. Hermione tried to move away, but he was too heavy. She giggled until she couldn't breathe and her eyes watered. "Okay, okay, you win! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" she whined.

Ron stopped tickling her and settled next to her. He smirked. "So, what was that again about me being impressive?"

"Ah, yes, your tickling is extremely impressive. You really hurt me there," she panted out of breath.

He rubbed his thumb over her cheek. "Oh, I'd never do that. I'll leave the pain to you. You're the one that likes to get violent. I don't fancy being the enforcer anyway. It's boring. You can have the job back."

"And does this mean that I can kiss you whenever I want to?" she asked.

"Yes, they're all yours," he answered while puckering his lips a little.

"Good. Now give them here," she demanded before placing her mouth over his. Ron held her close and deepened the kiss. She sighed heavily as they snogged. Ron tasted so good and was such an amazing kisser. Before she could even take control and insist for more the door opened.

"Oh, sorry," Harry said.

Hermione pulled away from Ron and sat up. "That's okay. This is your room. We probably should have—"

"You don't have to apologize, Hermione. I'm used to this by now. People have been having girlfriends in this room since third year," Harry answered. "I just need to get some broom polish. I won't be long."

Hermione watched as Harry walked over to his bed and searched his trunk for his polish. He seemed so out of it. She felt terrible. Harry had been keeping to himself and hardly left the Quidditch field. She glanced at Ron who was also looking at Harry. He had a distant look in his eyes as he watched him carefully. She could tell that he wanted to say something. She had to try and help them.

"So, Harry, do you think the team is ready for the playoffs?" she asked. She figured sports was the best bet. It was something easy and something Ron and Harry always agreed on.

"Yeah," Harry answered simply.

"What do you think, Ron?" Hermione said, turning her attention to him.

He pretended to be interested in his blanket pattern and avoided her eyes. "I think I'm ready. So, if he thinks we are thenâ€¦I reckon so."

Harry didn't look up from his trunk or respond to his comment. "Damn, I can't find it."

"Maybe we should help you look for it," she suggested. She got out of bed and pulled on Ron's arm to get him up as well.

"No need to look. It's under your bed. I'm staring at it right now, Harry," Ron said. He gestured his finger in the general direction under Harry's bed.

Harry followed his finger. "Ah, you're right," he said. He picked up the polish and looked to Ron. "Cheers."

"Yeah," Ron said, briefly looking at him before turning away.

Hermione looked between them and was sure that they would start talking, but Harry merely closed his trunk and left and Ron went back to lying down. She sat back on his bed and ran a finger across her brow in frustration. "You two are so infuriating and stubborn."

"What are you on about now?" Ron asked.

She eyed him and he suddenly looked apprehensive. He knew good and well what she was talking about. "Ron, how much longer are you really going to let this go on? I think you've made your point."

He sighed and placed a pillow over his head. "Hermione, don't start this again. I told you--"

She pulled the pillow off his face and held up her hand to cut him off. "I know. It's complicated. It's hard for you to take what he did and you're angry, but Harry is your best friend. He's sorry and he's more than paid for it. Honestly, I think you need to talk to him and forgive him. He meant no harm."

Ron sat up. "You think I'm being an arse about this?"

"I don't know, Ron. All I do know is that Harry is in a really bad place right now, and it would help tremendously if you made up with him. Is he still important to you or have you decided to pretend that he doesn't exist?" she asked.

"Of course I haven't. He's still important to me. How can you say that?" Ron frowned as if greatly offended.

She raised an eyebrow. Ron was the king of sending mixed messages. "I don't know, Ron. Maybe because you've been acting like you hate him for a long time now."



"I don't hate him. Well, I thought I did for a while but I don't. I justâ€¦I don't know. It's weird," he said.

She nodded. "I understand but I care about you both and I can tell thisâ€¦thing between you two is hurting you as much as it's hurting him. I swear it's just like fourth year. Ron, Harry misses you so much, and I know you miss him."

He crinkled his nose. "Mione, blokes don't miss each other."

Hermione gaped at him. The thought process behind men and their narrow ideas about feelings boggled her. "Oh, don't give me that. Even if that rule is true, it doesn't apply to you two. You care about Harry just as much as you care about me if not more. It's been obvious for years. How can you deny that?"

He stared at his hands and shrugged. "I'm not denying anything. I do care about him. This isn't even about whatever you think it's about."

"Then what is it about? Are you honestly mad at him for helping me? He helped bring us together, Ron. Rather it was in the right way or not he helped. I'm thankful for that," she said. It was true. Finally being with Ron added the last and most important piece to her heart that had been missing. She felt whole and she knew it was due in large part to Harry. She regretted what they did but was glad it had been with Harry. He helped her relationship with Ron in ways she didn't think were possible.

"It's not even really about that. It's Ginny. He lied to her, and he got in between her and Dean for his own gain. I can't easily forget that," Ron said. He finally looked at her. "She's my little sister, Hermione. I don't expect you to understand, but it really drives me mad to think about Harry getting in her head just for himself. No one is allowed to take advantage of my sister, and I don't care if the person wanting to is my best mate or not."

"Ron, it was never like that and even if it was it is not as if he enjoyed it. If you would ever listen to him, then I'm sure he'd be more than happy to explain how hard it was for him to lie to you and to Ginny. Like it or not but Harry actually does really love her, and she loves him. Do you really think she was better off with Dean? You said yourself that you thought she would get with Harry. What about that?" she questioned.

"This is different. There's a huge difference between them falling for each other and Harry pressuring her into it or making her feel guilty. I've been there. Feeling pressured and guilty for wanting to move on really messes with your mindâ€¦" he trailed off.

Hermione all of a sudden didn't know what to say. They were in such an uncomfortable place. She couldn't exactly defend Harry without bringing up her own part. There were still so many unknowns between them. "Ron, you're right. I can't understand

everything but something that has always been very clear to me is Harry's feelings for Ginny and more importantly for you."

Ron's ears went pink. "You don't have to do this."

"No, I think I do." She put a hand on his knee. "Ron, Harry loves you. You do know that you're the most important person in his life, don't you? He would do anything for you and he has. He is completely in love Ginny and has been for ages, but he won't take it any further because of how you feel. That doesn't sound like a vindictive person to me, and I don't think it does to you either. Can't you see that?"

Ron covered his face and sighed. "I don't know. Maybe and maybe not."

"Well, look at me and tell me what you see then, sweetheart," Hermione gently said. She removed his hands. His face was red.

He sighed and looked her in the eyes. "Hermione, I do care about Harry, and I always have. You're right. He's my best mate and I miss him. I really miss him and he's always been like a brother to me, but I don't know what to say anymore. I'm not completely sure about how I feel about him and Ginny. It all seems like too much at once again. Every time I feel like I'm ready to talk to him and I know what to say, it sounds wrong and stupid in my head. I don't know what to do. I can't just say the right thing and make change happen like you can."

She shook her head and rubbed his arm. "I don't think that's true. You never give yourself enough credit, Ron. You make change happen all the time. Maybe you have forgotten but you said some pretty remarkable things the night we got together. You made change happen then."

He grinned and took her hand. He kissed her fingers softly, and it made her shiver. "Two different situations, love."

"It doesn't matter. I think you'll know what to say once you really look at Harry and see what's there. You'll probably surprise yourself," she said.

He scratched his head. "I guess."

"Ron, I'm not trying to rush you or anything. I just think Harry really needs you right now and you need him. Also, not to sound selfish but I certainly need my two best friends. I need to be with you both and preferably at the same time," she said. "All the running around is doing my brain in."

Ron laughed a little. "Okay, I hear you. I'll talk to him."

"I really hope you do." She leaned forward and kissed him tenderly. "Am I still okay to do this?" she asked as she pulled away slightly.

"Mmm-hmm, they're all yours remember?" he whispered.

She grinned and traced his soft mouth. "I love you, Ron."

"I love you, too. Thanks for being so much smarter than me," he cheeked.

She gently popped his mouth. "Stop talking like that."

"Ow," he groaned. He moved away. "See what I mean? You're the violent one."

She gawked and swatted his arm. "I am not violent!" The two spent the rest of the afternoon wrestling on Ron's bed trying to convince each other that they were the less violent one.

Hermione finally went back up to her room feeling flustered and tired from the tickle-snog fest with Ron. She opened the door and her perfect mood immediately changed. Lavender was on her bed brushing her hair and staring at the teddy bear she always brought from home. She considered leaving her alone, but she decided to take the advice she gave Ron.

She slowly walked over to Lavender and cleared her throat. "Hi."

Lavender looked up but she didn't stop brushing her hair. "Hello," she said shortly.

She took a deep breath. "Can we talk?"

Lavender raised an eyebrow. "About what? Are you here to gloat? Do you want to give me all the details about what you just did with Ron? You're all red so I think I can guess quite accurately. So, thank you but I'll pass."

Hermione wanted to roll her eyes and give up, but she could hear the pain in Lavender's voice. She had to believe that there was real feeling under all the rudeness. "No, that's not what I want to do at all. I don't want to cause any more problems than there are."

"Oh, so, you're here to be the hero instead? Have you come to tell me how great of a person I am and how we can be great friends regardless?" Lavender spat.

She sat on her bed and snatched the brush out of her hand. "Lavender, I don't want to do this. I don't want to keep fighting with you. I'm trying here. I know what you're going through. I don't plan on acting the way you did." She hoped she hadn't said too much. She remembered her agreement with Parvati, but there was no other way to get through to her then acting a little mean.

Lavender crossed her arms. "If you're trying to make me feel guilty or worse than I already do, then you are a bit too late. I got the talk from Patty. You don't have to give me one as well."

"Fine, whatever you say, Lavender," Hermione breathed. She got up and went to her own bed. She turned away from Lavender and counted in her head. There would be no way that the two of them

would be able to establish any sort of normal relationship. Things were too heated between them.

"Regardless of what you may think, I do love Ron," Lavender said quietly. Hermione turned back to her. She was pale and held her bear closely.

Hermione's anger faded. "That's just it. I think you do, too."

Lavender's bottom lip trembled and her eyes glazed over. She kept her gaze on her. "I'm glad," she said some time later. Hermione had a feeling that it was meant to sound more harsh and sarcastic than it really did. Lavender's voice was so wavy and small. It was different from how she had ever heard her. Something seemed so different about Lavender and Hermione could see a little of it.

She stayed on her own bed as Lavender softly started to cry. She knew that Lavender didn't want her sympathy but for some reason she felt like Lavender probably didn't want her to leave, either. Though there was no words exchanged, it seemed like the first real conversation Hermione had had with Lavender in a long time. She felt as if they were talking in a different way, and it was clearer than words could ever be. After a few minutes Lavender dried her tears and went back to brushing her hair. They didn't say a word to each other or look at one another.

Parvati came in not too much later and Lavender acted as if nothing had ever happened. Hermione simply watched as Lavender put back on her mask and was instantly cheerful and bright again.

Hermione picked up a quill and parchment and decided to write a letter to her own mum about Ron, her new relationship with him, and advice about what to do about Lavender. She glanced up at her from time and time and felt a strong wave of curiosity.

Maybe there really was more to Lavender Brown than she led on.

\*\*\*\*Okay, I know this was extremely short and a chapter hasn't been this short since likeâ€in the teens or whatever but I honestly didn't want to add too much to this one. I have strategic ideas about where I want things to go in chapters, lol. Yeah, I'm a bit OCD about this story. Anyway, with the new relationship and new ideas and just about new everything there's so much transition that I have to get through. I don't like to leave things out or make small summaries at the beginning of chapters. That's fine but I've never liked doing that as a writer and I'm too much of a detail freak to do it anyway. So, this was another one of those transition chaps. I know I know but I swear this is the last one. The story has found a nice wave now. I just needed to get theses bits out.

Moving on, I want to say something. I read over my original notes for this story and I'm rather surprised with how I've been writing Lavender as opposed to how I told myself that I would. I originally had a whole different idea on how I would portray her and her relationship with Ron and what I've written is nothing close to what I originally saw. I'm not saying that everything

has gone to shit or that what I wrote is crap. I'm just saying that it's not what I honestly had in mind. I don't hate Lavender at all. She's always been an important character in my eyes and I'm thankful that she came along to the R/Hr storyline. However, I don't think my writing reflects that, lol. Granted, I do enjoy how she is in this story. She's a fun character to write but I'm going to try and blend what I originally wanted with how I've been writing her to see how the results come out. So, things with Ron/Lavender, Hermione/Lavender, and Hermione/Lavender/Ron will feel and be a little different and more depth will be giving to Lavender. It's a trial run so we'll see how it goes together! Fair warning! Don't worry though. I don't really believe in "everything is nice and perfect" for this story so it's not like the three will become best friends out of nowhere. It will still be realistic and there will still be issues. I'm just giving Lavender and all my secondary characters a depth and writing boost. It's time other people are brought into the two love pairings lives.

Anyway, enough about that! Lol. I hope you all enjoyed this. It's really short but yeahâ€¦

Thanks for reading and REVIEW!

CHEERS!

P.S- I know people are feeling antsy about Harry and him being so unhappy. Don't worry. I'm going to take care of that. :)

CHAPTER 35

Thanks for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry got up from the table, stuffing the last bit of muffin into his mouth. He left the Great Hall and headed straight to his room. It was the last day of the weekend and his last chance to be alone on the Quidditch pitch before the school week began. As he walked the halls he thought about his preparation for the next game. The team was ready. He knew that. The only issue Harry felt his team had was himself. He didn't feel very prepared nor did he feel ready to command and guide his teammates. He was so distracted and his game was suffering because of it. He had to see Ginny, Dean, and Ron. He had to pretend to the rest of the team that the four of them didn't have problems. He had to act like he was okay with everything all the time now.

"Hey, Harry, wait up."

Harry stopped and closed his eyes. It was the last voice he wanted to hear. He turned as Dean walked over to him. He didn't look angry so Harry didn't see the need to brace himself. He gripped his jeans pocket where his wand was anyway. When Dean caught up to him he simply looked at him. Harry didn't have the patience to guess what was going on in his head. "Yeah? Do you need something?"

Dean snapped out of his thoughts. "Oh, sorry, um, I was wondering if you've seen Luna."

He frowned. "No, I haven't. You should be asking Neville where Luna is."

"I can't seem to find him. I know you and Luna are friends, so I figured you might know," Dean said.

"Well, sorry, but no. Why? Do you need something from her?" Harry asked. He knew it was not his business, but he couldn't help himself. With his current state of mind he was willing to believe that Dean planned to steal Luna away from Neville. The bloke had an act for taking his mates' love interests.

"Not exactly from her but..." Dean glanced away for a moment before gazing at him in an almost nervous way. "I was going to ask her if she'd seen Ginny."

Harry's body immediately went into a knot of feelings. Hearing Ginny's name always brought a sense of excitement, love, and desire out of him but hearing it from Dean's mouth also made him feel angry, curious, and a tad jealous. "Oh," he finally said.

"Yeah, I really need to talk to her. You haven't by any chance seen her have you or maybe Hermione or Ron?" Dean asked. Harry didn't know what to say. He hadn't really seen Ginny since their moment in the bathroom. He had no idea what she was up to or what she was feeling. Quidditch was the only thing that had been distracting him from realizing how completely mucked up the situation was. "Harry?" Dean said slowly.

He shook his head slightly to clear his thoughts. "No, I haven't seen Ginny. You'll have to ask Ron and Hermione because I haven't really seen them today either. They're probably in our room snogging or outside snogging or in the library studying and snogging or something. Good luck with your search." He turned away and continued to walk. He didn't want to think about what Dean had to talk to Ginny about and he tried desperately not to care.

Dean didn't seem to get the hint. He caught up to him again and kept his pace. "It's really important, Harry."

"Look, Dean, I'm not bloody hiding her from you. I honestly don't know where she is. If you haven't figured it out already, we're not exactly hanging around each other every second," Harry spat through his teeth. He wasn't sure if Dean was blatantly trying to drive him mad, but he was succeeding with honors.

"I'm sorry. I just really need to talk to her. I have noticed that you two haven't gotten on like you usually do. That's why I need to see if she's okay. Something might be wrong that she's not telling," Dean said, gently.

Harry looked at him. He could see the concern in his eyes. It made hating him so much harder. Dean truly did care for Ginny and was in love with her. It was difficult for Harry to find fault in

that. "I wish you luck. Maybe you can help with whatever is bothering her." He swallowed hard. He knew what the problem with Ginny was. If Dean could truly help her, then it would mean that they would end up together again and Harry would once again have to move on and find a girl that wasn't already attached to another guy. He didn't want to have to do that. He knew Ginny was the one for him even if they couldn't find a way to be together.

"Cheers, but that's not all I want to do," Dean said. He touched Harry's arm and stopped walking. Harry did the same. "I'm going to ask Ginny if she wants to give us another go."

He gasped quietly and felt his brain freeze. "What?"

"I'm ready to try again if she is. I think that may be what's wrong. I honestly thoughtâ€¦I assumed some things would happen after we broke up but they didn't. It might mean that she does love me and wants to be with me. Maybe our breakup hurt her more than she let me see. I need to talk to her and find out. I want to be with her again, Harry. I love her and I can't take this any longer." Dean spoke his words with conviction and stared him right in the eyes. It was almost like a challenge. It was almost as if Dean was daring Harry to say no or tell him that he was wrong.

What worried Harry the most was that Dean was probably right. Ginny did love Dean and cared about him enough to keep the truth from him. Maybe it was what she needed. His head began to hurt. He wanted to tell Dean to sod off and that he was wasting his time. He wanted to tell his friend and enemy that Ginny was in love with him, and the only reason why Harry didn't have her already was because she pitied his feelings. However, he wasn't sure if that was even true. He wasn't sure of anything and it made Dean's statement that much more possible.

He turned away from Dean for the third time. "Good luck with that," he whispered in a shaky voice before walking away. Dean didn't follow him this time.

By the time Harry grabbed his broom and was on the field, he didn't feel like playing anymore. He sat in the grass of the pitch and pulled blades out. For all he knew Dean was in Ginny's arms now. They could have been snogging while confessing their love or shagging while Ginny told Dean that he was and would always be better. He was so angry at Ginny and for a second he wanted not to care about her anymore. He didn't want to love her or want to be with her. For a second he told himself that he was better off. It didn't last long. Harry rubbed his eyes raw before the tears could break through. He hated crying. He wasn't a crier. He had been through many painful situations and had never shed a tear yet nothing had seemed as brutal as the thought of Ginny once again going to Dean and finding peace with him.

Harry didn't know what to do. He had never felt so lost before in his life. He needed something. Quidditch wasn't doing it anymore. He needed someone. Hermione couldn't even heal his wounds as much anymore. What he truly needed and wanted wasâ€¦

"Harry?"

He jumped and looked up. Ron was standing not too far from him. He wore an apprehensive expression and slowly moved closer to him. "Areâ€|are you crying?"

Harry sniffed and wiped his eyes. He felt his face flush with embarrassment. "No, I'm fine. Too much sun, I reckon."

Ron nodded but his expression didn't change. "Yeah, I'm sure."

"Listen, if you're looking for Ginny I don't know where she is, and if you're looking for Hermione I don't know where she is either," Harry rushed before Ron could say anything else. He just wanted to be alone, and he didn't have the strength to hear any sarcasm from Ron.

"I'm not looking for either of them. I was looking for you," Ron said.

"Why?" he asked. The last time Ron had been looking for him, he yelled and punched him in the face. He didn't want to be found by Ron anymore.

Ron shrugged. "I want...I need to talk to you."

Harry ran through his memory bank. He couldn't think of any more lies. He was almost positive that he hadn't done anything wrong. "Is Hermione okay?"

"She's fine. This isn't about her," he said.

Harry was officially out of ideas. "Okayâ€|"

Ron took his cue and sat next to him. He pulled out blades of grass as well and tore them into smaller pieces before letting them fall back into the earth and picking up new blades. Harry opened his mouth to ask him what was going on but Ron beat him to it. "Harry, I'm sorry."

His eyes grew. Out of all the things he had expected Ron to say, an apology was not one of them. "For what?"

Ron gave him a once over. "For making you like this. I know you're going to deny it, but you were crying and I think I know why."

"Ron, please, I'm fine. I don't need you to apologize for anything. I can take care of myself," Harry said. Even if Ron was partially right, he didn't want him to be. He didn't want to feel guilt on top of everything else.

He didn't look as if he believed him. "But I do, Harry. I've been so bloody mad at you for so long and I reckon I might have taken it too far. What you did is a lot to get over, and I've lost a bit of my mind over it."



"I've noticed, Ron. You don't have to tell me that either," Harry said dully. He knew he made a mistake and didn't want to hear for the thousandth time about how stupid he had been.

"Let me finish," Ron shot. "You have to understand that even though I'm really angry about you betraying my trust to Hermione it doesn't compare to you manipulating Ginny."

"I get all of this. I told you that. I understand why you're mad at me," Harry urged.

"But do you understand about Ginny? That's the main point here," Ron asked.

"I think I do. Ron, I knew from day one that it would hurt you if you found out about what I did to her. I know how you feel about her and about the idea of me doing any harm to her," Harry said.

"It's not just harm, Harry. I didn't like the idea of you doing anything to her. That's where I need to apologize. Yeah, you think you fucked up but so did I. After talking to Hermione and really thinking about it, even though it was wrong, you were just trying to help. You were trying to help me with Hermione," he said.

Harry was taken aback. "Um...yeah, I was."

"And that makes you a good friend but meâ€¦I've never done that. I've never tried to help you with Ginny. I'm her brother and could probably help a lot, but I sat back and let you and Ginny do it all alone. What kind of friend does that make me? What kind of brother does that make me?" Ron asked.

"Ron, you're in a difficult position," Harry said.

"It shouldn't have mattered. I pushed for you and Cho, so I wouldn't have to deal with you fancying Ginny," he confessed.

"Why would you do that?" Harry asked, feeling a surge of anger rise. "I thought you didn't like Cho that much."

"I don't but I just can't deal with Ginny being with anyone. It's really hard for me to take blokes wanting her and going after her. I know how they look at her. Ginny is too brilliant and pretty for blokes not to fancy her. She's one of the most popular Gryffindors in the whole bloody school for fuck sake. It drives me mental." Ron violently pulled out a handful of blades and threw them.

Now, Harry was confused. "What's wrong with that? Would you rather she be hated or something?"

"No, that's not it. Nothing is wrong with her being popular, but it makes my job harder. She's my little sister," Ron said. "I know I may sound barmy but it justâ€¦"

"Makes you uneasy?" Harry helped. Ron nodded but said nothing. "I feel that way about her, too, sometimes," he added.

"Yeah?" Ron said.

Harry grinned slightly. "Oh, yeah, I get it. You love her. I know how much she means to you and how much you mean to her. She's your baby sister, and you just want her happy and safe and properly taken care of."

"And with half the blokes at this school thinking about shagging all the time, I don't know if she will be," he explained.

Harry had to look away for a moment. He didn't want Ron to see that he was one of those blokes who had not only thought about shagging Ginny but had also actually done it. "I see your point. Ginny deserves more than that."

"Yes, she does. I know we fight and take the piss out of each other, but we've always been close. I've always been at her side, and I've always protected her. I've been taking care of her and looking out for her my entire life. Even with my older brothers around mum and dad tell me to keep the close eye on her." Ron stuck out his chest as if suddenly feeling a gust of pride. "Before we left for school when Ginny finally started, they gave me a big lecture about being her older brother and taking good care of her, and I have failed at it miserably." His chest deflated at this.

Harry wasn't sure if he had heard him correctly. "What? No, you haven't. You haven't failed at all."

Ron gave him an incredulous look. "Are you mad? Of course I have. In her first year here she almost died. At the world cup I almost lost her. Last year at the Ministry I was too busy being attacked by brains to look after her. I have always been short when it comes to keeping her safe, and I hate myself for it. I love Ginny so much, and her safety is more important than mine. I feel like if I can't protect her from evil, then the least I can do is protect her from getting hurt by blokes. I can't even do that. It's happened again and again with you and Dean, and the more it seems to happen the more frustrated, protective, and mental I become."

Harry stared at him and felt a little lost for words. He had no idea all this went on inside of Ron. "I'm sorry. Dean and I aren't trying to make things harder."

"Well, you're doing it anyway. Harry, I'd give Ginny all my happiness without question if it would mean that she'd have it forever and never get hurt. I want her to be happy so badly, and I've been so bloody busy trying to save her that I'm forgetting that she can take care of herself." Ron suddenly laughed. "Ginny can help herself more than I can help her."

He was in awe of Ron. Though he had known him for years, Ron still managed to surprise him. "How come you never told me? It would have helped me to understand why you were so mad."

"I dunno," Ron mumbled. "Talking about things like this makes me feel like a tit."

Harry understood completely. Sometimes, words just felt useless and what he thought sounded pathetic in his head. "Well, you're not a tit, and I know Ginny appreciates what you do."

Ron snorted. "No, she doesn't. She thinks that I act like a prick because I'm older and she's the only girl. She has no idea that I'd curse off my right arm to keep guys from breaking her heart."

"Actually, I think she does. You two are a lot alike and I reckon she'd give her right arm to keep you happy as well. Ginny won't say it, but she doesn't want you any other way. She appreciates what you do and you do make her feel safe. It means that you'll always be around," he explained with a smile. The Weasley's were his favorite people for a reason. Their devotion to each other was inspiring and easy to understand.

He shrugged. "It also keeps her away from truly being happy and probably being really happy with you. I know I need to back, off but it's hard for me."

"Ron, I understand. I never wanted to make it more complicated," Harry tried.

"And it shouldn't have been that way," Ron said.

"But it wasn't a problem at first. It was always my choice. Ronâ€¦" Harry had to stop. Once again he was at a point where he would have to express his feelings to Ron. He didn't know why it was so difficult and scary but it was and made him feel uncomfortable. "Ron, I know dating Ginny might cause something between you two and between you and me. I don't want that. I know you don't believe it but-but your friendship is the most important thing that I have. We've been best mates since we were eleven and us being friends has gotten me through a lot of bad times. I need that. As much as I want a real relationship with Ginny, it's never been worth our friendship."

He blushed and rubbed his neck. "Harryâ€¦"

"I don't expect you to say anything to that. I just want you to know the whole truth," Harry said.

Ron sighed. "See, it's that right there, Harry. I feel like such an arse for being so mean to you for so long. I said that you were a terrible friend, but I didn't mean it. For you to say all that and sacrifice yourself like thatâ€¦" He blushed harder and Harry could tell it was just as tough for him to get his feelings out. Fighting and dying for each other was one thing, but actually saying the words about why it was so simple for them to do it for each other was something else entirely.

"Harry, our friendship means a lot to me, too. I know I've tried to show otherwise lately but it really does meanâ€¦everything. I rely on our friendship so much. It'sâ€¦it's why I've been so afraid of you being with Ginny. It makes me stupid and a prick,

but I couldn't help it then and I can't help it now," Ron said, not meeting his eyes.

"What are you talking about?" Harry asked.

He took a deep breath. "I know I'm thick about many things, but I know you and Ginny really well. I've always known she's fancied you, and I could tell to some extent that you felt some of what she did. I didn't like it because I was selfish and afraid. I was worried that if you two got together then our friendship would change. I don't want it to change, but I know that it will. You'llâ€|she'll be the person you go to and the same for her. She won't need me anymore if she has you, and it's the same with you. I didn't want that and I still don't. I know I'm mental."

Again, he and Ron were thinking the exact same thing at the exact same time. "I don't think it makes you mental. Yes, things would change but Ginny wouldn't replace you or anything. I'm not looking for a new best mate, Ron, and I never have been. I want her as my girlfriend. So, if you're mental and selfish than so am I. I've always felt the same way about you and Hermione. From day one I knew you two were in love, and I've always been afraid that I'd be shut out completely if you two started dating. I still am."

Ron looked as if he was fighting something inside of himself. Harry wasn't sure of what it was. "Really?" he asked gently.

"Yeah. Just because I'm all for you and Hermione dating doesn't mean it doesn't bother me a little," Harry said. Saying what was deep inside his heart removed years of anxiety. It was wonderful.

He smiled. "Well, I won't lie. Hermione is incredible. She's brilliant and kind and beautiful and being with her makes me incredible. It's everything I've dreamed, but it feels so much better. I can't even begin to explain it. She just makes me feel so good, and I love her with everything I have."

Harry patted his arm. "I figured this much. I'm really glad for you, Ron."

"But even with everything Hermione makes me feelâ€|she's not you." Ron's entire face and neck flushed. Harry felt his ears melting to his head as well. "She's my best friend and my girlfriend but you're, well, you're my mate. You've always felt like a brother to me, and Hermione can't replace you. Iâ€|there's still so much that I only want to tell you. Some things are just more fun with you and you understand me in ways that I don't see possible."

If Harry felt any warmer he'd have to go to the infirmary. "I know what you mean."

Ron eased a little, obviously relieved that Harry didn't take the piss out of him for being so sensitive. "Yeah, andâ€|wellâ€|I miss you, Harry. I know I've been sort of avoiding you, but I never wanted it this way."

"I didn't either, Ron. That's what I've been trying to tell you. I'm really sorry, Ron. I'm sorry," Harry repeated.

"I should have apologized ages ago. I'm sorry that I've always made you afraid to talk about your feelings for Ginny. I want you to be happy, Harry. If anyone deserves it it's you, and I know she makes you happy. It's clear that she makes you feel good, and she's always been mad over you. If you want her..., " Ron paused for a moment, "if you want her, then you should go for it."

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. It was fantastic but it all seemed a little too late. "Ron, you have no idea what that means to me. I'm grateful but I don't think I can be with Ginny anymore. I don't even know if I should be with her."

Ron frowned. "Harry, I know I told you that you weren't good enough for her. Please, don't believe it. I didn't mean it. I was furious, and I wanted to hurt you."

"It did hurt...a lot," Harry whispered.

Ron exhaled deeply. "I'm really sorry. You're a great person, and I think you can and should be with her."

More pressure fell from Harry's shoulders. For the longest time Ron's words repeated in his mind and he learned to believe them. "But-but Dean—he's in love with her, and she loves him. I don't know if Ginny and I could ever be what they are. Dean is right there, and I don't know what to do."

"Harry, you can't think that," Ron said.

"Why can't I? You see them. You have to see them!" Harry practically yelled. It did no good for Ron to lie to him.

Ron moved a little closer. "I do see them, and I get what you mean but you have to understand something. What you see with Ginny and Dean is what I've always seen with you and Hermione."

Harry looked at him. "Honestly?"

"Yes. I know how you feel. It's painful but you can't think like that," Ron told.

"This is different, though. Hermione and I have always just been friends. Dean and Ginny have dated," Harry said.

"It doesn't change the outcome. Look, Dean is my friend. He's always been brilliant, and I know he cares about Ginny. I saw the way he put her back, and I know they've been friends for a long time. I think you're right. She loves him, too," Ron explained.

Harry hung his head. He knew all this but it hurt more to hear it from Ron. "Yeah, I know."

"But it doesn't mean anything. I've known Ginny her whole life. She's never looked at Dean the way she looks at you. She doesn't laugh as hard at his jokes, and she doesn't get that silly girly

look in her eyes when she stares at him like she does with you. She's fancied you since she was twelve. She's risked her life for you, and she's bloody in love with you. Dean can't compare to that," Ron said.

Harry felt a little better but still not convinced. "Yes, but it's more complicated than that. They have a history."

"And so do you two. It's a stronger and better history as well. I know Ginny is worried about hurting Dean. She doesn't want to break his heart by being honest about her feelings. It's terrifying to want someone for so long and suddenly the person wants you, too. I hate that fear and so does she. Dean is a good guy, but he's not you. Ginny is one of the best women this world will ever see and no one deserves her," Ron said.

He looked away. "I hear you."

"But your relationship with her will be the closest to perfection and a peace of mind that I'll get," Ron said with a smirk.

"You really think that?" Harry asked.

"Trust me, I wouldn't lie. I reckon that I'm always going to be an arse but at least with you I know I can trust that she'll be taken care of. Besides, I know where you live and it won't be hard to get to you just in case I need to kick your arse," Ron said.

Harry laughed and rolled his eyes. "Ron, I know that I haven't had a lot of experience with girls and most of the time I have no idea what I'm doing, I know how I feel about Ginny. I love her so much that I feel like I can fly without my broom because the feeling is so magical. She makes me feel more powerful and safe and unsure at the same time. It's scary and fantastic and new and hot all at once."

Ron grinned broadly. "I get what you mean, mate. That's how Hermione makes me feel. Sometimes I get so nervous because I don't know what to say or what to do but then it just comes out of me, and it's the most natural thing in the world. I get so excited when I know I'm gonna see her and when I'm with her it's like we can't be touched."

Harry clapped his hands. "Exactly! That's why when I see Ginny with Dean I just want to explode. I know Ginny and I have had a rough beginning and our past hasn't always been the happiest or the easiest, but I love her more than Dean will ever be able to imagine. He can't understand sacrificing everything for Ginny like I can. I want her and I don't want to have to hide it."

"I've been able to tolerate Dean with Ginny but in the back of my mind I've always thought it would be you with her someday. He's used a room pass with her and even though I don't want to think it, I'd rather she'd come to our room with you." Harry was about to say something but Ron quickly added, "That doesn't mean I'm saying you should or that you can. I'm just saying what I'd rather have."

"Gotcha." Harry said. "Anyway, I think Dean's trying to get her back. I know I have no right to be upset but I am."

"Harry, if you want her then you should go after her. You gave me the same advice and it changed everything. You need to take your own word. Trust me it's worth the risk," Ron said. "I have the person I'm supposed to be with and it feels unbelievable."

Harry felt extremely proud of Ron and Hermione. He wished that he could feel what they did. "I don't know. I've been risking so much for so long. I don't know if I can do it again."

Ron raised an eyebrow. "Harry, I don't know where your confidence went, but you need to get it back. I wouldn't just say all this to make you feel better. I mean every word."

Harry ran his fingers through his hair and sighed. "I don't know what to say."

"The truth," he said simply.

"The whole truth?" Harry asked.

Ron peered off for a minute as if thinking about his answer. "Whatever you feel is necessary to get you and Ginny out of this hole. If some things would only harm and not help, the maybe you should keep them to yourself. You've paid well enough for your mistakes. I think we all have."

Harry knew what he was trying to tell him. Ron didn't want Ginny to know the full detail about the game. "I don't want there to be any more secrets between us. I've messed up so much in the past because of secrecy, and I don't want it all on my shoulders anymore."

"Well, I'll support whatever you decide. I'll support you telling Ginny. I'll support you telling her your feelings and dating her, and I'll support you just in case Dean comes after you," Ron said.

The feeling coming out of Harry was intense. He stood up and Ron did the same. "Thanks, Ron. It means the world to me. I love your sister, and all I want to do is be with her and make her happy. She makes me feel really happy."

"I know she does, mate, and what you said is all the verification I need," Ron said.

"If there's one person I can be honest with and should be able to talk to, it's you. I'm not going to lie to you anymore," Harry said.

Ron held out his hand. "Same here, Harry." Harry shook his hand and they looked at each other. Without really thinking about it, Harry walked forward and so did Ron. They hugged each other and finally let their guards down. So much emotion poured from Harry but he didn't want to let it out. It would be too much.

Ron patted his shoulder. "Look, I've said before that I'm shit with words and I really am. Hermione would know what to say and what to do, but all I do know is that I want us to be okay again. I'm thankful that you're my friend andâ€¦wellâ€¦I...um...I love you, Harry."

Harry closed his eyes. He wanted to say it back. Ron was the best friend and family that he would ever have. However, for some reason he still wasn't ready to tell him all that. He could tell about anyone else but saying the words to Ron was still too intense. "You too, Ron. Iâ€¦this is important to me," Harry said as best he could. It wasn't enough but it's all he could say without letting his emotions through too greatly. He pulled away.

Ron's face was red beat red. "So, are we okay?"

"Yeah, we're okay," Harry answered.

He let out a low whistle. "Well, now that that is over, um, can we play Quidditch or something? All this emotion makes me tired and feel weird."

Harry chuckled. "Yeah, I know what you mean. Do you need to get your broom?"

"I brought it with me. It's at the tent. I figured that either way I would need a fly after our conversation," Ron said.

He picked up his broom. "Smart. Let's get it and grab a few quaffles." Harry and Ron spent the afternoon tossing the quaffle back and forth and flying around the pitch. They laughed and caught up on what had been happening in each other's lives. It hadn't been that long but to Harry it seemed as if years had gone by since he was happy and on speaking terms with Ron. It felt good and it felt right.

They finally called it quits after a few hours and flew back to the field. They put the quaffles away and ran into Hermione at the tent. She was flustered and out of breath. "Why are you two so sweaty and red? Were you fighting again?"

Harry snorted but Ron rolled his eyes. "No, Hermione, I told you that I can do more than just throw myself at people."

"Yeah, he gave me a thirty second head start before he came after me," Harry cheeked. Hermione's brown eyes grew, and she glared at Ron. Harry held his hands up. "Um, I'm only joking. We didn't fight at all."

"Yeah, so, before you start yelling and hitting me just know that we talked it out. Harry and I are okay," Ron said with a shrug.

She gasped. "Really?" she asked him. She turned to Harry. "Really?" she repeated. She stared at him closely. He knew what she was looking for.



"Honestly, Hermione, we're fine. We talked it all out. We've been playing Quidditch for the past few hours. See?" Harry pointed to his and Ron's brooms.

Hermione suddenly realized that they did in fact have brooms in their hands. She squeaked and jumped into Ron's arms. She hugged him fiercely and gave him a hard snog. "Oh, Ron, that's fantastic! I love you!"

"Err-mione, keep your knickers on!" Ron whined as she crushed the air out of him.

Hermione then jumped in Harry's arms and hugged him as well. She kissed him hard on the forehead. "Oh, Harry, this is amazing! I love you!"

"Yes, lots of love to you, too. I only ask that you leave me room to breathe," Harry said through her monster grip.

She finally let him go and stood in front of them. She beamed and cried. "I simply can't believe that I've been looking everywhere for you two. I've been worried out of my mind, and you've been playing Quidditch. This is huge yet you two blokes didn't see the point in telling me."

"What is there to tell? Do you want line by line, professor?" Ron asked.

"Thirteen inches of parchment on her desk by tomorrow," Harry added.

Hermione glared at them both and swatted their arms. "Oh! You boys are so infuriating! I give up!" She quickly turned around and stormed out of the tent.

Harry shook his head. "Do you think we're in trouble?" The old and familiar feeling of their trio came back to him.

"Probably," Ron said with a sigh. They turned to each other and burst with laughter. It was hearty and filled the entire space. Harry finally stopped and nodded to Ron. He nodded back and the two sealed their friendship once more. It wasn't filled with tears and complicated words. It was simple and how they saw fit. It was perfect. "I reckon we should go after her. I still have work to do, and I need her help," Ron said.

His eyes lit up. "Oh, do you mean Slughorn's word problems? I'm having such a hard time with them!"

They followed each other out of the tent and talked all the way while catching up to Hermione. For the first time in a long time Harry didn't feel like going back to the Dursley's. He felt right where he was supposed to be and some of the dread was gone. He wasn't completely healed, but he was better and he felt like he could manage and figure out what he was going to do about Ginny and Dean.

Harry grinned as Ron rambled on about Slughorn and his terrible work sheets. He hadn't even realized it but he found the thing that he wanted and the person he needed.

Ron was back in his life and they were friends again.

\*\*\*\* Yes, this is going to be one of my favorite chapters. I love things like this. Ron and Harry are incredible and I couldn't wait any longer. Harry needs his best mate and Ron needs his best mate. I looked through all the books and read through their arguments and brief confessions. I think I've kept their conversation pretty canon. I tried to stay a long the style of GoF and DH in terms of them making up and how they feel and what they do. Harry understands Ron the most and can usually get why he acts the way he does. I wanted to bring that into this. For Ron, he's simply incredible and there's always a reason for his madness. It's always out of love. He's also maturing a lot and I think this was a big step for him.

I'm proud of how they handled this. Ron and Harry switched roles and it was time that they did. I think what Ron had to say hit a lot of points that JK hinted throughout the series, and Harry's inability to let go and feel and tell Ron that he loves him is something JK put forth as well. I feel like it's easier for him to say it to Ginny and Hermione not only because they're girls but because Harry's and Ron's personalities are so similar when it comes to emotion that it's like "I'll show itâ€¦but we don't have to talk about it." On the other side, I feel like Ron was able to say it because he's had more practice with the expression. He's got five brothers, a sister, parents, and a million relatives that he's always said it to. He's also got Hermione who he says it to so it's even more practice to make him feel comfortable saying it. Harry doesn't really have that but he'll get to that point. I'm in bliss that my boys are back and that Harry is happier! Yay!

So, I hope you all enjoyed it. I certainly did! Things are coming together now but also slowly unraveling as well. As I said that Lavender isn't finished, Dean isn't either. Stay tuned for that!

Thanks for reading and REVIEW! Now, you have to review if you want the next chapter.

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 36

Thanks for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Too bad you're the enemy. I could really use you on my team," Cho said.

Harry chuckled. "As your what? You couldn't pay me to be a sub seeker for Ravenclaw."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I forgot that Mr. Potter only joins as a starter or not at all," she said mockingly.

He rolled his eyes. "That's funny coming from you. How about you join my team?"

"No, that's okay. I'd rather just play against you," she said with a wink. The two continued to walk through the castle while discussing favorite Quidditch plays. It was only days before the playoffs began and the two captains wanted to get as much practice in as possible.

"Thanks again for going out there with me. I needed it," he said.

She grinned. "It was a pleasure. I enjoy training with you. You're a much better seeker than I am, and you push me right where I need to go. I learn a lot from watching you."

Harry blushed slightly. He was confident in his athletic abilities, but it never ceased to embarrass him when other people complimented him. "Cheers, but you're really great, too. You have a lot of experience, and it helps on the field."

Cho's dark eyes shimmered as her grin widened. "I appreciate you saying that. It's sort of what I told my parents when I explained them that I was thinking about going into Quidditch professionally."

His eyes grew in excitement. "Wicked! What did they say?"

"They weren't too happy about it, but it felt good to get it in the air," she said.

"That's great," Harry said. "If it's what you really want, then you should go for it."

Her smile faded. "Do you know really believe that?"

"In you playing professional Quidditch? Of course I do," he said.

It was Cho's turn to blush. "No, not that. I mean do you believe that people should go after what they want."

"Umâ€¦sure. Yeah, I do," Harry answered.

She nodded. "Alright, well, do you know what else experience tells me?"

He shrugged. "What?"

"That you weren't concentrated on the snitch today," she said.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Harry, I've watched you play since you were eleven. I've seen you when you're focused, and I know that mad look in your eyes. It's the look of a seeker who feels the snitch and knows where to

go. I get it and I understand the passion behind it. You didn't practice like that at all this morning," Cho explained.

Harry shrugged once more. He had no idea that he was so easy to read. Though his friendship with Ron was repaired, his problems hadn't disappeared. Ginny was still on his mind constantly.

"Iâ€¦I don't know, Cho. I thought I did okay."

"Yes, and that's the problem isn't it?" she said, keeping her eyes on him as they turned the corner.

He wasn't an expert at interpreting girl cryptic, and he felt himself get aggregated by her questions. "Can't you ever just say what you mean? I have absolutely no idea what you're trying to tell me."

"Harry, I know about Ginny," she said suddenly.

Harry stopped walking. "Sorry?"

Cho took his hand and pulled him over to the wall. She leaned her shoulder against it and crossed her arms. "You and Ginny, Harry, I know about it."

"What do you know?" he asked. He knew that his life had always been of interest to other people, but he didn't know it extended to his romantic relationships. He hardly talked about it or knew what was going, on so he had no idea how people in other houses could gossip about it.

"Harry, I'm in Ravenclaw for a reason. We notice things and it helps that I know you as a little more than just that bloke who saves the day year after year. I know you fancy her and she fancies you," she told.

"Cho, I don't mean to be rude but it's not really any of your business," Harry said. Things were too complicated and messy to talk through it all again and especially with his ex-girlfriend. It was weird and he didn't want to go there with her. However, Cho didn't seem to understand. She looked around then quickly opened the door to the supply cupboard that was near them. She took his hand again and pulled him in.

"Are you mental? What are we doing in here?" he asked in shock.

She lit her wand and sat it on the small stool that was by the door. "Harry, I want you to listen to me, okay. Will you do that for me, please?"

"Cho," Harry started.

"Good Merlin, for once in your life will you stop being so bloody stubborn and let someone else have a go?" she cut in.

He sighed and looked at her. He couldn't read her expression and it annoyed him. He felt nervous and irritated but his curiosity won out. He honestly did want to hear what she had to say.

"Sure."

She smiled slightly. "Thank you."

"So, what is it?" he asked.

"You, Harry. You've been so unhappy lately, and all you seem to do is mope around and keep your head down," she said.

"No, I haven't," Harry defended. His ears began to burn, and he felt a furious blush take over. Cho was making him sound so much more pathetic than he thought he was. He knew that he hadn't been doing great lately, but he didn't know it was that tragic.

She put a hand on her hip. "Please, you're too noticeable to hide."

"So I've heard," he mumbled, "I'm fine. Really"

She rubbed her brow in frustration. "Why do you insist on doing that? I know you're not okay, so there's point in pretending that you are."

"Then why don't you tell me what I am since you seem to know more than I do. For fuck sake, what are you getting at, Cho? You seem to know so much so say it!" he snapped.

Her eyes softened. "I know that you expected something to happen with Ginny after she broke up with Dean. A lot of people did."

He didn't know what to say. He and Cho never talk but suddenly she knew everything about his life, and he couldn't hide from her. "Iâ€¦I don't know."

"I don't need to hear everything. It's not my place. I just need you to understand that I know where Ginny is right now," she said.

"You do?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, I really believe that I do. Harry, Ginny loves you. It's been obvious since she came to Hogwarts. You and Iâ€¦wellâ€¦you and I were having our time so she found someone else. She found Dean and from what I've been told and what I've seen, she fell in love with him," Cho said.

"I know Ginny all that. I'm not ignoring her feelings for him. I've never been able to," Harry confessed. He didn't know why he was opening up to Cho or why it felt so comfortable to do so.

"Well, I don't think you've been ignoring it either, but you have to understand how it makes things difficult. I know what it's like to be between two people," she said. Harry frowned at her in confusion. She continued. "At the ball Ginny's eyes never left you. Yes, she was with Dean, but she was really with you the whole time and you were completely with her. There was a time when I would have done anything to have you look at me the way you looked at Ginny that night." She chuckled softly and her

cheeks went pink. "It was so intense that a tiny part of me did feel a little jealous."

Harry felt himself glow with heat as well. "I'm sorryâ€¦" he said awkwardly.

Cho waved a hand. "Don't apologize for that. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that I saw how much Ginny loved you that night but she was with Dean. It's hard to turn off feelings for someone even when the guy you really want is right in front of you."

Finally, something Cho said made sense to him. "Yeah, Ginny's told me this a lot, but it doesn't make it any easier. I can see why it's hard for her to truly let everything go, but it doesn't fix anything and I get so angry over it," Harry confessed. More and more he felt his wall crumble, and he knew that he could be honest with Cho. She was a girl and seemed to understand Ginny more than he did. He didn't want to make it obvious how badly he needed her advice on the matter. He wasn't even sure if he was allowed to ask for it considering all they had been through.

"But you have to try. Don't give up on her. It's really difficult and painful to move on sometimes," Cho said quietly.

He stared at her. There was something in her eyes that captivated him, and he felt closer to her than he ever had before. A burning question raged inside him and he decided to finally let it out. "Is that how it was for you?" he asked.

Cho nodded. "Yes. I always fancied you, but I had Cedric. He was wonderful, and I cared so much about him. We were a lot closer than most people realized. Weâ€¦he was my first for a lot of feelings and things that I've experienced."

Harry felt himself sweat. He had never had this sort of conversation with a girl before, and he wasn't sure how he was supposed to respond. He felt rather uncomfortable. "You don't have to tell me all of this."

"But I do for Ginny's sake. I know she and I don't really get along, but I meant when I said that you were one of my closest friends. I care about your happiness, Harry, and I know Ginny is the one you want. She wants you, too. You can't give up on her," Cho said.

Hearing this from Cho did something to him. Usually everything she said and did was so confusing, but at this moment her words were as clear and strong as anything he knew. "I don't want to give up. It's not something that I usually do."

"I know you don't, so don't start now. You're a bloody stubborn and resilient person. They're some of your best qualities, even though they can also be extremely bothersome," Cho cheeked.

He chuckled. "Thanks."

She tucked a long piece of black hair behind her ear and moved closer to him. "Listen, it doesn't mean anything now but I want

you to know that it was never about you. I know I was distant and we couldn't really get on, but it wasn't because of you."

"Then what was it about?" Harry asked truthfully. Though he was in love with Ginny, he couldn't deny that he thought about Cho Chang from time to time and why things had ended so poorly. She was his first love in a lot of ways and their relationship, no matter how dismal and short, would always mean something to him.

"I wasn't ready to move on from Cedric." She closed her eyes as she said his name but stayed strong. "Even though I really liked you, I moved too fast into a relationship with you. I didn't properly grieve, and I shouldn't have rushed through it all. You were great but we just didn't connect."

"I don't think I was ready to go into anything major at the time either. There were so many things happening that year and my life got away from me. That's not an excuse, though. I wasn't blind. I saw how upset you still were, but I didn't really want to get into it and I didn't know how. I just didn't want to go through more, you know?" he tried to explain.

She nodded. "Yeah, I think I understand. It's another reason why I'm doing this. I don't want what happened to us to happen to you and Ginny."

"I don't either. We're a lot more than that," Harry said. He knew that his relationship with Ginny wasn't perfect but being so close to Cho at the moment made him realize how special his relationship with Ginny really was.

"You love her?" Cho asked.

"So much," Harry answered.

"Then be there for her. It's a horrible feeling, but it's what you need to do," she assured.

"Yeah, I know I have to," Harry said. He felt good in a strange way. It was nice to talk to someone who wasn't tied into everything so closely. It was the outside help he had been waiting for since term began and it had come from no other than Cho.

She touched his arm. "And you will. You're a fighter, Harry. You've bloody slain dragons."

"A male dragon. I have no magic with girls," he said.

She grinned. "I think you do okay."

He smiled back. "I don't even know how to begin to repay you. Thank you once again."

"Well, once again I don't mind but in this case you can pay me back by getting your game fit. I want to beat you by my own merit and not because you were having a bad day," Cho said.

"I will. I promise," Harry said.

They looked at each other for a while before moving forward and hugging. "You'll be fine, Harry. I know things will work out."

"I hope so. I really want to be with her," he said.

She pulled away. "Then be with her." They stared at each other again. Cho bent close and kissed his forehead tenderly. It wasn't too sexual or charged in nature. It felt loving and supportive. It felt a little like Hermione kissing him. When she backed up her eyes were bright and a gorgeous smile was on her face. "I'm glad we're still friends."

"Me too. I want you to keep being my friend. I can talk to you in ways that I can't always talk to other people," he said.

"Well, I'm always here for you, Harry. There's no ill will from me," she answered.

"There isn't any from me either. Although, I may get angry with you if someone catches us in here," he said.

Cho giggled and slowly opened the door. She waved her hand to signal that it was safe and the two sipped out. They walked down the hall together before having to separate to go to their respective houses. "Hopefully the next time I see you, things will be better," Cho said.

"I wouldn't get my hopes up if I were you," he said.

"There's that Harry Potter optimism that I read about in the Daily Prophet," she cheeked.

"Don't make me rip your Tornadoes pin off," he warned.

Cho gaped at him. "You've been friends with Ron for too long."

He laughed and bit his lip. "Is it too early to say thank you again?"

"A bit but you're welcome," she said, squeezing his hand. "I'll see you around."

"Yeah, I'll talk to you later," he said, turning around.

"For what it's worth, if things had happened differently, you and I might have been pretty good together," Cho said.

"Yeah, I think we would have, too," he said sincerely. Cho's blush returned. She turned away from him and walked to her Common Room. Harry smiled and walked back to his own, feeling better and more confident.

He wasn't sure what he was going to do about Ginny but talking to Cho gave him a more proactive state of mind. He was ready to talk to her and find out where they stood. However, when he opened the door to his dorm, his heart fell to the floor and every high



spirit vanished. Dean and Ginny were on Dean's bed. They were sitting close and seemed to be deep in conversation. Both looked up as he opened the door.

"Harry," Ginny said, shooting up from the bed.

Harry wasn't sure if he could form words but someone he was able to. "A-ah, um, um, I-I'm sorry. Iâ€¦I didn't you know you twoâ€¦that you two were in here together." He felt his throat burn and his head throbbed. His worst nightmare was right in front of him.

"No, please, don't go," she said, walking over to him.

He held his hands up. This was officially too much. "No, I need to go. I don't want to stay here."

"But you should, Harry. We were just having a nice little chat about you," Dean shot. He got up as well. "Please, take a seat. We can start from the beginning."

"Dean, stop it," Ginny ordered.

"You should probably listen to her because I'm in no mood to listen to your shit," Harry shot back.

Dean laughed harshly. "You have a lot of bollocks to say that."

"I'll say whatever I want to, Dean. Believe it or not but you don't control me," he said.

"Harry, Dean, please, stop it! Please don't do this!" Ginny practically shouted. Harry's trance finally broke and he looked at her. She seemed anxious and a little scared.

Harry forced some of his anger to fade. "Sorry."

"I bet you are," Dean breathed.

"Dean, you're not helping. Please, be civil," she said.

Dean looked at her in a way that Harry had never seen before. It was full of rage and emotion. "Why should I do anything you ask? What the fuck would be in it for me?"

"Oi, don't talk to her like that!" Harry snapped, walking toward him.

Dean walked closer as well but Ginny stood in front of them and put a hand to Harry's chest. "No! Don't do this! Please, you have to stop. Please, don't do this," she pleaded. She put her hands over her face and hunched over.

All of Harry's anger completely vanished. He didn't know what to do. He wanted to comfort her, but Dean was standing right next to him and he didn't know if the two were an item again or not. However, Dean turned away from her and sighed heavily. Harry

decided not to care anymore and put an arm around her. "I'm sorry. Do you want me to leave?" he asked.

Ginny removed her hands and looked at him. "No."

"If anyone is going to leave, then it's me," Dean said.

"That's enough, Dean. Please, I want to explain. I need to," she said.

Dean looked as if he wanted to break down, but he didn't let whatever sadness he held go. "No, I've heard enough. He's here now so you don't need me anymore."

"What happened? What is he talking about, Ginny?" Harry had no idea what was going on. It was strange to see Dean angry at Ginny and it was even stranger to see Ginny act so frail.

"I'm talking about the fact that Ginny doesn't want to be with me anymore because she wants you. I don't bloody exist," Dean explained simply.

Ginny stomped her foot. "Fucking bollocks, Dean! You know that's not true! Stop talking like I'm not here and stop acting this way!"

"I'm not acting like anything. I'm stating the way that things are, Ginny. I'm so fucking stupid. I knew you and Harry wereâ€¦whatever." Dean's eyes glowed red as he said Harry's name and he was ready. If Dean wanted to take a shot, then he would be more than happy to fight back. Hearing Dean yelling at Ginny and making her feel bad brought a new sense of hatred out of him.

"Dean, you need to calm down and watch what you say. Look at Ginny right now," Harry said. His heart beat out of his chest. He couldn't process his fury, the fact that Ginny had told Dean the truth, and that he was in the middle of it all at once.

"I am fucking looking at her, and I'm looking at you! I'm bloody looking at everything that I was told didn't exist! You bothâ€¦you both swore. Iâ€¦" Dean stopped talking. His voice broke and it seemed that he would lose it any moment. Harry was livid but for a moment his heart did pull toward him. No matter what he didn't want things to end this way.

"Dean, please. I want us all to talk about this," Ginny said. "I still care about you and Harry knows that."

Dean shook his head frantically. "No, fuck this. I'm not going to listen to you or this right now. I don't want to hear it and especially with Harry here. Do whatever you want to. What I have to say and think doesn't matter." He turned away from them and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Ginny let out a whimper and collapsed on Harry's bed. She sniffed roughly and wiped her nose. Harry wasn't sure if he should go after Dean or stay with Ginny. All he wanted to do was punch him but her sniffles kept him from running out the door. He slowly

walked over to her and sat down. "Ginny, what happened?" he asked.

"Dean hates me," she said.

"Why would Dean hate you? Fucking hell, what did he say to make you this upset?" Harry asked.

She shook her head. "He didn't say anything. I did."

"I don't understand," he said.

She sighed. "Dean found me this morning at breakfast. He wanted to talk. He said that it was really important so we came up here."

He felt guilt seep in. "Is that what I interrupted? I'm sorry about that."

"No, you don't need to apologize. It was over long before you got here," she told.

Harry still didn't fully understand. "Ginny, what happened?"

She let out a deep breath and wiped her eyes. Harry quickly pulled out tissues that he kept in his bed table. He gave one to Ginny and she blew her nose. "Thanks," she breathed. "Well, I sort of knew what he might want to tell me. He held my hand all the way up here and had this look on his face. Still, thinking about it was one thing but hearing what he had to say was so much more."

"What did he say?" Harry asked.

Ginny moved her eyes on the floor. "He told me that he was sorry for everything, and he knew that he knew he held me a little too tightly. Then he said that he missed. He looked me deep in the eyes and told me that he missed me terribly. I could see it all over face. He meant it."

Harry felt extremely uncomfortable again. He didn't want to hear about Dean's feelings for Ginny anymore, but he couldn't exactly tell her to stop. "Yeah, he misses you a lot, Ginny. You probably should believe it."

"That's not all he told me." She finally looked him. "Dean told me that he loved me and wanted us to try again. He said that all he has thought about since we broke up was how much he wanted to try again and would do everything he could to make us work." She closed her eyes and let out a shaky breath. "He was—he was really passionate about it and it moved me."

Harry watched her closely and felt extreme jealousy toward Dean. He was so much better with words and knew how to take Ginny there. "Did you like him saying that stuff to you?" he asked. "I want you to be honest."

She face turned red, but she kept her focus on him. "I wasn't sure what I felt. When he told me all that I was torn but he wasn't finishedâ€" She trailed off, waiting for him to tell her if he was up for hearing more.

He nodded. "Go on."

"He said that he missed talking to me and spending weekends together andâ€"he said that he missed touching and holding me. He wanted all of me again." She spoke incredibly softly and her face flushed darker the longer she went on.

Harry was trapped in feeling. He was angry, jealous, nervous, and heartbroken all at the same time. "Did you say it back?" His heart was in his throat.

Ginny kept her eyes on him. "Harry, I've always known that I've loved you. Even after everything that's happened between us and with me being with Dean, I've known that I've loved you but-but I don't want to pretend that a small part of me wasn't still holding on to Dean as a boyfriend. I haven't known for a long time if I've been ready to give it up and hearing all that from him really made me realize what I felt."

Harry could feel his chest caving in, and his stomach felt as if a tree branch had hit it. He wasn't sure if he would be able to sit next to her and hear the rest. "G-Ginny, I just want you to be happy. I-I'm starting to try to understand that things like this can be really hard for you. I can see why youâ€"why you would wantâ€"t-to." He couldn't get out a full sentence. He knew what he was supposed to say, but it wouldn't come out. Even if it was the right thing to do, he couldn't do it. It didn't feel right, and he couldn't get his heart and brain to agree.

"Harry, I'm sorry," she whispered.

He shook his head. "No, umâ€"yeahâ€"

"No, I need to apologize. I need to apologize for putting us through all this. I shouldn't have acted on fear. I hate being afraid, and I let it get the best of me. We wouldn't be like this if it wasn't for me," she said.

He frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Harry, as soon as Dean said all that I knew. I knew what was already in my heart and everything fit together. What he said was beautiful and passionate and romantic butâ€"but it wasn't the same. It wasn't anything compared to us," Ginny explained.

Harry was sure his brain would explode. If he wasn't lost before, then he was certainly baffled now. "You mean you and me? Is that what you mean by us?"

She smiled slightly. "For a whole minute I considered and thought about what he said, but it didn't mean anything. Dean makes me feel good and when he said all those things it was nice but there's no comparison. There was nothing in his words that could

compare to what you say to me and how you make me feel. I've never had you, Harry. All I could ever do was imagine and when I was with Dean, I thought I had something special."

"So...you didn't?" he asked.

"I truly thought that he was someone who could replace my feelings for you or even do better but after spending holiday with you, after us kissing and having sex," she blushed harder, "after our fights and after you telling me that you love me and wanted to be with me, I knew that feeling was real and what I had with Dean wasn't. It wasn't right for me."

Harry's mind began to cloud as Ginny spoke. Hearing her express her feelings about their relationship was like music to his ears. It was the most beautiful song that he could listen to. "Really?" he whispered.

"If there was ever any doubt about my feelings for you, they disappeared when Dean told me how he felt and even more so when you walked in. I felt the difference right away. Harry, you just make me feel so excited and happy and tingly and I've never really had those feelings with Dean. I knew it was always you, but I've been so afraid of losing Dean and making him hurt that I tried to convince myself that how you make me feel wasn't worth it but it is. There's nothing I want more than to be with you," she said. "I've always wanted to be with you and your happiness with me means more than what I have with Dean."

"I want you, too, Ginny, and I want you to be happy. That's why I'm not going to push you. I can't force you to do something like this," he said.

She smiled slightly. "I know. This was something that I had to take care of. Fear isn't an emotion that I like or can deal with easily. I try so hard to not get scared because I can't control it. I couldn't bloody stand it anymore. I was so afraid of hurting Dean, but I couldn't let it continue. I'm afraid of losing Dean, but I knew that if I let him continue and if I kept hanging on then I would lose you, Harry and I can't handle that."

"You're the only one that I want," Harry assured, taking her hand.

She held it close to her chest. "Harry, I wouldn't expect you to wait on me forever. I know exactly what waiting feels like and I could never ask you to do that for me."

"I think I would, though," he said honestly.

"Well, I don't want you to. So, after he was finished I told him that I still loved him and really did care about him but then I told him the truth. I couldn't lie and be so scared anymore. I told him what I felt," she explained.

"What did you say?" Harry asked.

"I told him that I appreciated what he had to say, but that I had to be honest about my feelings. I told him how he had been right the whole time. I told Dean that I was still in love with you. Actually, that I had always been in love with you. I said that I couldn't be in a relationship with him again because he wasn't the person I wanted to be with." Ginny didn't look nearly as confident as she tried to make her words sound.

His insides heated and he felt light. He loved her so much, and he admired her bravery. She was perfect. "Is that when I walked in?"

"Pretty much. He didn't take it too well. He was absolutely gutted. He started yelling and telling me that I had used him, and he started questioning me about my relationship with you and what we've been doing together. It was awful. I was so mad at him, but I felt bad because he was right. I was in a relationship with him but had thought about you all the time. It was worse than the first time we broke up," she said.

"I'm sorry, Ginny," Harry said. He rubbed her back, and she shivered against his touch.

"Don't be. I needed to say it. I love you, Harry, and I want to be with you. There's no point in dragging anything further with Dean and risk losing you. It's not worth it to me. I don't want to have to pick between you and Dean, but if I must then there's no question. I need you," she urged.

Harry smiled and felt a small lump form in his throat and a strong sense of passion come over him. He wanted to hold her forever and hear her words over and over. "I need you too, Ginny. I always have. I'm so sorry that I never told you how I felt. I should've ages ago. If I had then you and Dean would be in this situation and we would be okay, but I've been always been so scared, too. I've never been so scared as when dealing with my feelings for you."

"I know how you feel. You bring this weakness out of me that I've never had before. I get so worried when it comes to us because I don't want to fuck anything up. I've cried so hard over all this and I never cry. I'm not a crying type of girl, Harry," Ginny said.

He put his thumb to her cheeks and wiped away the rest of her tears. "I know you're not. I'm not the crying type either, but with you I have to let it out. I want to let it out for you."

She moved closer to him and fixated her large brown eyes on him. "And I want to let everything out for you. I want us to be okay and to be so much more than what we are now."

"What about Dean?" Harry asked. His conscience always won out.

"I don't know. He's hurt and I want to make things right with him, but I need to make things right with you first. He'll just have to accept this. This is what I really want," she said. She suddenly laughed.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

She smirked. "I have a feeling that someone else will need to be handled when he finds out. What about Ron?"

"He'll have to accept this, too, but I think he's ready," he said confidently. If memory served him correctly, then Ron had told him to go for it. So, there was no reason to believe that he would suddenly change his mind. At least, Harry hoped that he wouldn't.

She raised an eyebrow. "You talked to him?"

"You can say that," he said. "Ginny, I want you to know that I don't see you as only Ron's little sister. I see you and I want you as Ginny Weasley, and just because your brother happens to be my best mate doesn't mean that I don't want you as my girlfriend. I do. I see you as someone I can trust and depend on. I want-I need you as someone I can love and be with."

Ginny put a small, soft hand to his cheek. "Harry, it was never a question you had to ask. You're someone I go to for strength and you understand me. I don't think any other guy will ever put up with me and get me the way you do. I don't know if you've ever doubted me, but I don't care if you're the chosen one or not. All I've ever needed you to be is Harry. It's what I fell in love with, and it's what I want."

Something in her statement touched him deep inside. He had secretly always feared that he wouldn't be enough for Ginny or would disappoint her. He was The Boy Who Lived to so many people and he wasn't sure if anyone wanted to see him as Just Harry. "It's what I want to give to you, Ginny. I want to give you whatever you need from me."

She moved close enough to where he could feel her breath on his lips. "I need you."

"Done," he wheezed.

She licked her lips slowly and swallowed hard. "So, what happens now?"

"Well, if you want to and if you're ready, we can try again," he said.

She nodded. "I do want to try again but slowly."

"Of course, I want to do it the right way this time. There's no pressure and no need for us to rush anything," Harry reassured.

"Okay, let's try again," she said softly. "Let's be with each other the way we're supposed to be."

His heart lifted and he felt dizzy with bliss. "We can make this work, Ginny. I know we can."

She grabbed his arms and squeezed them hard. "I love you, Harry. You're so amazing and gorgeous to me."

Harry blushed and felt pressure run down his body. "I love you, too. You're everything that I want and everything I need. I'll make you happy, I promise. You're so damn incredible."

"You already make me happy," Ginny said. "I'm the one that has some catching up to do."

"No, you don't. You're making me feel good just by being here. I want you so badly, Ginny," he practically moaned.

She pulled him within an inch of her face. "I'm here," she whispered.

Harry leaned forward and kissed her. She put her hand on the back of his neck and kissed him back. He let his mouth melt against hers and everything else faded. It was as if he was being baptized in warmth. It was unbelievable and more powerful than any of their previous kisses had been. This kiss was so much more because it wasn't rushed or hidden. He was kissing his girlfriend and the person he wanted to be with always. He moaned and deepened the snog. He wanted to show her and make her feel what she did to him. Ginny moaned as well and massaged the back of his neck. Everything felt perfect and he never wanted it to end.

The door opened and Harry quickly pulled away. He looked to find Ron and Hermione hand in hand and giggling into the room. However, they immediately stopped as they saw them. Hermione gasped and covered what was most likely a smile with her hands. Harry's attention focused on Ron. He wore a strangled expression, and his mouth was slightly open. Harry braced himself. He was sure that Ron wasn't quite ready to see his best mate and sister snogging in an empty bedroom.

Ginny cleared her throat. "Hey guys. How are you?"

"Hi!" Hermione said cheery, unable to hold her smile and looking from Ron to Harry.

Harry's insides flipped. Ron was obviously furious and hadn't meant his words. Once again, they were going to have a row. Yet, Ron didn't clench his fist or set his jaw. He simply rubbed his neck and nodded. "Yeah, um, we're good. Did you two—do you two want the room? Hermione and I thought it'd be empty so that's why we came back."

Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing. Although Ron's words sounded a little forced, he was being civil and polite nonetheless. Harry couldn't ask for anything more. It was all he had ever wanted from him. "Actually, I think we're going to go outside. It's nice. What do you think, Ginny?" He turned to her.

Ginny finally took her eyes off Ron. "Sure, that sounds great."

She stood up and he joined her. Harry took her hand and headed for the door. "Wait," Ron said. Ginny sighed as they turned



around. Hermione put a hand on Ron's arm to obviously hold him back if need be. He looked from Harry and Ginny once more and chewed on his lip as if thinking about his words carefully. "Ifâ€¦if you're going outside, then be careful. It's really sunny, and you don't want to get sunburned. That especially goes for you, Ginny. I don't want you to get hurt out there."

Ginny smiled affectionately. "I'll be careful, Ron."

"Yeah, and I'll take good care of her. She won't burn," Harry said, not talking about sunburns at all. He didn't think that Ron was either.

"Yeah, you better, Harry. You know how sensitive her skin is. It's like my own," Ron said seriously. Harry grinned slightly and nodded. Ron returned the nod and put his focus back on Hermione.

"I think that went well with Ron," Ginny said as they continued to walk and make their way outside.

"And now I'm paranoid about sunburns. He'll shove my wand in me sideways if you actually do get one. Bloody hell, I should have asked Hermione if there's some sort of spell that I can use to keep you protected," Harry said.

Ginny laughed. "Harry, I've been a ginger long enough to know how to take care of myself in the sunlight. I'll be fine, and you'll be fine." She stopped walking and kissed him. Once more Harry lost himself in it. He loved that he could kiss Ginny without having to hide it.

He pulled away and ran his hands through her long and thick hair. "We should go to the lake. There are a lot of trees over there and brilliant shade to keep you nice and pale."

She lightly punched his arm. "Leave my skin alone. I've never heard you complain before."

He took her hand and interlocked their fingers. "I'm not complaining. I love your skin. I love every part of you. I can't get enough."

Her ears flushed with color. "I'm glad but feel free to try sometime." They stared at each other and it took all of Harry's restraint not to pounce on her. He would keep to his word about taking things slow.

"Ginny."

Harry and Ginny turned around. Dean was standing behind them. "Dean, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"I really need to talk to you," he said, ignoring Harry. Harry bit his lip. He would let Ginny take care of it but he couldn't deny that he wanted to use an unforgivable on him. Dean always showed up at the wrong time and he had no right to anymore.

"Well, I can't right now," she said, leaning against him.

Dean glanced at him for a whole second before turning back to her. "I know but there's something really important that--"

"Dean, I understand that you want to talk. I want to talk, too, and we will but not now. I'm going to spend some time with Harry," she interrupted.

Harry tried his best to hide his smile. It felt marvelous to hear Ginny say the words and especially in front of Dean. His already shattered expression crumbled even more. He looked down and nodded. "Fine," he whispered. He walked away from them slowly and kept his head down.

Once again, Harry found it hard to be mad at him. He felt terrible for him regardless of how annoying he was. He turned to Ginny. She was still looking after him and her eyes were distant. He suddenly didn't feel so confident anymore. "Are you okay?" he asked.

She looked at him and smiled. "Yes, I'm fine. He's going to have to accept this. This is what I want."

"Are-are you sure?" Harry asked. He hadn't meant to say it but it came out away.

She frowned. "Of course I'm sure. I love you, Harry. I love you so much that I'm going to go easy on you when we get to the pond."

Harry laughed and tugged on her hair gently. "Let's get out there before I take you down right here."

The two raced down the hall and outside. Harry watched as Ginny smiled and laughed. He finally had her and finally felt the completion that he had lacked for years. However, even as they played and snogged under the shaded trees, Harry couldn't help but look over his shoulder once in awhile.

He had a feeling Dean Thomas wasn't finished yet.

\*\*\*\* So, yay! They are finally together! I know that this was a lot different from how Ron and Hermione got together but this was a different circumstance and I just don't see Harry and Ginny talking and reacting like Hermione and Ron. I also don't want to write R/Hr and H/G exactly the same. I don't view their characters and relationships the same. I think H/G's more straightforward and calm approach to things is canon. Plus, they were a lot further along than R/Hr. This was mostly about Ginny facing her fears with Dean. I tried to be as canon as possible with everything. Speaking of canon, I have to say that my favorite part of this chapter was Ron's short chat about "sunburns." I really think it's his way of telling Ginny and Harry that he's okay with their relationship but that he's still apprehensive and wants Ginny to look out for herself as well as Harry to take care of her because she is his family. I thought it was sweet.

While on the subject of sweet, lol, I enjoyed throwing in some nice Harry/Cho. I think they're great and Cho is going to become a more important figure in this story and what she said to him is going to be a major factor later. Anyway, that's not important right nowâ€¦!

So, if you're thinking, "yay! R/Hr and H/G are together so everything is complete!" WRONG, MATE! This is me, Rose, so, of course there's more and while a lot of it will be pretty and loving and juicy, some of it, and a good chunk at that, will be ugly and complicated. Hermione may have Ron and Harry may have Ginny but getting there was only half the battle.

So, I hope you all enjoyed it. I'm happy with how it came out and I'm relieved that I finally got the two couples together! Thanks for reading and REVIEW if you want to start reading the beginning of the endâ€¦!sort ofâ€¦!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 37

Yeah, another huge gap in between updates. \*Sigh\* My life is not where I want it to be right now and it's driving me mental! I'm sorry that my drama has slowed down my updates. \*Mega sigh\* I'll get things together one of these days. Anyway, thanks to everyone for hanging in there with me and for the reviews! Like I said, I'll never quit this story. I'm going to finish it. It just won't be as quickly as I originally planned for it toâ€¦!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"We have to go to sleep." Snog

"I know we do, Hermione. That's what I'm saying." Snog

"Then," snog, "we should stop." Snog

"Okay, let's stop." Snog. Snog.

"Ron, we're going to wake up your mates." Snog. Snog. Snog. Snog.

"Then let me go." Snog.

Hermione pulled away from Ron and looked up at him with a slight grin. It was late and the two of them had to get to sleep. They had been studying for almost two hours prior and the wave of tiredness had already washed over them. However, a simple kiss goodnight had turned into something much more for the couple. They just couldn't seem to part from Ron's door. "You let me go," she said. Ron put his hand to her cheek and kissed her again. She kissed him back and sighed gently as his warm mouth once again electrified her body. She still couldn't believe that their kisses were as intense as their first had been and if anything, they were stronger.

She pulled away just as the feeling began to travel below her waist. "Really, we need to go to sleep. We have class tomorrow."

He groaned. "You just love to ruin the moment by bringing up school, don't you?"

"Maybe ruining the moment is what we need," she answered.

He rolled his eyes. "Fine. One more and after three seconds we'll pull away, and I'll go in."

"That sounds like an excellent idea," Hermione said.

"I'm known to have them once in a while," Ron cheeked. "Okay, last one."

"Last one," she repeated. She once more rose on her toes and Ron bent down. They kissed softly, and she took her time counting to three. She reached the number eventually and pulled away. She watched as Ron opened his eyes and smiled. He was such a marvel to her.

"I love you," he whispered.

"I love you, too," she whispered back. They stared at each other and for some reason Hermione was finding it hard to walk away. "Well, I should go," she said.

"Wait," Ron rushed. He suddenly blushed terribly and rubbed his neck. "Do-do you want toâ€¦sleep with me tonight?"

Hermione's eyes widened. "Sorry?"

"I-I mean sleep in my bed with me. That's all," he rushed again, passing by the color pink and jumping right into crimson.

"No, I understand what you mean. I justâ€¦I don't know if it's such a good idea," she said.

Ron looked away and nodded. "Yeah, yeah, you're right. It was stupid of me to ask."

Hermione thought about what she was saying. "No, it's not stupid. I just don't know if it'sâ€¦good. Your roommates might still be awake, and I don't want to hear Seamus' mouth."

"I doubt anyone is awake, but even if they are the curtains are closed. At a certain point in the night we all close our curtains forâ€¦reasons," Ron explained.

"You don't have to explain. I think I get it," she said, trying to block out the images. Her stomach began to flutter in excitement. "What if we get caught?"

"By who? The sixth year Gryffindor Prefects who have final authority over this hall?" Ron put a finger to his chin and rubbed it questionably. "Hmm, oh yeah, that's right. They would be us."

He laughed and Hermione hit his arm. "Fine, you have me on that one." She could feel a smile creep over her mouth, and the anticipation and excitement grew and swarmed. She knew that people did it all the time so it wouldn't be as if she was the only one breaking school rules, but she also knew that the punishment for getting caught could easily be expulsion. Regardless, she couldn't deny that she wanted to and had thought about it on more than one occasion. She felt a little guilty for not caring about being honorable to her badge in this case.

"If you honestly don't want to that's fine, but if you're worried that it makes you less of a Prefect then stop. No one takes the job more seriously than you," Ron assured.

Hermione broke out of her thoughts and felt her love for Ron grow. "You know me too well. You really mean that?"

He took her hand and kissed her knuckles. "Of course I do. The fact that I'm even making you consider coming in with me makes me question how powerful I really am as a wizard."

She laughed and looked around as if people might have been listening in. "Well, I want to."

"So, what's stopping you?" he asked.

She laughed. "I guess nothing. Yes, okay, I will."

Ron squeezed her hand and bounced on the balls of his heels. "Wicked! All right, let me check to see if anyone is awake. I'll be right back." He quietly opened the door and slipped in.

Hermione let out a long breath as he shut the door behind him. She didn't know why she was so nervous. They had technically slept together before, but it had been on the floor of the Common Room and they hadn't meant to. What they were going to do was simple enough, and it wasn't as if he had asked her to marry him or have sex with him. He simply wanted to sleep next to her, and she desperately wanted to do the same. However, even though it didn't appear to be a big deal, it was to her. It was a first real step into deepening their relationship.

He slipped back out. "It's all clear. I'm almost positive that everyone is asleep, and the curtains are closed."

"Okay, I'll be right back," Hermione said.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I don't plan on sleeping in my school clothes. I need to change," she answered.

Ron's blush that had slowly started to fade since first asking her to sleep with him came back with a force. "Oh, well—you can borrow something of mine. That way you won't have to explain to anyone in your room about where you're going off to if you didn't want to."

Hermione knew that he had a specific person in mind with his statement and though she didn't really care about what Lavender would think of her sleeping with Ron, she didn't exactly want to deal with her sour reaction. "Okay," she said softly, feeling a blush of her own.

Ron took her hand and slowly pushed the door open again with his shoulder. He led her into the dark room and she looked around. All the other bed curtains were closed, and she couldn't hear a thing from the boys. He pushed books and papers off his bed and Hermione sat down. They took off their shoes, and she tried to stay calm. "I'm surprised that none of your roommates snore," she said, lighting her wand so they could see.

"They do. Silencing charms are good for that and for other reasons that we talked about earlier," Ron answered as he looked through his trunk and pulled out a shirt. He handed it to her. It was the orange Cannons shirt that he had worn on Valentine's Day. For some reason it made her even more nervous and excited.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

He nodded and looked around. "Um, I guess just close the curtain."

"Why?" she asked, a little distracted by everything that was happening.

He shrugged. "So you can change."

Hermione looked up at him. "Y-you're not going to switch clothes?"

"I am, but I thought you might want to change in private," he answered.

She could feel the ball of nerves roll around and grow in her stomach, but she knew what she wanted. "I don't mind. You canâ€¦come in if you want."

Ron's eyes grew twice their size and he stagger breathed. "Are you sure? It's not a big deal for me to change out here."

"I know, but I want to," she answered as strongly as she could.

He simply looked at her for a while. "Okay," he said finally. He grabbed his clothes and climbed into bed with her and closed the curtains around them. Hermione quickly put up a silencing charm. They stared at each other for several minutes without movements or words, and she began to feel like their decision was a bad idea. She had never exposed herself to anyone so intimately before and even though she trusted Ron, she didn't think she would measure up to what he was expecting.

"Would you like me to go first?" he asked.

"Yes," she breathed, as if his words were the answer to her prayers. "Please."

Ron grinned and pulled off his tie. He unbuttoned his dress shirt and took it off. She watched and felt heat rise everywhere. With shaky hands he then unbuckled his belt and unfastened his trousers. Hermione bit her lip. The sound was deafening and came with so much feeling. A gentle buzzing swarm in her head as he pulled off his trousers and was in nothing but a pair of blue and white striped boxers and an undershirt. Ron blushed so hard that she thought his face would catch on fire. He took a breath and slowly tugged off his under shirt.

Hermione couldn't help herself. She let out a gentle moan as his creamy yet freckly torso and back was exposed. After years of dreaming and imagining, it didn't come close to the real thing. Ron was incredible and picturesque in every aspect of his body. He was so long and lean, but there was muscle that had developed and it truly made him sexy. She wanted to touch and kiss every inch of his body, but she was too scared. She was turned on and steamy, and she didn't know if she had the will to stay in control once she got ahold of him.

Ron rubbed his beet red neck and frowned a little. "I must be blinding you. I can't be uncovered in the sun for too long, so I end up looking like this most of the time."

She shook her head. "There's nothing to excuse. You're gorgeous, Ron, and I love your skin."

He looked down shyly and pulled over his black Cannons t-shirt. "Thanks."

Though she was in awe of his beauty, the terrible anxiousness came over her again. It was her turn, and she certainly didn't think that she would be as impeccable and stunning as Ron. However, she took a deep, quivery breath and began to unfasten her shirt. She could feel her heart beat roughly against her chest, and it was a little hard to breathe. She got to the bottom and slowly took her shirt off. She glanced at Ron as he saw her modest C-cup breasts for the first time.

He had a distant look on his face that she couldn't read and instead of asking him she chose to keep going. She definitely did not want to think about what was going on in his mind. She unfastened her skirt and pulled it off. Now, there was nothing to hide her. Regardless of the fact that she was still in her bra and knickers, she felt naked and imperfect. Her heart was in her throat, and she pulled her knees toward her chest. Ron didn't like what he saw. She knew that. After being with Lavender Brown who was tall, skinny, and had the curves and breasts of a much older woman, Hermione knew that her body would never compare. No matter what, Ron was a bloke and she knew looks mattered to him.

"I-I know that I'm notâ€¦" She didn't know how to explain. She knew that she shouldn't have cared about how she looked compared to Lavender but she did. She was still a teenaged girl and she had insecurities.

Ron put a hand on her knee. "Don't. I know what you're thinking, and you need to stop. Hermione, you are absolutely beautiful."

She rolled her eyes. "Yeah."

"Hey, look at me," he said. She slowly pulled her eyes to his, and his features were gentle and sweet. "You are everything and more of what I have ever imagined that I'd be attracted to. You're perfect, and you're exactly what I want. Bloody hell, you have no idea what you're doing to me right now. Nothing and no one has ever made me feel this way before."

She swallowed the lump of fear and found warmth and honesty in Ron's words. Already, she felt better. "I think I do have an idea," she whispered, pulling her knees down and exposing herself again. Ron gazed at her, and his eyes seemed to roam every inch of her body. Electricity sparked between them and she could feel his need. She could feel it easily because she had it, too.

They simultaneously leaned forward and kissed. It was soft, slow, and intense. Hermione moaned again and placed a hand on his leg. The slight ginger hairs tickled her palm. Ron put a hand on her shoulder and deepened the kiss. Feeling his hand against her skin sent a wave of pressure to her middle. Her heartbeat picked up again. Even in the passion of it all she was a little nervous. She had never been in a situation like this before. He pulled away and licked his lips. He put his forehead against hers. "Wow," he said out of breath.

"I know," she said, equally out of breath. "We should probably try to get some sleep."

He pulled away from her and handed her the shirt, still eying her closely. "Yeah, that's a smart idea."

She slowly put the shirt on so Ron could see a bit more of her. Her confidence grew with every moment he gazed at her in such a loving way and seemed to like what she had. He took their clothes and pushed them over the mattress as she put out the light. Hermione got under the covers and he settled next to her with his chest to her back. He wrapped an arm around her, and she snuggled against him.

It felt incredible. Ron's body was warm and had a perfect of balance of soft and firm spots in all the right places, and she could certainly feel some of that hardness touching the small of her back. It made her shiver and feel even closer to him. "I love you, Ron. I really do."

"I love you, too, so much. You're so beautiful," he said in her ear before kissing it. He dragged his fingernails over her stomach and even through the shirt it gave her goose bumps. The smell of him all around her and the feeling of his gentle hand relaxed her completely. It didn't take long before she was fast asleep.

Hermione opened her eyes. Morning light had seeped through the drawn curtains. She yawned and felt weight on her side. She



turned and instantly smiled. Ron was asleep with his arm still draped over her. He breathed deeply and seemed to be heavy in sleep. He looked lovely and incredibly peaceful. She could wake up to him every morning for the rest of her life, if granted the opportunity. She kissed his lips lightly before reluctantly pulling the covers off her and sliding from his embrace.

She eased back the curtain and peeked out. All the curtains from the other beds were still closed. She knew it was early and the boys wouldn't be up for awhile but the last thing she wanted was Seamus and Neville going on about her breaking the rules to sleep with Ron. She quickly took off Ron's shirt, folded it, and put her own clothes back on. She grabbed her wand and shoes and tiptoed out of the room.

Unfortunately, her roommates were awake when she opened the door. "Well, there you are," Parvati said, brushing her long hair at the mirror. "I thought maybe you had been abducted during the night or something."

Hermione sat on her bed and pulled out fresh clothes. Lavender didn't appear to be in the room. "And by your tone I can tell that you honestly don't believe that."

Parvati smiled. "How was it?"

"How was what?" she asked.

"You don't have to be that way with me. How was sleeping with Ron?" Parvati heavily emphasized on the word.

"We didn't do anything. We just went to bed," Hermione said with a smile. She wished that she could still be lying with Ron. It had been one of the calmest nights of sleep that she had ever experienced.

Parvati raised an eyebrow. "Hmm, must have been nice."

"It was nice and considering that all we did was sleep, it wasn't a big deal," Hermione said, lying. In fact, it had been a huge deal.

"Even if all you did was sleep, which I'm still not believing, it's a big deal. It's a new step," Parvati explained.

She looked at her and felt as if they were truly connecting for the first time. "Yes, it was, but Ron is a gentleman, so I felt comfortable."

"Duh," said a voice. Lavender rose from under her bed, holding an earring. "Of course Ronnie is a gentleman. See, Patty, it always falls under here."

Hermione put a hand to her chest in surprise. "Lavender, I didn't know you were in here. Why didn't you say something?"

"And interrupt the discussion? I'd never do that." Lavender walked over to her and placed her hands on her hips. "He's really nice, isn't he?"

Hermione wasn't sure how to take her question. Lavender's tone was sweet enough but her facial expression was completely stiff. "Um, yes, Ron's nice. He always has been."

"Yeah, Ronnie was really nice to me when we dated. He never forced me into anything so why would he with you? Especially since you don't seem to mind giving it up," Lavender said.

"Lavender, please," Parvati said.

"What exactly do you mean by that?" she snapped.

Lavender held up her hands and giggled. "Wait a minute. I'm not implying anything mean. What I meant to say was that you don't seem to mind being so close with Ron. You slept over last night. That's a really big deal as Patty said and especially for you, right? You're a Prefect, and you always follow the rules."

Hermione was too confused by her explanation to come back with something clever. Once again it didn't sound rude but there was something to way Lavender looked at her and her tone that made Hermione not believe her. It didn't matter. The last thing she wanted to do was give in to whatever Lavender was trying to pull. "Okayâ€¦well, I guess your right."

Lavender patted her on the arm. "Of course I am." She brushed past her and walked out of the room.

Hermione stood in bewilderment. She looked to Parvati. "Why didn't you tell me that she was in here?"

"I thought you could see her from underneath the bed. Besides, she does live here," Parvati said.

Hermione ran a finger over her brow. "Can I ask you what that was? I have no idea what she meant by all that."

"That was Lavender attempting to be nice to you," Parvati answered.

"I'm not so sure. I think she was insulting me," she said.

"She wasn't. It was simple conversation. It was her way of making the situation less uncomfortable for her," Parvati explained.

Hermione sat on her bed. "It wasn't as if I was trying to brag or anything. I'm not that immature."

"I know that, but she has to get used to it. It's the only way she'll be able to deal with it. Trust me, I know my best friend," Parvati said.

Hermione decided to take her word for it. She had to get ready for school. By the time she was finished, she felt it was safe to

go back to Ron's room. She knocked on the door and tried not to seem as excited as she was. Harry answered the door. "Well, good morning, Hermione. How did you sleep last night?" His eyes were bright, and his smile was big.

"Ron told you, didn't he?" she said.

Harry opened the door wider to let her in. "Come on, Ron is obligated to keep me informed because Merlin knows you won't."

"You're one to talk," she said in an undertone.

"Hey, Hermione," the others said as she walked in.

"Hello," she said, looking at them all get dressed. She couldn't help but notice that Dean was in somewhat of a heated conversation with Seamus.

"I hope you don't mind that I told Harry. He wouldn't stop asking why I woke up in such a good mood, and the truth sounded a lot better than what he had come up with," Ron explained, throwing dirty socks at Harry.

"It's fine. We have nothing to hide," she said.

Ron took her by the hand and brought her close. "Why did you leave so early? I didn't get a chance to say good morning."

She blushed, thinking about what was underneath his school clothes. "I like to get an early start, and I didn't want to wake you. You looked comfortable as you were."

"He's about the only one in this room who's comfortable when he sleeps. The rest of us are up half the night trying to get him to stop snoring," Neville said.

"Oi, shut up, Neville. You shouldn't listen in on other peoples' conversation, and at least I didn't twitch around and knock Hermione unconscious like you must do to Luna. You're like a dying spider," Ron shot back.

Harry laughed. "I think it's fantastic that you lot watch each other sleep. What exactly do I do when I'm asleep, or do I want to know?"

"Maybe we should ask Ginny that," Neville replied.

"No one is asking Ginny anything," Ron said.

In a flash Dean got up from his bed and left the room. Seamus sighed deeply. "Fucking hell you pricks. Did you have to do that?"

"Have to do what?" Neville asked.

"Bring up Ginny. Did you not see me talking to Dean?" Seamus asked.

"Oh, were you two talking about herâ€¦again?" Neville asked softly, glancing at Harry.

Harry glared at Seamus. "I didn't know that I wasn't allowed to talk about my girlfriend."

"Yeah, Seam. Dean needs to get over it. Harry is dating her now," Ron defended.

Seamus shook his head. "Well, it's a bit bloody hard for him to when you knobs act like this, isn't it? I'm just looking out for my mate. You know how hard he's taking this and especially now. Give him some respect, yeah?" He too left the room.

Hermione felt uncomfortable as Ron, Neville, and Harry looked after Seamus. She had never seen them so heated before, and she didn't know that Seamus had the ability to be serious. "Do you want me to come back?" she whispered to Ron.

"No, it's fine. I'm almost done. Here, you forgot this," he said, handing her his orange Cannons t-shirt from last night.

"I didn't forget this," she said.

He grinned. "Yeah you did. It's yours. When I let you wear it, I was also giving it to you."

Hermione didn't know what to say. "But this is one of your favorites."

"I know. That's why I want you to have it. It looks better on you, anyway. I don't think I can live up to the shirt's full potential now," he said. She smiled and felt her heart lift. She hugged his neck and kissed him deeply.

"Harry, maybe we should leave," Neville said.

"If we do then they may not stop. Staying is the only way to make sure that they get to class on time. We've got that test today in potions," Harry answered.

Hermione and Ron laughed and pulled away. Ron put his hands on her shoulders and frowned at his remaining roommates. "Don't you two have somewhere to be?"

Harry shrugged. "I guess. Come on, Neville. I suppose a few minutes won't hurt."

"Okay, but only if you're sure. I trust your judgment," Neville cheeked as he grabbed his bag and joined Harry. They left the room and Ron turned back to her. He traced her mouth.

"I'm sorry that the blokes in this room are twats," he said.

She kissed his finger. "They're okay. Besides, I think we had that last one coming."

"What was that for? I thought you didn't like giving them any ideas," he asked.

"I don't but you deserved it. You make me really happy, Ron," she said.

He kissed her forehead. "I try my best."

"And your best is exactly what I want," she answered.

The rest of the day Hermione was in a good mood, and she and Ron continued to blush as they looked at each other. Lavender's comments still bothered her but she tried her best to not take it seriously. Ron made it easy for her. Every time she caught his eye he was smiling, and it made her think about his firm chest and strong shoulders. It seemed that one night had changed so much and by Transfiguration she found it difficult to concentrate because of it. Ron was dozing off behind his book with the same peaceful look on his face that he had when she had woken up next to him.

Hermione watched him for a moment with a grin before nudging him. He instantly opened his eyes and sat up. "What? Did she ask me a question? Is she coming over here?"

"No, but you should be using this study period to write notes. You know how McGonagall is about note taking and complete attention," Hermione whispered.

Ron rolled his eyes and flipped through the pages of his book. "But this is so bloody boring. I'll never be able to concentrate. Besides, you take better notes than I do."

She looked around the room before leaning in. "If you think that I'm just going to let you look off my work every single time, then you're sadly mistaken. You have to do the work yourself," she whispered quickly.

He pouted slightly. "Are you saying that you're not going to help me anymore? I'd think that as your man you'd want to help me to an even greater extent than before."

"Don't make me pinch you, Ron, and don't pout. Now, as my man you should want to take your own notes instead of leaving it all to me," Hermione answered.

Ron put his hand on her thigh and squeezed it. "I'm sorry. You must be sadly mistaken."

Hermione chuckled softly and felt her leg tingle where Ron touched it. She gazed into his eyes and saw desire. It made her neck heat up. "Whatever it is that is so fascinating, I'd like for you to share it with the class," McGonagall said, standing in front of their desk.

Ron swiftly moved his hand away and she sat straight in her seat. "Sorry, Professor McGonagall," she said.

"Ms. Granger, I'd think that you of all people would take this time to study. We've talked about this before," McGonagall pressed.

Hermione's cheeks burned. "I know. I'm sorry. It won't happen again."

"It's my fault. I asked her a question, and she was just trying to explain it to me," Ron said.

"Mr. Weasley, it's not your job to constantly come to Hermione's aid when I'm speaking to her. I'll get to you next," McGonagall snapped.

"I'm not coming to her aid. We were both talking, and all I'm trying to do is explain why," he said rather loudly.

"Ron, please," Hermione said.

"Mr. Weasley, there are only so many times that I'm going to ask you not to raise your voice in my classroom. I'm more than just your teacher. I'm the head of Gryffindor house. As a Prefect you should know that," McGonagall said coldly.

Ron crossed his arms over his chest and Hermione could tell that he wanted to say something damaging back but instead he mumbled, "Sorry, professor."

Professor McGonagall expression drew firmer. "Well, if you have any more questions feel free to direct them to me. I will be more than happy to answer you without interrupting the other students." She walked away without another word.

Hermione dug her nose in her book and didn't look at Ron again for the remainder of class. Afterward, she packed up her books to leave and McGonagall once again came over. "Ms. Granger, I need to have a word with you."

Ron and Harry both raised their eyebrow but quickly walked off. Hermione felt nervous flutters in her stomach. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm not sure, Ms. Granger. We both know that the past couple of months has brought out an odd behavior from you," McGonagall said.

Hermione had hoped that her concentration had gotten better but it was obvious that the damage was done. "I'm really sorry about what happened today in class. I promise that I'm getting the course work completed. It's not an issue."

"I don't think it's for you, Hermione. However, to be frank, I'm more concerned about what your actions are doing to other people," McGonagall said.

Hermione shook her head. "I'm not sure what you mean." She knew that a couple of times she and Ron had flirted in class, but it was always harmless.

McGonagall clasped her hands together as if she felt out of place. "Hermione, I'm well aware of your relationship status with Mr. Weasley and while it's none of my business, I feel as if I have to say something when it's affecting other students."

"Professor, I can assure you that my relationship with Ron isn't impairing his learning," Hermione said, feeling offended.

"I'm not talking about Ron. Other students have brought it to my attention that your interactions with each other during my class are causing disturbances. I'm not sure what these actions entail exactly, but if it continues to be a problem, I'll have to separate you and Ron. Now, you both are old enough to know when to be professional and when it's appropriate to have down time. Is that understood?" McGonagall asked.

Hermione's jaw dropped. She had no idea what actions she was talking about or who would ever say that they were being disturbing. She felt flustered and embarrassed, but she had to take it. "Yes, I understand." McGonagall dismissed her and she slowly walked out of the classroom.

Ron and Harry were waiting for her. "What happened? Did she lecture you about me?" Ron asked.

Hermione kept walking. "No, the lecture was more about me."

"Well, what happened? Are you in trouble?" Harry asked.

"No! I mean she just doesn't want Ron and I chatting so much in class," Hermione said, feeling aggravated. Ron and Harry gave her a look but she didn't want to explain anymore. She felt guilty enough. "Look, I'll meet you two back at the room or whatever. I need to go to the library and see if my book is there."

"I'll go with you," Ron said.

"No, that's okay. It will only take a second," Hermione said, already turning and walking away.

She walked down the aisle of the ancient wizard history section of the library and hoped that at least something would go right for her. She bit her lip hard as she reached the shelf. She scanned the row of books and her heart sank even further. She was too late. She sighed and realized that she would have to wait and put her name on the reserves list for the book. Her perfect day was slowly fading away into an awful evening. As she went toward the front desk she noticed Harry leaning against a wall near the front entrance. She walked over to him. "What are you doing here? I told you that I didn't need an escort."

Harry frowned. "I'm not following you. I'm waiting for Ginny. She wants me to help her study for defense class before dinner. OWLs are soon and she doesn't feel very prepared. I don't know how I'm supposed to help her."

"Your modesty only takes you so far, Harry. If anyone is qualified to help her with Defense against the Dark Arts, it's

you." she said. "Besides, I doubt she'll want to study for long. I'm sure she has other things in mind that she wants to do with you."

He turned red but grinned widely. "Now that I can help her with." His grin faded a little. "Why were you so upset? Ron thinks that he did something."

"He didn't do anything. I just don't like it when McGonagall gets upset with me," Hermione said.

"What exactly is she upset about?" Harry asked.

Hermione considered her options and realized that Harry would be the best person to talk to. She nudged her head and he followed her to a table. "McGonagall told me that some people have been complaining about me and Ron during class."

"Complaining about what?" Harry asked.

"She didn't say but apparently we're a distraction," Hermione said.

Harry chuckled. "You must be joking. You're the last person in class to cause disruption, and Ron is usually asleep."

"Exactly, I do realize that today we were talking and we were close," Hermione noticed Harry's smirk at this but she continued, "but we have never been like that before. It's justâ€¦you knowâ€¦ last night."

"Yeah, I get it," Harry said.

She blushed and smiled slightly. "It was a big deal for me, and I think for us. I guess I lost a bit of my judgment today."

"You don't have to explain anything to me. I know you, Hermione. You didn't do anything wrong," he explained.

"But McGonagall doesn't seem to think that. You should have seen her. She looked so disappointed," Hermione said.

"So, what are you thinking? Who would care that much to say something?" Harry asked.

She took a breath before answering. "Lavender."

His eyes widened. "You think Lavender is talking to McGonagall about you and Ron? That would be mental considering all she did with him in public."

"I'm aware of that, but this morning when I went back to the room she was acting really strange. Parvati thinks that it's her way of trying to get along with me, but I don't know. I wouldn't put it past her to use this to get back at me," Hermione said. "What do you think?"



"I don't know, but it's not my opinion that matters here. Are you going to tell Ron?" Harry asked.

"Apart of me really doesn't want to, but I think I should. If nothing else, I want his opinion on the matter," she said.

He nodded. "Good, please explain to him that he didn't do anything wrong. He really does think that he got you in trouble, and he was giving himself a hard time as usual."

Hermione could already feel her guilt grow. She had to get to him. "Okay, where is he?" she asking, standing up.

"Last time we talked he was going to head back to the room," Harry answered.

"Great," she said. She looked back and gave him a smile. "I'm really happy for you, Harry. I don't know if I've said it, but I'm glad things finally worked out with Ginny," she said.

Harry's wide grin returned. "Thanks. So am I."

Hermione rushed back to the Common Room and through the portal. She hoped that he was in his room. However, there was no need to look for Ron. He was standing right near the staircase with Lavender. He had apparently said something to her that she liked because she giggled horribly and threw her arms tightly around him. She held him like he was still her boyfriend and nothing had happened between them. Ron didn't return her hug but he patted her back with an awkward look on his face.

She walked further into the room and cleared her throat. Ron turned to her and his eyes grew. He pulled away from Lavender. "Hermione," he said.

Lavender turned to her with a huge smile on her face. "Oh, we were just talking about you!"

"You were?" Hermione asked, looking from Ron to Lavender and not liking the sickening feeling in her stomach.

"Yes, but it wasn't bad or anything," he quickly said.

Lavender playfully shoved him. "Of course it wasn't anything bad, Ronnie. Well, I have a lot of work to do." She gave Ron a serious look. "Remember what I said, yeah?" she said with a wink, poking his stomach.

"Okay, I will," he mumbled.

"Good! I'll see you two later!" She giggled again and ran upstairs.

Ron groaned and rubbed his face. "I'm sorry about that."

"What do you have to be sorry for?" Hermione asked, coming further into the room.

"Forâ€|that. For what you saw," he answered.

"I'm not sure what I saw, Ron," she said.

"It was nothing. She just wanted to talk," Ron explained.

"And apparently she doesn't want you to forget something," Hermione added. "I take it Lavender doesn't care if I know what you and her were talking about in regards to me."

"Don't say it like that. We were only talking about how we're going to try to be friends again, if that's what we ever were," he said.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Of course. What else would we talk about?" he asked.

She felt a little taken back. It went against everything she had been feeling all day. The last thing she had expected was for Lavender to want to forgive and forget. "I guess nothing. Well, I'm glad."

"And she said that she'll be civil toward you. She's not going to cause any trouble. That's what she wanted me to remember," he said.

Hermione had to hold back an eye roll. "Yes, I've heard that one before."

"Bloody hell, Hermione, will you please not get upset? I don't want us to argue over this." He walked over to her and put his hands on her hips. "We talked about this. I told you that I wanted to try, and you said that you did, too. We're just going to see what happens. Nothing has changed."

"I know that, Ron. You don't have to treat me like I'm thick. You obviously said something to make her really happy," she said.

"I told her that we could still be friend," Ron explained. "There wasn't anything else, I swear."

"Okay, but it's just a little weird, okay?" she answered.

"I know and I'm sorry. You know how Lavender is," he said.

Hermione thought about what she wanted to tell Ron. "And so do you."

"That's why I'm not making a big deal out of this. It's awkward enough. Lavenderâ€| she likes to make things seem really big even if they aren't. There's nothing else," Ron reassured.

She looked into his eyes and found herself believing him. She felt immature and selfish for feeling suspicious. "You're right. I just didn't expect to see that and especially after what happened today."

"And I didn't expect it to happen. I'm sorry. I was waiting for you," he said.

She smiled and took his hands. "Don't apologize. I want things to be civil with her. I meant it when I said it. I'm really sorry for acting this way. I guess I'm not feeling very well today. Let me apologize."

He shook his head. "I don't want you to. I want you to feel better, and I can try to make you better. Would you like that?"

She closed her eyes for a moment and took in his soft and low words. "Mmm-hmm," she breathed.

"Okay," he whispered before kissing her. A cluster of electricity traveled through her body once again. The dread that she had felt previously faded somewhat.

He pulled away. "How did I do?"

She sucked his taste off her bottom lip. "Exceptionally."

He smiled. "That will be the highest praise that I will ever receive from someone, I reckon. Do you want to go for a walk before we head to dinner?"

"Sure, that sounds like a great idea," she answered. Hermione was quiet as they walked around Hogwarts. She didn't know why seeing Ron with Lavender made her feel so apprehensive.

"So, are you going to tell me about what happened with McGonagall?" Ron asked.

"She wants us to pay closer attention during class. Apparently, people are complaining about us," Hermione told.

He rolled his eyes. "What a load of bollocks. No one is saying anything. She's making that up to cover her own arse. She doesn't want to see her favorite student getting caught up with an unruly student like me."

Hermione frowned. "That's not true. She's not juvenile. If she had a problem, then she would just tell me."

"Then what are you saying? Do you actually believe that something told her about us? Who in class cares about what we do?" Ron asked.

She didn't know if she should tell him. She wanted to know what he thought, but she didn't want to upset him. She decided to go ahead and say something. "Well, you know that Lavender—"

"Hermione," he interrupted.

"I'm just saying that she's the only person I can think of who would care, and she sits right behind us so she can see everything," she continued.

Ron sighed and ran a hand through his hair in irritation. "I don't think she said anything."

"Of course you don't!" Hermione snapped. Ron looked at her sternly before putting his hands on her shoulders and walking her back until she hit the wall. "W-what are you doing?" she asked.

Ron leaned down and kissed her hard. He wrapped his arms tightly around her waist and groaned. Hermione lost her breath and closed her eyes. He had never kissed her so roughly before but she enjoyed it. She pulled her arms around his neck and got on her toes so she could move her tongue in deeper. It was a furious kiss, and every part of her was at Ron's will. He parted from her and his breath was extremely uneven. "I'm on your side. You know that, don't you?"

"Of course I do," she said, running her finger over his jawline.

"Then why are you mad at me over this?" he asked.

"I'm not mad at you. I'm not even upset about this situation. I honestly just don't want anything to get in the way of me becoming Head Girl, and McGonagall's opinion means a lot to me," Hermione answered. Ron was still so close to her face, and her lips pulsed to feel his again.

"But I watched your face when you saw us, and I think I've known you long enough to tell what that expression means. What's on your mind, honestly? Do you really think that something else was happening with Lavender and me?" he asked.

She didn't know what to say without sounding like a bitch. "No, I don't think that at all. Nothing happened to give me any right to think that, but Lavender worriers me," she confessed.

Ron raised an eyebrow. "Why? Has she said or done anything to you?"

"No, and that's the point. I know I was the one to bring up everyone trying to move on and work things out, and I honestly want to with her. She hasn't given me any problems and I'm thankful, but it's Lavender. I don't know if there's something else going on with all this. She seemed to get over things really fast, and it's sort of strange that she wanted to talk and make up with you the day after you and I slept together," Hermione explained.

He shrugged. "I'd think that would be a good thing."

"You don't understand." She could feel herself getting more and more frustrated.

"Well, maybe I don't, but what I do understand is that apparently Lavender hasn't done anything mean to you and she wants to move on. I can't take that as anything more than a good thing. Please, don't worry so much about this," Ron said with a warm smile.

She could already feel herself relaxing as his bright blue eyes shimmered as he smiled. She had to get over herself. "You're probably right. Maybe she didn't say anything to McGonagall, but I think I have a right to wonder if she did."

"Yeah, you do. Just like I have a right to think that she didn't say anything without it having to mean something on my end. Plus, regardless if she did or not, we're not in trouble so it's not as if it hurt us. You can't be perfect for McGonagall all the time, and she's going to have to get off to someone else for a change," Ron said.

"Ron, that's absolutely uncalled for," Hermione pressed, feeling as if he was missing the point.

He shrugged. "She keeps stressing you out, and it's annoying me. I swear, our day was perfect until we got to her class."

Hermione opened her mouth but realized that she wouldn't get anywhere. There was so much more that she wanted to try to explain, but she didn't know how because it all had to deal with Lavender. Though Ron was her boyfriend, he had every right to still see Lavender and talk to her. She would certainly not act as controlling as Lavender had been. However, there was a certain level of hostility between the two girls, so it wouldn't be completely wrong for Hermione not to trust her. It sounded so reasonable in her head but she couldn't find the right words to translate her meaning.

"Tomorrow is a new day," she said in somewhat of a defeat. "And I overthink too much so I know that it didn't help."

He ran his fingers through her hair. "It's what I've been trying to tell you for years. You'll drive yourself even more mental than you already are if you keep it up."

She pulled his hand away at his remark. "Now who's being mean?"

He chuckled but grew a little more serious. "One more thing about what happened, then we'll drop it for at least the rest of the day."

"Alright," Hermione said.

"I was walking downstairs to wait for you, and she was on her way up. We sort of crashed into each other, and that's what got us talking. It's not like I went looking for her, and she didn't come looking for me," he explained.

"You don't have to give me every detail. It's not necessary," Hermione said, feeling guilty for what seemed like the hundredth time that day.

"No, it's okay. I don't want there to be any questions between us," he assured. "We talked about nothing for a minute or two then we sort of talked about you and me. She honestly said that she wanted to still be friends with me because she still cares about me. I said something similar and I asked if she was going

to try with you. She said that she already was and would continue to. I told her that we could be friends or whatever if everything would stay civil. That's when you walked in and she hugged me."

It sounded much less conniving coming from Ron than what she had originally thought and she decided, at least for now, to let it go and put a bit of faith in Lavender. "That doesn't sound too bad."

"It's not bad. It's good. You'll see, I promise. You can always trust me," Ron said.

She grinned and put a hand to his chest. "I know I can," she whispered. They leaned forward and kissed again. Automatically he moaned and tightened his grip on her waist. She stuck her thumbs in the loops of his trousers and pulled him close.

Hermione moaned as well and pulled out of the kiss a little. "Ron, maybe weâ€¦"

"Should stop? I know," Ron interrupted before snogging her again. He stuck his tongue deep inside her mouth. She squeezed her eyes shut. He tasted so good, and it drove her crazy. Her hands went to his hair. She tugged on the locks and began sucking his tongue. They were in an open space where anyone could see them, but she couldn't deny the fire in her stomach. She wanted Ron so badly.

Ron whimpered loudly and pushed against her. She moved up the wall and felt every bit of his stiffness pressing into her. It shocked each fiber in her body. She cried out in surprise and pleasure and Ron instantly moved away. "I'm-I'm sorry. I didn't mean for that to happen. I justâ€¦I'm sorry, Hermione."

She pushed herself off the wall and tried to catch her breath. "No, no, it's okay." She ran a hand over her burning face and felt her heart in her throat again. Her body was wired but her brain was slowly clearing. "We should probably stop. With everything going on the last thing we need is to be caught snogging aggressively in the corridor."

Ron let out a deep breath and loosened his tie. "Yeah, you're absolutely right. Um, dinner?"

Hermione felt an overwhelming sense of lust and knew that she wouldn't be able to eat unless she gave herself a moment to calm down. "Actually, I'll meet you there," she said.

Ron gave her a worried look but nodded. "Okay." He began to walk off and Hermione leaned against the wall. Her heart wouldn't stop racing. She could feel Ron's hardness against her. It felt so amazing, and she wanted to feel it again. She didn't know why she was so sexually progressive, and it made her feel a little uneasy. Dreaming about it and demonstrating it were two totally different things. She went up to her room to relax but Lavender was inside picking through clothes.

She looked up and smiled. "Hey, Hermione."

"Hi," she answered back. There was no way that she would be able to calm down now.

Lavender gave her a once over. "Are you sick? You're really flustered."

"Oh, no, I'm not sick. I had to chase down a couple of first years down a corridor," she came up with.

"Aww, there just kids, Hermione," Lavender said.

"Yes, well, they need to learn the rules, don't they? It's my job," Hermione said.

Lavender stopped sorting through her things and stared at her. It was the exact same look she had given her that very morning, and just like that morning, Hermione couldn't understand what it meant. "Yeah, I guess it's your job to enforce the rules. You're so good at following them yourself, aren't you?"

Hermione narrowed her eyes. She knew what Lavender was getting at. "If you have something to say, Lavender, go ahead. I really don't care for games like these."

"There's no game, honestly. I'm simply trying to make conversation." Lavender then flipped her hair and walked past her to the door. "You too paranoid sometimes, Hermione. It's not becoming of you." She smiled sweetly. "Well, see you at dinner!" She closed the door behind her and Hermione stomach went into a knot. She was full of confusion and rage but she didn't know how to deal with it. There was too much cryptic and guessing involved.

By the time she got back to the dinner table everyone had already started eating. She took her seat next to Ron. "You were gone for ages. Are you okay?" he asked quietly with concern written all over his face.

She smiled and patted his knee. "I'm fine. I just wanted to look for something first. Really, everything is okay."

"Hermione, could you pass me the bread? This tin is empty," Lavender asked sweetly from across the table. Hermione tried to hide her discomfort as she passed it over. Lavender gave her a huge smile but there was something in her eyes that was off.

Hermione glanced at Ron to see if he had noticed but of course he was elbow deep in roast and gravy. She mentally sighed and tried to tell herself that she was overthinking and maybe a bit paranoid. However, even if no one believed her, Hermione knew that there was something else going on with Lavender and she had a feeling that her intentions were not what they seemed.

\*\*\*\* Hmm, wonder what's going on thereâ€¦.guess you'll have to keep reading and find out, lol. I was all smiles when I wrote that part about Hermione sleeping with Ron. I remember the first time I did that with a boyfriend and it was huge for me. I just

wanted them to share that with each other and it's a portal to the next level of their relationship. Yes, this is ME, Rose, so you know what will happen down the line and anyway this story is rated M for a reason, lol.

So, I hope everyone enjoyed it. I'm trying out different ways of writing this story so the feel and structure may change and hopefully you lot will like it. Please, REVIEW and I will get the next chap posted as soon as I can! Thanks for reading and review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 38

Thanks for the reviews! Seeing them all come in so fast and in such big pools made me get up and update faster! :)

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

The tent roared with victory and excitement. Harry beamed at his teammates and felt unstoppable. He wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand and cleared his throat. "Now! Now, hold on a minute, mates! Yes, we won today but we still have another round to get through."

"Harry, we all know that the only reason why Slytherin was ahead of us in points before this match was because Draco takes ages to catch the snitch!" Katie Bell called out.

The team laughed and Harry couldn't help but to agree. It was the only example he could think of where it paid to be a slow seeker. "But they still manage to win. Draco, unfortunately, isn't the only player on the team. He's got great teammates to back him up."

"Well, obviously the bloody bastards couldn't come through this time! Next game will be easy. You know it. We've already made it to the finals!" Ginny yelled.

The team roared again and Harry wasn't sure if he wanted to remind them that they still had another round to play and could possibly lose it if Slytherin improved on their weaknesses. His team had won and was one step closer to making it to the finals. However, that wasn't the entire reason why he felt lighter and happier than he had in a long time. Ginny was smiling at him and her eyes were big and commanding. As soon as he had caught the snitch and landed safely to the ground, she had wrapped her arms around him and whispered in his ear that she loved him and was proud of him. It was the best feeling he had ever experienced.

Ron got up from the bench and stood next to Harry. He put his hand on his shoulder. "Listen up you lot. I'm sure your modest and average captain here wants us to be professional and not take this win over ferret and the boys as a victory. It was a simple warm-up for the next game that I'm sure will be a lot more intense. Malfoy scares Harry. We all know this."



Harry rolled his eyes and elbowed him. "Piss off, Ron. That's not what I mean. I'm only saying that we do have another round to play, and I don't want us losing our heads over it. We will still have practice and we will still take the next game seriously. In the mean time, go to the match against Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff." A couple of the people on his team groaned. "Yeah, I get it. For some of you it's OWLs season and Katie, I know you're working on your NEWTs but if we do make it to the finals, we'll be playing against one of them, most likely Ravenclaw, and I want every single one of you to be prepared for their moves and tricks. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Harry, we hear you," Dean said in a tone Harry couldn't nor cared to understand.

"Alright, go wash up, and I'll see you all back in the Common Room. I'm sure the party has already started," Harry ordered.

For the third time the team roared and collectively headed out of the tent. Ginny walked over to him and took his hands. Her face was flushed, glistened in sweat, and her hair was messy and coming out of her long braid. She looked absolutely stunning and he couldn't believe that he was dating someone so fiery. "Don't take too long," she said.

"I won't. You did really well today. Have I mentioned that?" Harry asked.

Ginny moved her finger to his bottom lip and brought it down a little. "Yes, a few times. You were great, too, but you always are." Harry's already sweaty and broiling body intensified. There were so many things that he wanted to say, but Ron's discrete throat clearing brought him back. Ginny dropped her finger. "I guess that's my warning."

"I'll be right there. I promise," Harry said.

"I know you're a man of your word," Ginny said before placing her lips to his. They kissed for only a minute but it felt like days to him. She pulled away and all of her beauty and wonder was there for him to see again.

"Meet you there," he said breathlessly.

She smiled and pecked his lips again. "Okay. Ron, you can stop staring at the walls now. We're done here." She backed up and headed out as Ron turned around.

Harry still wore a smile even after he couldn't see her walking to the castle anymore. "She's amazing."

"Yeah, she's fine when she's not hexing you, I reckon," Ron said, picking up stray brooms and quaffles.

"Don't start that. You know she's great and an amazing player," Harry added, helping to straighten the benches.

"Now that I can agree with. Charlie will be pleased to hear it. She may be the one to carry on his legacy of being a great Weasley Quidditch player," Ron said.

Harry sighed. "Are we going to do this every bloody time? Weren't you paying attention today? You did a great job. I was really proud of you out there. You took what we discussed about your catching and you used it. You saved us a lot of time, and you're possibly the main reason why we won."

Ron blushed terribly and rubbed his neck. Harry knew that Ron didn't believe him, but he needed reassurance and praise. Ron could be an outstanding player when he believed in himself. "I don't know about all thatâ€¦" he said, looking sheepish.

Harry patted his arm. "Well, I do. Besides, if I thought anyone would cost us the game, I thought it would be Dean."

Ron gave him a look. "Why? Dean is really good."

"I'm not talking about his skill. I dunnoâ€¦I guess a small part of me thought he'd mess up just to get back at me," Harry confessed.

Ron chuckled. "Fucking hell, Harry, he's mad but he's not mental. Not that mental, anyway. He wouldn't do that just to get to you."

"Maybe but you never know. I really don't care about what he does, but I don't want him ruining it for the rest of the team and especially for you and Ginny," Harry said.

"What does she think?" Ron asked.

Harry closed the Quidditch trunk and nudged Ron to help him lift it. They carried it back to the shed. "I don't know. We don't really talk about Dean. I see them sort of speaking sometimes, but she never wants to bring it up. I don't either. It's too bloody complicated, and I'm too interested on making things right with Ginny and me. I honestly don't care about him."

"Hmm," was all Ron said as they pushed the trunk in the shed and picked up their brooms.

"What does that mean?" Harry asked. Ron shrugged. "Come on, Ron. If you have something to say, then just say it."

He shrugged again. "I don't know. It's just that you keep saying that you don't care about Dean, but you always have that look on your face when you see him. I know that look by now. It's the famous, I'm tough on the outside, but inside I really care because I'm a sensitive midget, look."

Harry shoved him but knew that he was right. As much as he didn't want to care about Dean, he still considered him a friend. "I don't know what to do. I didn't think it would take him this long to get over her."

"I don't see why not. Would you get over Ginny in a day or two?" Ron asked.

"No," Harry answered.

"Then why is it so hard to understand that Dean can't? He loved her, Harry. I mean he really loved her. He still does," Ron said.

"I know he does. I've heard it a million times. Shit, when did you get so much insight on people?" Harry asked annoyed.

Ron smirked. "You might be dating a Quidditch pro, but I'm with the girl who's probably written or at least read a million books on feelings and the meaning behind what every single bloody person does. I was bound to pick up on something."

"Then what should I do?" Harry asked.

"How the hell should I know? I'm not good with this stuff. I'm dealing with similar issues myself," Ron said, frowning slightly.

He noticed the slight elevation of his voice, signaling panic. "You mean with Hermione and Lavender? Are they fighting?"

"No, they're not fighting. Actually, Lavender is being really nice but for some reason it bothers Hermione," Ron explained.

"Maybe she thinks it's not sincere," Harry helped.

Ron sighed. "Yeah, that's sort of what she said, but it doesn't seem that way to me. If Lavender says that she wants to try and it looks like she's trying, then I don't see the point it taking it any further. Hermione wants to analyze everything, and I don't know why."

"You should talk to her," Harry said.

He shook his head. "No. I don't want to fight with her about it, and I know it'll happen if I say something. Things are great with us now, and I'm not going to fuck it up over something that's just in Mione's head."

Harry wanted to tell Ron that there was probably more to Hermione's theory than simply speculation, but he didn't want to fight with Ron either and they were finally back to the castle. Like Harry imagined, the Common Room was bursting with cheers and clapping from their house when they returned. Seamus hit his back. "There's the captain! Cheers to you, Harry!" He tossed chocolate frogs at him.

Ron snatched a couple and sat on the couch. "It's good to know that the rest of the team isn't being recognized here."

"You were fantastic, Ron!" Hermione said. He grinned widely and motioned her over with a finger. She slowly walked over to him and snuggled next to him on the couch. She kissed his cheeked. "So, what happens now?" she asked.

Harry sat on the arm of the chair that Katie was sitting in and looked at everyone who was watching him closely. "Well, whoever wins the next match will definitely go on to the finals. We're tied with Slytherin now so it's our last chance in the playoffs."

"Who do you think we'll play against?" a fifth year asked.

"Most likely Ravenclaw. They're a much better team than Hufflepuff this year and Cho is a lot faster, smarter, and skilled than Draco Malfoy is. He's fairly easy to take down. Cho—she'll be more of a competitor," Harry said honestly.

"That doesn't matter," said a voice from the crowd. Ginny pushed her way through the students and locked her eyes on him. She walked up to him and Harry could feel every bit of her feeling. It was incredible. "You're the best, Harry, and we all believe in you. I believe in you, always."

Before Harry could even process a smile or some sort of response, Ginny pressed her mouth to his, hard. He was so stunned by her gesture that all he could do was moan in surprise and kiss her back. He didn't know how long they held for but when she pulled away, all that he could see was her smile and her eyes. In that moment the only life Harry knew was Ginny, and he existed only because of her. Love couldn't begin to be enough to describe what he was feeling.

As the fog cleared from his mind, he could hear the catcalls and cheers from his fellow Gryffindors. He could even hear Ron trying to convince anyone that there was nothing to see. It didn't matter. He was still completely attached to Ginny. She took hand. "Do you want to get out of here?"

"Yeah," he croaked.

Harry was still in awe as Ginny lead him out of the room and down the staircase. He let her lead him to the corridor near the library. There were only a few empty classrooms and closets. When she found a spot near the end of the hallway, she pushed him against a wall and snogged him roughly. He placed his hands on her waist and moved himself off the wall. He turned them around and backed her against it. She broke out of the kiss and gasped. "Oh, Harry, I've been waiting for this ever since the match ended."

He licked her bottom lip and began to kiss her neck. "I beat you. I've been waiting for this since our morning warm up. You were so incredible out there. You're brilliant, Ginny."

"Then I must take after you. You were a fucking star today, and you destroyed Malfoy's arse. You got the snitch so bloody fast that I could barely understand what was going on. Hmm, Harry, you're perfect." Ginny words came out as pants and her hands dug into his arms and shoulders.

Harry blushed and sweat coated him completely. "I didn't know Quidditch was such a turn on for you."

"It is and especially when you play. It's always been this way," she said.

He tugged on her braid and brought their mouths close. "Well, I could barely focus for a while. Seeing you play does something to me. You're just so good. You're so bloody talented. It drives me mad."

She gently tugged on his lip with her teeth. "I reckon Quidditch is a turn on for you as well."

Harry moaned. He couldn't keep it in. He pressed his lips against hers again and pushed his tongue through. Ginny let him in and wrapped her arms around his waist. It felt good. A heavy snog with Ginny after a Quidditch victory was something he'd always wanted to experience, and it was better than he ever imagined it could be. They snogged again and again and longer and faster, only breaking apart for air. He didn't want it to end. He never wanted to let her go. However, she did eventually.

Ginny pulled away from his mouth and put her fingers to his lips. "Harry."

"Yeah?" he asked, excited about the words he thought he would hear next.

"We should start heading back," she answered.

He opened his eyes. It wasn't the response he was waiting on. "Did you hear something?"

"No," she said softly. "But we should start heading back. We've been out here a long time, and Ron's hair is probably on fire by now."

Harry frowned. "Since when do you care about what Ron thinks?"

She looked away. "And since when do you not?" She moved from his hold and straightened out her clothes. "Look, I'm getting tired. It's been a long day."

"So what does that have to do with this? What are you trying to say?" he asked. He didn't want to sound like an arse, but it was hard to feel and translate different ideas.

"I'm not trying to say anything. I want to go back. Is that a problem? Am I not allowed to?" she snapped.

"Ginny, don't talk like that. You know that's not what I mean. I'm justâ€¦confused. I thoughâ€¦I dunnoâ€¦" he trailed off, feeling a little embarrassed about what he thought she wanted.

Ginny softened and shook her head. "Yeah, I know. I know what you thought. I did, too, but we said we'd take it slow, yeah?"

"Yeah, we did," he said, trying his best to smile. He knew it was a good idea for them to go slow and he wanted nothing more than for Ginny to feel comfortable, but he couldn't completely ignore

the desire he had and the reminder of it in his trousers. There was only so much he could control at sixteen and when she pushed, he assumed that he was supposed to push back.

She must have sensed that something was wrong. Her subdued demeanor only worsened. "Actually, I think I'm going to find Luna. She usually takes a walk at this time."

"You don't have to do that. I'm sorry, okay? Is that what you need to hear?" he asked.

"Harry, you haven't done anything wrong so you don't need to apologize. I don't need you to be sorry. I want to go find Luna, and talk to her about some potions homework. I have OWLs coming up, too, you know." She didn't give him time to come back with something. She quickly kissed him. "I love you."

"I love you, too," he breathed.

He took his time going back to the room. Not only because he didn't want to hear Ron's temper but also because he was in too much perplexity to walk straight. He didn't know how things with Ginny could turn from her praising him to her not wanting to be around him. He hadn't meant to make her feel pressured into having sex. Then again, he wasn't sure if that's why she was even upset.

He walked through the portal and noticed that the room was mostly empty and that Ron wasn't waiting on him. In fact, he was in a slow yet intense lip lock with Hermione who was sitting on his lap. He cleared his throat and she pulled away. "Harry, how long have you been there?" she asked, turning pink and getting off Ron.

Ron whined slightly and pulled on her collar. "Get back over here."

She slapped his hand away. "Not now, Ronald."

"You don't have to stop for me. I can go up to the room," Harry said.

"No, it's fine. When Hermione says it's over, there's no point arguing with her," Ron said, pouting slightly.

She took his hand and laced her fingers with it. "I didn't say it was over. I simply said not now, Mr. Keeper."

Ron grinned. "I thought I was Mr. All Knowing."

"I'm sorry. You just have so many names that I can't keep up. I try my best," she answered.

"And as always your best is good enough," he said gently. Harry watched as they smiled and gazed at each other as if sharing some inside joke that he couldn't understand. He felt a little uncomfortable so he decided to sit on the floor in front of them. The movement seemed to break them away from their private moment.

"So, where's Ginny?" Hermione asked.

"And you better not have left her to clean up the mess in the bathroom or wherever you two went smiling off to," Ron added.

"She went to find Luna," Harry answered simply. Ron and Hermione shared a look.

"Umâ€¦you wanted Luna there, too, mate? Is Neville in on this as well?" Ron asked.

"No, that's not what I mean. It was only me and Ginny like it should have been but randomly she left to go find Luna," Harry repeated.

"Harry, is something wrong?" Hermione asked. He looked down at his hands that were dirty and cracked. He still hadn't taken a shower since the match ended. He had been so busy thinking about Ginny to notice how he was still in his Quidditch robes.

"Harry," Ron said loudly.

"Yeah?" Harry answered, finally looking up.

Hermione moved from the couch and sat next to him. As always her eyes were so full of concern. "Harry, what happened? What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. I'm worn out and so is she. That's all. I should go shower," he said, getting up. He didn't meet Hermione's eyes as he spoke.

"Oh, you can't just walk away like this. Harry, obviously something happened." Hermione looked toward Ron for support. "Ron."

He shifted and looked at Harry. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine," Harry said.

Ron then looked back to Hermione. "Well, there you have it."

Hermione threw up her hands in defeat and Harry gave a nod before heading up to the dorm. Only Seamus was inside. "Well, I didn't think you'd turn up till morning."

"Reckon you were wrong," Harry said.

"You know Ron could have shit galleons, don't you? His face when you and Ginny first started was great. Please, do it again and again just so I can see that look from him," Seamus said.

Harry rolled his eyes and stripped off his robes. "Where is everyone?"

"You probably ran into Ron downstairs. He and Hermione are going at it like fucking horny cats or something. Neville was here with

Luna earlier but they left. Probably to do some of what Ron and Hermione are up to. I wonder if he's finally given her the big-

"Wait," Harry interrupted. "Neville left with Luna?"

"Yeah, she snuck in during the party. You probably didn't notice her because Ginny was all over you. She left with Neville not long after you left with Ginny," Seamus explained.

Harry's eyes swiftly shot to Dean's empty bed. "What about Dean?"

"I haven't seen him since the match. He told me that he wanted to shower and be alone for a while. Why?" Seamus asked intrigued.

Harry thought about it. He didn't know what he was getting at or what he was thinking but a small, sickening feeling took over. "No reason," he said quietly, sitting on his bed and closing the curtains.

Harry didn't sleep at all that night, at least, not until Dean finally came back into the room much later and Neville there after, quietly explaining to Ron how he had been with Luna all night.

The next morning Harry, Ginny, Ron, and Hermione were in the dorm studying. Harry, Ron, and Hermione all had an exam in herbology approaching and of course Ginny had OWLs. All night Harry had been thinking about what happened and about what Ginny had really done after their parting. He couldn't help but wonder and look at Dean from time to time. Nothing seemed different about him. He was still quiet and not his old self, but a bit of him did seem brighter as he left for breakfast. Ginny also was in a better mood, and she acted as if nothing was wrong. She had kissed him and said good morning like she always did.

"Hermione, how long is your essay so far?" Ron asked from his bed.

Hermione looked up from her book. "Four pages but I'm not even halfway finished with my last body paragraph. I'll have to shorten my conclusion, and it's going to be a nightmare to do so."

Ron rubbed his eyes and groaned. "I just hit page two. For fuck sake, how do you know so much?"

She moved his hands away and smiled. "Try reading more and swearing less. It's not a mystery." She dropped the book in his lap.

"Watch the goods," Ron breathed, shielding his crotch from the heavy book.

"You really shouldn't complain about one essay. I have something due in all of my classes," Ginny said, flipping through her notes. She looked up at Harry. "Harry, how did you get through this?" There was light in her large brown eyes and her freckly



face was so pretty. Even when he was confused as all hell, she made him feel electricity.

"Hermione and lots of guessing," he answered.

Hermione hit her fist against Ron's mattress. "Will you two boys stop giving Ginny the wrong idea? OWLs aren't that terrible as long as you focus, study, and do your best. I didn't take the tests for you. You did it yourself."

"Yeah, but I'm sure it helped to have you around," Ginny muttered, chewing off the head of a chocolate frog. "Urgh, I can't eat any more of this. Ron?"

"You know it," he answered, leaning forward and opening his mouth wide.

Ginny closed an eye to aim and tossed the frog at him. It landed directly into Ron's mouth and he clapped his hands. "Score! Nice shot, Gin."

"Got a lot of practice in yesterday," she answered.

"That's rude not to mention dangerous. She could have hit your eye or your head or something," Hermione said.

Ron chuckled. "It was chocolate not a brick, Hermione. We've been doing it since we were little. I think we have the technique down by now."

"Even if we didn't you have nothing to worry about, Hermione. Hitting Ron's head wouldn't damage the air that's inside," Ginny cheeked.

Harry laughed and Ron scowled at her. "Why are you in here? No one invited you."

"Oh, don't mind her, sweetheart. She knows how smart you are." Hermione said sweetly to Ron. She rubbed off the bit of chocolate that was on his chin with her thumb. "You're always such a mess."

"Care to fix that for me?" he asked before kissing her.

Harry exhaled deeply and turned away from his snogging best friends. Ginny tapped his knee. "Maybe we should go downstairs. I highly doubt they'll realize we've left."

"Sounds good," he whispered, getting up from his bed and packing up his books. Ron and Hermione were still snogging when they left the room.

"I swear it. Ron kisses Hermione almost as often as he kissed Lavender, and Hermione actually lets him," Ginny said, setting up their things at a table by the window.

"I know. Hermione always said that she'd never get like that. She found the behavior obnoxious and immature," Harry answered, sitting down.

She smiled at him. "Well, I guess it's a different story when you're finally with the person you're meant to kiss. Actually, I know it is."

Hearing her say that and seeing the look on her face made some of Harry's suspicion disappear. However, it wasn't enough to keep his thoughts at bay. "Can we talk about what happened yesterday?"

Her smile dropped. "Yes, we can. I need to say something about it."

"Well, let me go first. Ginny, I know we agreed to take things slower than we have in the past. I completely agree, and I don't have a problem with it. But yesterday was amazing and after the win and after you kissed like that in front of everyone, I just felt everything and I don't know. I thought you were feeling it, too, and it was what you wanted. I don't know how to explain it."

"You don't have to think of the words. You're right. I felt it, too. I felt every bit of it," Ginny said, looking him up and down.

Harry's neck heated up at her double meaning. "Yeah, um, about that. Please, don't think that I want to push things. I don't. Whenever we get heated like that, it's not a requirement in my eyes for us to shag. I just got really into it yesterday and if I made it seem that way, I'm sorry."

Ginny looked at him in a guilty way. "I should be the one apologizing. I didn't mean to make you feel like I was mad at you, and I know that I helped bring it on and just left. I've always been like that with you, and I don't always know how to control it. When you," Ginny looked around then leaned forward, "when you touch me and kiss me like you did, sometimes it's as if all I can think about is sex and you taking me there."

Harry swallowed hard. It was a blessing and a curse that his girlfriend was so frank and assertive. "Yeah, I know what you mean."

She licked her lips slowly and ran her fingers through her hair. The flaming locks glided through her pale fingers and only added to her sex appeal. "But I don't want it to be all about sex again. I don't want it to seem like that's the only thing that connects us or keep us from yelling at each other."

"I don't either. I honestly don't want to just shag you against the wall again. I want it to be different this time, too, and I want there to be more. If I was mad about anything yesterday, it wasn't about us not doing it. It was about how you ended things. You wouldn't talk to me or let me know what was going on with you. I didn't know what to think all night." Harry put his hand on her knee and rubbed his palm over it. "You have to talk to me."

"I know and I'm sorry. I guess I'm so used to doing everything on my own and agreeing only to myself. This takes some getting used to," Ginny confessed.

"I'm sure Dean helped," Harry said.

She shook her head. "Not the way you do."

He didn't want to say it. It wasn't necessary or the right time but his brain wasn't fast enough for his mouth. "Maybe that's because I care about you more."

Ginny turned away from him and moved his hand away. "Harry, this isn't a competition."

Not much was said after that. The two of them got back to work and Ginny did not seem in the mood to hear an apology. Harry's stale mood only increased when the portrait hole opened and Dean walked through. He stopped by their table. "Hey."

"Hi," Ginny said with a small smile.

"Hello," Harry said slowly, looking from him to Ginny.

Dean stood there awkwardly for a moment before adding, "Well, I'll leave you to it."

"Be careful up there. We left Ron and Hermione alone," Ginny said.

"He's not using one of his passes either," Harry added.

"Cheers," Dean mocked before heading upstairs.

Ginny chuckled and went back to her work. Harry stared at her. "That was the most Dean and I have talked civilly in a long time."

"Good," she answered. She noticed his face. "Right, Harry?"

"Yeah, it's good." He finally found the courage to say what had been on his mind. "Did you find Luna last night?"

"Um, no. She must have gone off somewhere to be with Neville. I ended up taking a shower and going to bed. I was a lot more tired than I thought," she explained.

"You didn't see anyone else?" Harry asked.

Ginny looked up from her work once again. "No, why?"

"No reason. I was just wondering. I went straight up to my room so I didn't know if you came back early or not. Luna was with Neville at night. He said so," Harry said, doing his best to hint to Ginny about what he suspected.

She didn't seem to understand. "Great. I'm sure she'll tell me all about it tomorrow." Harry exhaled and sat back in his chair. He didn't know what else to do.

"Why didn't you tell us that you were coming down here?" Hermione asked from the staircase. She and Ron joined them at the table. Both were pink and lively.

"We did but you obviously didn't hear over the sound of your snogging," Ginny said.

"And there would have been nothing wrong with continuing it, but Dean came in of course, the bloody git," Ron said.

"And it was for our own good. We can't keep taking study breaks like that, Ron. We should be studying like Harry and Ginny," Hermione said, pulling her books out.

"I doubt they were studying," Ron said.

"W were," Harry said dully.

"Well, that's your loss isn't it, mate?" Ron cheeked.

"Shut up, Ron! Some of us actually want to make good grades!" Ginny shot.

He raised an eyebrow. "What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing is wrong with me. I'm just sick of you always finding everything so fucking unimportant. You're my older brother. You're supposed to set an example on what to do instead of what not to do. It almost makes me miss Percy being around here!" she snapped.

Ron's pink faced turned red and he looked away. Hermione looked at Ginny in an almost glaring way. "That was completely unnecessary."

Ginny packed up her books for the second time and stood. "Well, someone had to say it."

She stormed off and Harry quickly got up to catch up with her. "I'll talk to her," he said as an afterthought. He ran after Ginny who was almost gliding above the floor. He took her arm. "Hey, what's going on?"

"I know. I know. I shouldn't have said that to Ron. He didn't deserve it, and I'll apologize," she rushed, sounding nasally.

"I don't think he minds nearly as much as Hermione probably does, and I honestly don't care about that right now." He was finally able to stop her from walking. She turned to him and her eyes were wet. He felt as if the wind got knocked out of him. "Ginny, what is the matter with you? Why are you crying?"

She sniffed and wiped her eyes. "I'm sorry. I know Ron didn't deserve that. I shouldn't have said it and especially the part about Percy."

"Not about him. What's wrong with you?" Harry asked gently.

Ginny shook her head and let out an irritated breath. "I'll tell you again, Harry, I don't cry. I never cry, but I think I've cried more this year than I have in every other year put together."

"I know. I know how strong you are. Now, please, talk to me," he urged.

Ginny took another breath and looked at him. "It's just seeing Ron and Hermione made me really angry..."

Harry nodded for her to continue. "I'm not going anywhere."

She smiled sadly. "Seeing Ron and Hermione so happy and in love and kissing all over each other made me angry and feel uncomfortable. I know that tomorrow Luna will go in detail about whatever she did with Neville and how perfect it was and how sweet he was. All I'll be able to do is sit there and listen to it all." Ginny sniffed and rubbed her eyes roughly. "Don't get me wrong. I'm happy for Luna. She's my best friend, and I'm really happy that she found a nice guy who understands her and enjoys the things she does. I'm really happy for Ron and Hermione, too. Hermione is great and of course Ron deserves to be happy. I've always said that. I love that she makes my brother feel good butâ€¦!"

Harry squeezed her shoulder as encouragement. "Yeah?"

"But seeing him and Hermione and Luna and Neville makes me jealous as well. All my life I've had to take second-hand things and watch everyone else be happy with new things that they wanted. Well, for the first time in my life I have exactly what I want and I don't have to share. I have you as my boyfriend, and I love you so much and you're amazing but it's almost still not enough. There's still something between us, and I don't know how to fix it. I hate not being able to fix this. I feel like we can be so much more than what we are but we're not."

Hearing her say his thoughts made him feel more sane. "I know what you mean."

"Something is in the way, though, and I don't know how to move it. I need to move it, Harry. I want us to be all the time like how we are when we're playing. I want us to be the best and completely connected. I want us to be happy, Harry. I want us to be happy like Ron and Hermione are. I want to look like Ron." Ginny let out a deep breath.

Harry was floored. He didn't know where to start. Everything he was feeling, she had said. There was nothing more to add. All he could do was pull her close and hug her tightly. "I know exactly how you feel. You're not the only one who's felt like that around

Ron and Hermione. I thought there was something wrong with me for getting angry. I want you to be happy, too. I want us to be happy. I want to fix everything, but I don't know how. I love you, Ginny. That's the one thing that I know without having to try or think about it."

"I love you, too. I love you so much and I want you. It's even more than that." Ginny pulled away a little to look at him. "Harry, I need you so much. I need more than I thought I ever could."

He ran a finger under her eye and brushed away the dampness. His chest filled with warm feeling and his throat tightened. "I don't want to be without you ever again. I don't think I could handle it. We'll make this work, okay? We'll fix whatever it is, together. No rush for anything else. I told you. I'm staying here with you."

Ginny nodded and smiled. "Good. I don't want you to go anywhere. I want you to kiss me. Please, kiss me," she pleaded.

Harry held her even tighter and kissed her with everything that he had. He wanted to make her better and to make them better. He felt like an asshole for even considering that Ginny may have been lying to him about Dean. Ginny was his. She loved him and she wanted to be with him. If he ever wanted things to work with Ginny, he had to trust her. However, in the back of mind, even as they snogged and Ginny whispered every time they broke apart that she cared about him, he couldn't help but wonder.

Harry had spent a majority of his year learning how to lie and hide things. It was naïve to believe that others weren't doing the same.

\*\*\*\* Hmm, another "what's going on?" chapter! I'm not going to say anything about Harry, Ginny, or Dean. You'll have to read and find out! Hehe! Yes, this one was lighter in terms of H/G but obviously I couldn't completely make it happy. With H/G there's just too much going on for there to be happy-happy only, lol.

Now, I can talk about Ron and Hermione. I know there were in this chap a lot considering it was H/G centric (which I'm sure you all loved) anyway, lol. However, I just want to say that it's actually pretty fun writing R/Hr from Harry's pov. It gives a very 2D look at their relationship. It can be fun and light without all the emotion and hidden feelings, lol.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this! I did my best to sort of recreate The Kiss that happened in HBP between H/G after Gryffindor won but I doubt it's even close to what JK created, lol. I tried my best as a casual H/G fan but there's only so much steam I have! No matter, thanks for reading and REVIEW!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 39

Thanks for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Hermione quickly exhaled before Ron's lips covered hers again. She gripped the sides of his waist and lifted her neck as his tongue went deeper into her mouth. It made her whimper. Without any other real experience, she was confident that Ron was the king of snogging. She was amazed at how much control and strength he possessed when they were close, yet it was always in a gentle manner. He broke away again and kissed across her jaw. His tongue ever so lightly grazed her skin.

"Mmm, that feels so good," she purred.

"Trust me. It's better for me than it is for you. You taste like honey or peaches or something. You're so bloody sweet," he whispered, moving down to her neck.

Hermione bit her lip and closed her eyes as he ravished her. She tried to wrap her arms firmly around him, but he was too high up. He had his knee in between her legs and they weren't actually touching bodies. It was slowly becoming more and more difficult and annoying. "Ron, come closer."

He looked up from her neck. She opened her legs wider and he slowly settled between them. When she felt the full weight of him she automatically arched her back to feel him. They both gasped. "I reckon it's okay this time," he said.

"It was okay last time," she answered with a smile. He leaned down and kissed her. This time, he pushed into her as he did. Hermione moaned in his mouth and gripped his waist again. Even through their jeans, she could feel Ron and how hard he was. He pushed his firmness into her repeatedly, and she had to stop snogging to catch her breath. She was tender and wet from him and every thrust against her middle set a shockwave of pleasure all through her body. She couldn't believe all this was possible with what little they were doing. It made her think of the feelings that would arise when they actually got serious.

Ron's face was slightly red, and his eyes were heavy lidded. "You feel that?"

"Of course I do," she said breathlessly, moving her fingers across his mouth.

He pushed into her again and groaned. "It's all because of you. Your smell, your taste, and the way you feel makes me like this." He pushed into her once more, harder this time. "You make me this way."

Hermione gazed at him and tried to keep her breathing and heart steady. Ron's voice dripped in sexual heat, but there was something so loving and honest about it as well. She moved up into him and caused them both to moan. "You should feel what you're doing to me."

Ron's eyes widened. "I'd love to," he said, slowly licking his lips. She shuddered and bit her lip again. She blushed slightly at their implications. Everything was intense between them and she wanted to go further even though she was nervous.

Someone knocked on the door and her composure changed. She tapped Ron's arse so he'd move off her. She heard him whine as she fixed her hair and shirt. "Maybe we should tell them to go on without us," he said.

She shook her head but secretly wanted to. "No, we said that we'd go, and I think Harry and Ginny could use some cheering up."

"Fine," Ron breathed, going to the door.

"Sorry to interrupt," Harry said as he and Ginny walked through.

"It's okay. We were just getting ready to go," Hermione answered.

"Ron, mum sent ours letters together, again." Ginny handed him a letter and gave him a smile. Hermione knew she probably still felt guilty for snapping at him and comparing him to Percy. It was one of the few times when Hermione actually felt anything ill willed toward her.

"Has she written to you lately about anything important?" Ron asked.

"No, why?" Ginny said.

He shrugged. "Well, she wrote me a couple of days ago asking where we'd be today. I think she may stop by or something."

"She hasn't said anything to me, but I doubt something's wrong. We would've already heard about it," Ginny assured.

"All right, let's go. I figure Hogsmeade won't get overly crowded for about another hour. That gives us time to shop," Harry said. He put his arm around Ginny and led her out of the room.

Ron grinned at Hermione and held out his hand. "Come on, love. Let's be immature and obnoxious. Your favorite things, yeah?" She laughed and took it. Butterflies swarmed her stomach as they touched. She loved that Ron always gave her butterflies.

The four of them walked around Hogsmeade and Hermione couldn't keep a smile off her face. She was happy. Ron was happy, and Harry and Ginny both were happy. For so long she didn't know if the four of them would ever reach a level of contentment and normality again. "So, where are we eating?" Harry asked.

"I don't know. Let's go somewhere that has bacon sandwiches," Ron said.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "Bacon sandwiches?"



"It's his favorite meal. Well, any food is his favorite meal but bacon sandwiches are at the very top. I think some place by the bat accessories shop might serve them," Ginny explained.

"All right, well, why don't you two go down there to look, and we'll meet you down there. We want to go by the Quidditch shop," Harry said. He took Ginny's hand and held it tightly, and they shared a look.

Hermione's already wide smile grew. She knew they probably weren't just going to shop. "Okay, have fun."

"Don't get lost," Ron added, frowning slightly.

"Come on, Ron," she said pulling him away. "You think they're doing okay?" she asked as they too held hands and walked down the streets of Hogsmeade.

"They look fine to me. Harry seems better," he answered.

"I just wish there was something I could do or we could do. I know they're better, but I also know that this situation with Dean must be stressful," Hermione said.

"They'll figure it out. Dean will get over it, and things will calm down. I don't think there's anything that we can do. You can't fix everyone," Ron said.

"I know," she said softly, hating the feeling of having no control.

"Look, there it is," he said, pointing to the small restaurant. As they got closer Hermione noticed a tall, skinny figure with long hair coming out. She didn't even have time to turn around. Lavender spotted them and waved.

"Hi guys!" she said, running up to them.

"Hey, Lavender," Ron answered with a slight smile.

"Hi," was all Hermione was able to say.

The three of them stood in silence. Hermione noticed Lavender eyeing Ron as he pretended to pull lint out of his jeans pocket. "So, what are you two up to?" Lavender finally asked.

"Lunch," Ron said.

Lavender giggled and touched his arm. "Oh, of course you're looking for a place to eat, Ronnie. We just finished at Martin's down there. It's great."

"We?" Hermione asked.

Lavender's smile faded. "Cormac and I. We had a lunch date."

Hermione couldn't hold back her chuckle. The two of them together was entirely too cliché. "That's great. It's nice that you're here with him."

"It's not what you think, Hermione," Lavender said firmly. "He asked me if I wanted to meet him today for lunch. That's all."

"Lavender, you don't know what I think. Whatever you say is it, I'm sure it is," Hermione said.

"Right, he asked me for lunch and that's all. I mean you should know how it goes. Who would know Cormac's actions better than you, right?" Lavender asked.

"That's enough, Lavender. Don't talk to Hermione that way," Ron said to her.

"I'm sorry, Ronnie," Lavender said, trying to look sincere.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Oh, please."

"Let's not do this, okay? It's over now," he shot. Hermione shook her head to keep from getting angry and Lavender rolled her eyes. Ron shifted between them and cleared his throat. "So, do you know if they have bacon sandwiches there?"

"Actually, I did see them on the menu. Neither of us ordered any but what we did have was good. I think it's safe," Lavender said sweetly.

"Great." He took Hermione's hand again. "Well, if you'll excuse us, we're going to try it out."

"Have fun," Lavender said. "Oh! I'm glad I ran into you. I almost forgot. There's a new shipment in at the Quidditch store. They've got a few Cannon items."

Ron's eyes grew. "Really? You went there?"

"Cormac wanted to go, and I got so used to going with you. I saw the stuff and thought about you. It might be worth taking a look," she said.

Hermione felt a little nauseous at the way Lavender spoke to Ron and how excited he was at her news. She didn't know what to say. "Yeah, maybe. Thanks," he said.

"Well, I better go meet Patty. Have fun and sorry for earlier, Hermione," Lavender said with a smile.

"It's okay," Hermione said slowly. She gave Ron's arm a squeeze and started to walk in the opposite direction. Hermione looked back and Lavender turned around again and grinned. It was eerie and bothersome. She felt a pulse of frustration.

"Come on," Ron said softly. Hermione was so upset that she didn't even say anything to the waiter as they sat down to order drinks.

Lavender so easily got under her skin these days. "Hermione," he said.

"Yes," she said, looking up from her hands.

He sighed. "I'm sorry about Lavender. She shouldn't have said what she did about Cormac."

"I don't care about what she said," she rushed.

"Then what is it? Why are you upset again?" he asked.

"I'm not upset and please don't say, again. You make it sound so bad," she said.

"What do you want me to say, then? What do you want me to do?" Ron asked.

"Nothing. I'm fine, really. I'm not upset. I'm just—can we please not talk about it anymore? I'm having a really good time, and I want it to stay that way. What she said doesn't bother me, really. I promise," she said, taking his hand.

Ron seemed to believe her, but she could tell there was something more that he wanted to say. However, he folded. "Okay, whatever you want."

"Good. Let's just enjoy the day. I need to freshen up, though. I'll be right back," Hermione said. She got up and went to the bathroom. She washed her hands and took several deep breaths. She was upset, but she didn't know why. Hermione always felt like she had pretty thick skin but for some reason Lavender knew how to get under it. All her smiles, politeness, and touches bothered her to no end. It didn't matter. It couldn't matter anymore. She took one more deep breath and left the bathroom.

She froze when she got close to her table. Ron was standing up and talking to Mrs. Weasley. Hermione rushed over. "Is everything okay?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," he said nervously.

Mrs. Weasley smiled. "There's nothing wrong, dear. I've already said that."

"Then why are you here?" Ron asked.

"Don't you remember me writing you and asking you where you'd be today?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

"Yes, but I didn't know you were actually thinking about coming. Ginny isn't here," Ron said.

"I know she's not. I ran into her and Harry up the street. They said that you would be here," Mrs. Weasley explained.

"Do you want me to give you and Ron some time?" Hermione asked.

Mrs. Weasley eyed her carefully. "I'm here to see you, dear."

"Oh," Hermione said, her pitch rising.

"Mum, she didn't do anything," Ron said.

"Ronald Weasley, you always assume the worst. Not every visit has to be disciplinary. Not everyone gets in trouble all the time," Mrs. Weasley said.

"Hey, I've been good this year!" he defended.

"I know and you should keep it that way. Now, do you think you can give Hermione and I half an hour or so?" she asked.

Ron quickly looked to Hermione. She shrugged slightly but nodded. "Okay, um, I guess I'll check that shipment in at the Quidditch store, then."

Mrs. Weasley patted his cheek. "That's my boy. Go have fun. She's in good hands."

Ron nodded and gave Hermione one more look. "I'll be back. Umâ€¦yeahâ€¦" He slowly walked out of the store and took his time passing the window.

"He's going to pop something one of these days, with how much he worries," Mrs. Weasley said, sitting down.

Hermione sat across from her. "Ron's pretty laid back. He doesn't worry that much, trust me."

"I know but when he does worry it can get a little overbearing. His father is that way, too. Ron thinks that he always has to be the protector. Even if it means protecting his girlfriend from his own poor mother," Mrs. Weasley cheeked.

She laughed. "I see what you mean. So, I'm not in trouble?"

"No, not at all." Mrs. Weasley gave her a smile. "So, how's school?"

"Fine. I'm back where I need to be. With all the work that needs to be done with the graduation ceremony, I have a lot of duties to do. I think it's putting me in good standing for Head Girl," Hermione explained.

"That's great, dear. I'm sure you'll get it. Ron talks all the time about how you go above and beyond your responsibilities," Mrs. Weasley said.

"He talks about me?" Hermione asked.

Mrs. Weasley gave her a look. "Of course he does. He always has since first year."

"First year? We weren't exactly friend in the beginning," Hermione said.

"It doesn't matter. Even then I could tell there was something. He'd always write about the bossy girl or the bookworm or the really smart girl." Mrs. Weasley chuckled. "He would go on and on about how you did something really smart or really brave or really annoying, but it would always end the same. He thought you were cool in a way, and that's a pretty big compliment that an eleven-year-old boy can make about a girl."

"Wow, I had no idea. He never told me," Hermione said.

"Well, it's not common for boys to publicly announce that they write to their mum's about who they fancy. Just know that over the years you went from bossy girl to Hermione to my friend Hermione to my best friend Hermione and now to my girlfriend. Ron's come a long way in terms of writing style," Mrs. Weasley said.

She felt her spirits lift, and her cheeks flush. "I talk about Ron to my parents. They want to formally meet him this summer."

"That's a great idea. We all really do need to get together," Mrs. Weasley said.

"I'll tell them," Hermione answered.

Mrs. Weasley grew more serious. "That's actually why I'm here."

"To talk about my parents?" Hermione asked.

"Not exactly about them but about what they've taught you," Mrs. Weasley said. "Now, I've done some research and if I'm correctâ€¦you know about condoms right?"

Hermione choked on her water. "Condoms, Mrs. Weasley?"

"Am I saying it wrong? Isn't that the little rubber bag type things that guys are supposed to put on their penis' to somehow stop girls from getting pregnant? As if it wouldn't slip off or break or something," Mrs. Weasley explained in bewilderment.

"No, no, you've got it right. Yes, I know about condoms and birth control but Mrs. Weasley," Hermione looked around for a moment, "Ron and I aren't having sex. You don't have to worry."

Mrs. Weasley shook her head. "Oh, Hermione, dear, I'm a mother. Of course I'll worry."

"No, honestly, you don't have to because even if we wanted to, I don't have condoms or birth control," Hermione said.

"So, you don't plan on having sex with Ron?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

Hermione felt her entire face burn. She had the talk with her mum but being in the medical field, it was clinical and very informative. Plus, she was only thirteen at the time and the questions had to deal with future experiences, not present ones. "Well, I didn't say thatâ€¦"

Mrs. Weasley reached across the table and put a hand over hers. "Hermione, there's nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about. You're seventeen years old, and I know how much you care about Ron and how much he cares about you. I'm not that old. I know how things can work around a coed boarding school. Arthur and I used to go here remember? We used toâ€¦well, you don't have seven kids without years of practice before hand."

She laughed and felt herself ease some. "So I'm notâ€¦I don't knowâ€¦"

"My dear, it takes a lot more than wanting to be romantic with the man you love to make you what I think you're getting at. If it makes you feel any better, I'm not singling you out. I had this talk with Ginny this past summer when I realized that she and Dean were serious. I didn't give her a blessing to have sex or anything, but I informed her. I'd rather her be safe just in case it happens than tell her she can't and assume that it won't. I'm really glad I did. Now that she's with Harry, who knows, right?" Mrs. Weasley said.

Hermione could only nod. She didn't know if Ginny had told her mum about her sleeping with Harry over holiday. "Right, I completely understand."

"Good. Arthur gave Ron the talk as well. So, he might actually have a leg up on you when it comes to this, unless you've been reading. I'm not sure what your parents know about how we use protection," Mrs. Weasley said.

"I don't think they know anything. I'm usually the one explaining things to them and wellâ€¦I've looked at some different books, but I've never really put a lot of time into learning anything," Hermione said.

"That's okay, dear. That's why I wanted to see you. I want you to know how it works, and I want you to be smart about your decisions," Mrs. Weasley said.

"I have been. Ron and I have been going a good pace," she said.

Mrs. Weasley smiled. "That sounds like Ron. On the outside he probably appears really indifferent about everything, but I bet that's not how it is on the inside. It's a Weasley male trait. They're all very passionate. I've learned through experience and stories at family reunions."

Hermione laughed again. Though embarrassed, she loved how open and honest Mrs. Weasley was being. She was also happy that she was being treated like an adult. "So, what do I need to know?"

Mrs. Weasley pulled out a tube of clear liquid and a couple of thin books. "We have two forms of contraceptives. There's a potion that men take and it looks like this." She handed Hermione the tube.

She looked around again before quickly turning back to it. It almost looked like water but it was slightly thicker. She popped the top and took a whiff. "It doesn't smell like anything."

"But it tastes terrible. It's only good for one use. It lasts up to a couple of hours depending on how much is taken. Ron should drink the entire dose if you two want the full time. I have the ingredients here in this book along with some tips and possible side effects if the potion isn't brewed properly," Mrs. Weasley said.

Hermione skimmed the contents and was already itching to take notes. "Thank you."

"It should always be clear and odorless. I'll tell you that up front. If it's got even a little color to it or smell, it's wasn't made right. It's the same with the taste. It should taste bad. When you brew it the first time don't hesitate to try it yourself. It won't harm you, but it won't help either. It's just so you'll know," Mrs. Weasley explained.

"Okay, I will. What about for women?" she asked eagerly.

"That, of course, is a little trickier. There's a spell. It can be done verbally or non-verbally. While it does last 24 hours, there isn't a visual sign that it's working. It's something you feel," Mrs. Weasley explained.

"I'll feel it working?" Hermione asked.

Mrs. Weasley pointed her wand to her lower stomach. "You point your wand tip about here and say the spell. If it works, you'll feel a slight tingle in your groin area. It's not painful or very strong, but you should feel the tingle. If you try it and you don't feel it, don't say the spell again. You'll have to wait. I say try the spell at least once a day before you finally get comfortable with it and the feeling. I have an instruction book on that, too."

"It sounds complicated," she said.

"It is at first because you're not sure if it worked or not. Don't assume that it did. Have Ron take the potion until you're absolutely sure that you can do it. It's not hard, but it might take a few tries. However, knowing you, you'll get it the first time," Mrs. Weasley assured.

"I'm not so sure. So, either one or the other?" Hermione said.

"Yes, you only need one. Just remember that the potion only lasts two hours, so take more as needed," Mrs. Weasley said.

"Where do I get the ingredients?" she asked.

"You can get them here or in Diagon Alley. The school has made sure not to have everything you need. You can buy ready-made potion, too, but I've always liked the satisfaction of seeing it

done in person. It always made me feel more confident," Mrs. Weasley explained.

"How long are the potions good for?" Hermione asked.

"Depends. Two months is typical. A good way to check is by shaking it. If you see bubbles, it's too weak and shouldn't be used," Mrs. Weasley said.

"There's so much information and things to remember," Hermione said, putting the books and potion in her bag.

"I know. It seems like a lot but as time goes on, it becomes second nature. The potion only takes about eight minutes to make including setting time, and the spell is easy once you get it down. Don't try to rush into learning. Talk to Ron about everything and learn together. He should already know how to make the potion. Arthur walked him through it," Mrs. Weasley said.

"Good. I certainly will talk to him," she said.

"That's great to hear. It's a partnership and something you two should go through together. There shouldn't be any surprises if you both listen to each other and take things as they come," Mrs. Weasley said.

Hermione nodded, feeling so much going on in her head. "Mrs. Weasley, can I ask you something?"

"Of course, ask anything you want. That's why I'm here," Mrs. Weasley encouraged.

Hermione let out a deep breath. "Well, in any of his letters, has Ron ever mentioned if heâ€¦might have slept with Lavender?"

Mrs. Weasley's eyes grew slightly. "No. He's never said anything about getting serious with her. I didn't think he cared enough about her to take it there."

"Yes, I don't think he did either and I've already sort of talked to him about it, but I just thought that maybe he said something," Hermione said.

"Well, he hasn't. At least not to me he hasn't. This is exactly what I'm talking about. You should ask him. You need to talk to him about this and voice your thoughts. You have to be mature and open when it comes to anything sexually related. It's the only way to keep things from complicating more than they will naturally," Mrs. Weasley explained.

"I just don't know how to ask," Hermione confessed. "This is one area that I'm not really familiar with."

"You're not supposed to be, not yet. You're still so young and there's so much for you to learn. Is this something that's been bothering you?" Mrs. Weasley asked.



"Some. I don't think they have, but Lavender is really pretty and a really blunt and physical person. I know she and Ron were somewhat close and as his girlfriend now I know how he can be as well. I just don't want it to come out wrong. I trust him," Hermione said.

"Then tell him that, dear. Tell him exactly what you just told me and no matter what the outcome is, it won't change and shouldn't change how you feel about him. Sometimes, things just happen. Ron's a teenager and so is Lavender and so are you," Mrs. Weasley said.

"I know. That's what worries me," she said. "Sometimes I feel so much older than everyone else, and I feel things should be different from how they are."

"I want to tell you something. Something that I haven't told anyone else other than Arthur," Mrs. Weasley said. She sat up straighter, intrigued. "When Arthur and I were in seventh year, we had a horrible fight and we broke up."

"Really?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, it was for almost three months. During that time I was completely gutted and out of my mind. Arthur and I had been together for so long, and I knew he was the one I would marry and have kids with. So, to be without him shattered me. I couldn't even move, I was hurting so badly," she explained gently.

"I know how that feels," she said softly.

"Yes, well, I was devastated and one night I was talking to a male friend of mine about my feelings. I was vulnerable and lonely and before I knew it, I had sex with him," Mrs. Weasley explained with a painful expression. "I wasn't proud of it, but I took my responsibility for it. I didn't date the bloke, and I certainly didn't have strong feelings for him but it happened. After Arthur and I got back together, I knew that I had to tell him. It killed me to do it, and I know it hurt him but we got past it. He understood where I was and accepted that it happened, and I was finally able to let it go and be with the man that I was made for."

Hermione rubbed under her eye where a tear had tried to escape. She didn't know why the story affected her so greatly. "That's good to hear, Mrs. Weasley. I'm glad things worked out."

"Me too. I didn't love Arthur any less. What I did didn't keep me from wanting him as much as I did. Sometimes things just happen. So, whatever Ron and Lavender did have or whatever they have now or whatever Lavender is trying to get people to think they have, it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't change what you feel for him and what he feels for you," Mrs. Weasley said.

"I could never love Ron any less. I love him more every day," Hermione said.

"Good, because I don't think he could either. I don't know what he's done with Lavender, but I honestly don't think it's significant. Either way, I do know that he loves you very much. Ron's ability to love is one of the most beautiful and powerful things on this Earth. His heart and his feeling are so vast and so strong. He'll be honest with you, and he'll take care of you when you need him to. I know he's not always the most mature but when it comes to this, showing his love, he couldn't be any better. Talk to him," Mrs. Weasley urged.

"I will Mrs. Weasley, thank you," Hermione said.

She smiled. "Anytime, sweetheart. You're pretty much my daughter anyway. Is there anything else?"

Hermione thought about it. "I think you should tell Ginny that story about you and Mr. Weasley. It could really benefit her to hear it."

Mrs. Weasley gave her a look but nodded. "I will."

There was a knock on the window. Hermione looked to see Ron, Ginny, and Harry looking at them. She smiled. "What do you think, Mrs. Weasley?"

"Ah, we're done here. I think I've made Ron suffer enough. Write me for anything you might need or any questions. I mean that," Mrs. Weasley said.

"I will," Hermione answered.

"I also think that if and when you do start having sex, you should tell your mum. It may seem like a weird idea, but it will put her at ease in some way. Believe me," Mrs. Weasley said, waving for the three to come in.

"Did you have a nice time?" Ginny asked, hugging her mum.

"Yes, Hermione and I had a lot to talk about," Mrs. Weasley said.

"All good I hope," Ron said nervously.

"I'm still here, Ron. Everything is okay," Hermione answered.

"Well, I won't take any more of your time. I should get back home." Mrs. Weasley went around and gave each of them a hug and a kiss. "Enjoy the rest of your visit and Harry, you look so much better than at Christmas."

"Thanks. I feel better," he answered, putting his arm around Ginny's waist.

"I figured. Well, bye sweethearts," Mrs. Weasley said before leaving the shop.

Hermione watched as Mrs. Weasley walked back up the busy street. Her chest filled with love and appreciation. She needed Mrs. Weasley in her life. However, her vision was altered when Ron

gently cupped her chin and pulled her face to his. "What did she say?"

Hermione got out of his grip. "None of your business. We had a nice conversation."

"Don't give me that rubbish," he whined.

"Leave her alone. Women are allowed to talk to each other without it being public knowledge," Ginny said, looking at Hermione. She had a feeling that Ginny knew the subject of their chat. Ron groaned.

"Well, if it makes you feel any better yes, you were mentioned but no it wasn't anything bad. Your mum adores you," Hermione said.

"I guess that's one word for it," Ginny teased.

Ron gave her the finger. "Take this advice and go."

"Ronald, you're a Prefect," Hermione said, lowering his hand.

"Yeah, Prefect, don't be rude to Ginny," Harry said.

Ginny smiled at him. "You don't have to stand up for me. I'm used to him."

"Still," Harry said softly, returning her smile. They gazed at each other for a while before closing the gap. Hermione grinned as her two friends snogged. It was a relief to see them happy.

"Fucking hell, I'm not even hungry anymore," Ron said in her ear.

She took his hand. "Let them have a minute before breaking it up. They deserve that much."

Ron rolled his eyes and frowned slightly at her idea. However, glancing at his best mate and sister and seeing their joy, he let it go and picked up his menu. "Just this once," he whispered.

After they ate, Harry and Ginny decided to head back to the castle. Hermione knew it was to continue what they had started at the table. She didn't mind. It gave her a chance to be alone with Ron and be extra close herself. "You know this is almost too much, right?" Hermione said as Ron came behind her and pulled his arms tightly around her waist. She was pressed against his chest, and his smell and body melted her bones.

"It's a visit. It's your one day off from being the perfect Prefect," he said in her ear. His lips moved down to her neck where he kissed.

She shivered and tripped over her feet. "No, it's not. We're out here in the open and teachers come here, too. I don't want to set a bad example."

"You could never do that. You're always a good example. You're always so bloody good," he said against her skin.

Hermione moaned softly and closed her eyes. Ron was snogging her neck in the middle of the village. As good as it felt, she couldn't allow it. She pulled away from him and took his hand. She led him further and further down the street until they reached a fork in the road. She found a large tree away from most of the noise and people and pushed him roughly against it. "Bloody hell, do that whenever you want to," he said, his eyes wide.

Hermione pressed her body against his and moved her mouth over his. She snogged him as deeply as she could. Ron's hands went to her arse. He lightly squeezed her cheeks, causing her to gasp. She pulled on his hair and brought his mouth closer down to hers. She could feel every part of him again and it drove her wild. She wanted him. She wanted to feel him, and she wanted him to feel her. However, as Ron's hand reached around to her front, she pulled away.

Ron's face was flushed and he was out of breath. "Do you want to slow down?"

She nodded. "Yes, we need to talk first."

She moved off his body and sat in the grass. He joined her. "Does this have anything to do with what you talked to my mum about?" he asked, wiping his forehead.

"Yes," she said.

He pulled blades out and frowned. "Is it something bad?"

"No, she wanted to talk to me about contraceptives," Hermione said.

Ron's already flushed face blushed more. "Oh, yeah, I thought maybe she'd bring it up sometime. Considering your parents are Muggles."

"That's what she said. We talked about the spell and the potion. She said you knew how to make it," Hermione said.

"Yeah, dad taught me last summer. It was weird. He came to my room and just started talking about sex and how to brew the potion. I'd had the talk with him before but this one was more hands on," he said with a smile.

"Yeah, your mum gave me pamphlets and a potion," she said.

Ron laughed. "That sounds like mum. She wants us prepared for everything. You know that I'd never make you do something, right? I don't have any expectations. Whatever you want, whenever you want it is fine with me."

She smiled. "Thanks, Ron, that means a lot to me but know that it doesn't go one way. I'd never make you do something. The decision is up to both of us."

He nodded. "Yeah."

Hermione mentally prepared herself. She remembered what Mrs. Weasley told her. "Ron, I need to ask you something and I want you to be honest. It won't change us."

"Okay," he said quietly.

She held the sides of her jeans for support. "How far did you go with Lavender?"

His blushed returned. "Hermione, I don't want to--"

"I want to know, Ron. It's important," she said.

Ron sighed. "We didn't have sex or do anything close to it. We mostly snogged. A few times when we got serious we touched each other but never hand to skin. I couldn't let it happen. It wouldn't be right. It didn't feel right, not with her."

"So, you never really did anything with her?" she asked.

"No. The most we've done is reach under each other's shirts. It never went any further than that," he explained. Hermione nodded in relief, but she couldn't deny that she was a little upset. She thought back to the Christmas ball and seeing Lavender all over Ron. "I'm sorry," he said after some time.

"Please, don't apologize. I'm not mad, and I'm not thick. Lavender was your girlfriend for some time, and I know you were attracted to her. It's okay. I'm relieved and a little surprised, to be honest. Sometimes I thought you and her went all the way," she confessed.

Ron moved closer to her. "I could never do that. I had the chance once but I couldn't. I don't want to do that stuff with anyone but you. You're the only one that I think about taking there."

Hermione stagger breathed. Talking about sex with Ron was so different from her past experiences with Mrs. Weasley, Harry, and Ginny. It was scary and exciting and comfortable. It felt right. "I guess I don't have to feel bad for wanting to be the only one you experience it all with."

"No more than I do. I want it to only be you and me. I can't stand the thought of some other bloke having you. I don't see how you put up with it. I would have ended up strangling the guy you were with," Ron said.

"Well, you certainly don't have to worry about me. I only kissed Viktor a couple of times, and I've only kissed Cormac once. He tried to touch me, but I stopped him. I don't want anyone else doing it but you." Hermione felt extremely proud of herself for

being confident in what she wanted. She was glad that she waited to experience everything.

Ron placed a hand on her knee and rubbed it gently. "I'm honored." He leaned forward and kissed her. They snogged slowly and deeply. Hermione moved herself to his lap and wrapped her legs around him. He was able to hold her close and deepen the already powerful kiss. She moaned longingly. She was so in love with Ron, and she was thankful that they were virgins in every way and would fulfill each other's fantasies for the first time.

He pulled away and put his forehead to hers. "Mmm, we should stop and go back to the castle."

"Why?" she teased, nibbling on his bottom lip.

"Because. If we don't, then I'll end up having to use that tube that I'm sure mum only gave you as a comparison right here in the grass," he said, squeezing her legs.

Her middle pounded and damped with pleasure as she took in his words. "How romantic."

"What's not romantic about pinning you down right here and giving you what you want in a natural setting?" Ron asked.

Hermione thought about Ron making love to her in the grass. It was incredible but she knew that it wasn't the right time and she knew Ron didn't mean it either. However, it was still fun to play around with the idea. "Who says that I want it and who says that I'm into performing in public places?"

Ron smirked. "Well, I can only assume that you want it butâ€¦" He took her by the hips and pressed her against his hardness. It made her whimper and dig into his shoulders. "Judging by that response, it's a good assumption to make. Also, I'm not the one who shoved me against this tree. You did that."

"I'm sorry. I got really worked up. Are you okay?" she asked, rubbing the back of his head.

"The bump will be worth it. I've never seen you like that before," Ron said.

She blushed. "Did you like it?"

"I fucking loved it. You're incredible," he answered.

"So are you," she said gently before kissing him again. After a while the two finally broke apart and headed back to the castle. "Are you hungry?" Hermione asked.

"Actually, no. I had too many sandwiches earlier. Are you?" he asked.

"Not really. We can go see Harry and Ginny at dinner," Hermione said.

Ron grinned. "Or we could go to up to my room. Everyone is eating, and it will give us plenty of time to change for bed."

Her eyes lit up. "Another genius idea from Ron Weasley."

"You're really rubbing off on me, love," he said.

"And you must be doing something to me because I see no reason in protesting your idea. I'll meet you there. I have to get my things," she said.

Hermione practically ran to her room. Lavender was the only one inside. She was brushing her hair and looking at the floor. "Have a good time?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you for asking. How was Cormac?" Hermione asked, not really interested.

"He was okay. He kept talking about himself and how attractive we are together, but I guess he was nice," she answered.

She laughed. "Sounds perfect for you."

"Don't be a bitch. He's just a friend. I'm not interested in him. He's not my type," Lavender snapped.

"Fine, I won't be a bitch but that means you can't be one either," Hermione said.

Lavender's jaw dropped. "What are talking about?"

"Look, whatever you're doing, I don't care. I have to go," Hermione said, grabbing her shirt.

Lavender got up from her bed. "Did Ronnie go to the shop? He looked excited and happy that I told him." She smiled and crossed her arms.

Hermione smirked. "You know what? He did go and I'm really glad that you told him. I'll have to ask him about it when I see him. We'll have all night to talk."

"What-what do you mean?" Lavender asked, her fierceness fading.

"Well, I'm sleeping with him again tonight. No one will be there for a while so it'll give us time to talk. I'll have to ask if he got this shirt from there. He gave it to me. I still don't think it's too orange. What about you?" Hermione held up the Cannons shirt that Ron gave her to sleep in. Lavender paled and she bit her lip. She didn't say a word. "Well, I'll let you think about it, goodnight," she said cheerfully before leaving the room. She took two stairs at a time in her triumph and knocked on Ron's door.

He opened it right away. "Hi," he said.

"Hello," she answered, walking in. They went over to his bed and started to change. Hermione took her time and watched as Ron

stripped out of his jeans and shirt. Every time she saw his naked skin, heat came over her. He reached for his shirt but she stopped him.

"Wait, come here," she whispered. Ron slowly walked over to her. She put her hands on his bare chest and felt the strong beating of his heart. She could also smell the faint hint of apples. She looked up into his eyes, and in the clear blueness she saw love. It made her forget that she was only in her knickers and bra. She felt safe and secure.

He leaned down and kissed her. Hermione put her hands on his shoulders and loved the feeling of his skin against hers. He turned them around and led her back to the bed. She left the kiss momentarily to settle on his mattress. He quickly closed the curtains and lay on top of her. She gave a choked cry and bit his shoulder. There was nothing between their parts but cotton. He pulled away and grinned. He ran his fingers through her hair. "I never get tired of hearing that."

"I never get tired of you making me do that," she answered, taking his hand and putting it to her lips. Ron gazed at her in a curious way. "What?" she asked.

"Nothing. It's just that you're beautiful. You're so perfect this way," he said softly.

She let the emotion run through her. "What way is that, half naked?"

He chuckled. "Well that too, but seriously. You're so beautiful when you're happy and confident and at ease. I love you so much, and I always want you to look this way. I'll always try to make you this way."

She swallowed the lump of emotion and let the high of his words fog her head. "I love you, too, and you won't have to try very hard. Just continue to be the best man I know. Continue to be amazing and sweet and gorgeous, and you'll always have me like this." She leaned up and kissed him.

Ron kissed her back for a moment before moving off her. He settled close to her. "Can we stay like this tonight?"

"I think that will be okay," she answered, placing her cheek to his stomach.

He continuously ran his fingers through her hair, and she moved her fingers around the freckles on his stomach. She felt so relaxed despite the day. With so much talk about sex and experiences, it was nice to take a moment to calm down. She smirked, thinking about her petty troubles with Lavender. "So, did you go to the Quidditch shop?" she asked. Hermione figured that if Lavender wanted to challenge her again, she might as well be ready.

\*\*\*\* Wow, a lot of sex talk and sex things in this one. Yes, this is more my element, lol. It was fun and light and I really



enjoyed writing it. Mrs. Weasley is great and I love her relationship with Hermione. At least, I love how I view their relationship. Mrs. Weasley can be so much more than this high strong mother. I believe that.

Well, like the latest chap in my other story, this one was pretty straightforward. I guess it's a phase I'm going through. Things are starting to heat up for everyone so keep reviewing and reading to find out. You might be pleased with what you get nextâ€¦ \*whistles and walks away \*

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 40

Thanks for the reviews! YES, I stole the idea for the chapter title from the amazing, "Frankie says Relax"

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Hermione made her bed and prepared her school bag for the day. It was nice having an off period. She could take a nap or possibly get more studying done before afternoon classes. Not surprisingly, she found a way to do both. She gathered extra ink and quills and looked over her section of the shared dorm room once more to make sure it was clean. As she walked downstairs to the Common Room, she heard the portrait hole open and Dean walked through. "Hello," she said with a smile.

He merely nodded. "Hey, Hermione, are you actually skiving?"

"I'd never. I don't have arithmancy right now, so I want to catch up on some chapters," she answered. "Wait a minuteâ€¦why aren't you in class?"

He shrugged. "Well, I am skiving off. I don't feel like being there today, you know?"

Hermione studied his face and saw the irritation. He probably didn't want to put up with Harry any more than he had to. "I guess, but I hope you realize that it's important for sixth years to go to all their classes. Seventh year will run a lot smoother if we're prepared for the material."

He rolled his eyes. "Thanks for the advice."

He started to walk past her and up the stairs, but she touched his arm to stop him. "Do you want to talk?"

"About what?" he asked. "I don't skive every day."

"No, I mean about something else," she said gently.

"It's okay. I'm fine. You don't have to do me any favors or worry. I'm just gonna take a nap before lunch. I'm really tired," he answered.

She considered giving up. Dean's attitude and feelings were his business, but her persistent need to help wouldn't leave her alone. Plus, she did care about him. He was her friend. "I'm not trying to do you any favors. I want to make sure you're okay. This is just me talking and no one else. It can be like last time."

He sighed and chewed on his lip. She could tell that he wanted to say something but being a bloke, he had to appear stoic at all times. "Can we go up to the room?" he asked.

"Of course," she said.

They sat on his bed and Dean took his time before speaking. "Seamus is always talking to me. He always wants to know how I'm doing and everything."

"He's your best friend. He worries about you. I've never seen Seamus more serious than he is now," she said.

Dean grinned slightly. "Yeah, he's a pain when he is. I don't know. I don't have anything to say. I'm trying to do whatever I'm supposed to do, but it's difficult."

"I know how you feel. It's really hard not to think about it or care when you're constantly reminded of it," Hermione said.

He looked off to Harry's bed. "I don't want to hate him or be mad at him. He's always been my friend, but I feel like he planned this. It's like he knew this would happen between Ginny and I, and he was just waiting for it."

She didn't know how to answer him considering that he was somewhat right. It sounded awful coming from Dean. "Harry never wanted to hurt you. He cares about you, but he's been in love with Ginny for a long time and it makes sense that he would be with her now. She loves him, Dean. It's not as if he forced her to."

"I know that I completely understand that she loves him. That's why I feel like such a dick. I tried so hard to be with her and make her feel loved, but she didn't want it from me. She was thinking about Harry the whole time," Dean said. "That's why I can't stop feeling angry. I know I'm young or whatever. My mum keeps telling me that I'm young and situations like this are supposed to happen now, but I really love Ginny. I really wanted to be with her and when we were together and happy, it was great. What does my brain in is that the whole time she wasn't in it for me. She was waiting on Harry."

"That's not true. Ginny loved you and still does really love you. She came to me when she told me that she fancied you and wanted to try a relationship with you. She wanted to be with you. You made her happy, and you helped her so much, Dean. Please, don't think that you didn't." She placed a hand on his and gave him the warmest smile she could while on the inside she felt coldness. It was times like these that truly made her question everything she and Harry had done.

Dean didn't seem to care for her words. He pulled his hand away. "Can I ask you something? When she told you that she wanted to be with me, was Harry's name mentioned? Did she bring up the fact that she wanted to get over him and I was just around?"

"It wasn't like that. Ginny isn't like that," Hermione said. "You know her. She wouldn't do that to you. She loved you and trusted you enough to take things further than she ever had before. You may not know it but trust is a big thing for girls. She wouldn't just give everything away if she didn't care."

Ever since her talk with Mrs. Weasley, sex had been a constant thought for Hermione. She desired and questioned it more than she ever had in her life. There was something so beautiful and exciting about it, but at the same time, it added complication and anxiety. She couldn't help but think that it affected Dean and Ginny's relationship more than they planned for it to. He rolled his eyes. "What? You think that just because we shagged it proves that she wasn't thinking about Harry?"

"What are you trying to say, Dean? What do you think Ginny's intentions were? I'm trying to tell you what I know but apparently you have it all figured out!" Hermione snapped.

"I don't know! One minute we were together, and the next minute we broke up, and two seconds after that Ginny and Harry started dating. If she truly loves him and if she's happy, then that's brilliant. I want her to be happy, but it doesn't bloody add up! I can't help but feel like the prick in the middle that was only needed for a while," he said.

"Dean," Hermione started, "that's not true."

"Well, that's what it felt like. I feel fucking used, Hermione. Maybe you don't know what that's like but it hurts. I think she used me and Harry knew that she was doing it. For all I know they were shagging long before I was ever with her." Dean's eyes were hard and his jaw was set. She had never seen so much fury come from him before.

"If you're implying that Ginny cheated on you, then you're wrong and that's a terrible thing to suggest. I know you're angry, and I guess you have a right to be suspicious. You're hurting but defiling Ginny and Harry's names isn't going to solve anything. You know in your heart that Ginny was always faithful to you. When she was with you, she was only with you, and Harry, no matter what he felt, would never do that to a friend or to anyone. You know that, too," she explained.

"I dunno. I guess," he said.

"Well, if you feel so strongly about it, then maybe you should talk to Ginny," Hermione suggested.

He snorted. "Yes, because that conversation would go over extremely well. I can't do that. I still do want to be friends

with her. She'd hex my balls off if I asked her about cheating on me."

"That's probably because she never has, and it's absurd to think that she did just because she's dating someone else," she explained.

Dean shrugged. "Even if she didn't, it doesn't make this feel any better."

"I think it does. There's a big difference that it makes," Hermione said.

"How would you know? How could you possibly understand what I'm going through?" he asked.

"Because," she started, "I felt something similar with Ron. When he was with Lavender I—"

Dean rolled his eyes. "There's a big difference between what you went through and what I'm going through now. Ron always wanted to be with you. Everyone knew from day one that you were the only girl he really fancied. Whenever he was in here with Lavender and she would get close to him, everyone in here knew where his head really was. He talked about you all the time and always had that silly look on his face. It's always been there. I never had that with Ginny. You don't have to wonder, Hermione, but I do. I have to wonder if she ever gave a shit. You know Ron does."

Hermione tried to find the right thing to say, but the coldness that she felt was fading. Dean's words hit her hard. She didn't know how she could feel so sorry yet so happy at the same time. "Dean, I don't know—"

"That's okay. I'm fine. I'll be fine." He stood up and motioned her to the door. "I really do want to take a nap."

She got up and didn't bother protesting. She knew that his grief was something that he'd have to get over for himself. "Okay. I'm sorry, Dean. I know they care about you. Ginny will always love you. Don't give up on that."

He opened the door. "Yeah, that's what she said, too."

Hermione couldn't exactly get started on her work. She had a twisted feeling in her stomach. She abandoned her books and walked the halls. She sat at the base of the staircase that led to the divination classroom and read. Not too much longer after that did the door open. She could hear the students leaving, so she stood up and waited almost anxiously. Ron and Harry walked casually down the staircase. Ron put his head on Harry's shoulder. "Kill me, Harry, please. It won't change my opinion of you."

"If you die, then I won't have anyone to finish my journal for me. You're staying here, mate. At least, until we're done with the journals, then I might consider it, okay?" Harry said, patting his head.

Ron smiled at him. "I knew there was a reason that I sat next to you on the train." He and Harry laughed but stopped as soon as they saw her. Ron rushed over to her. "Are you okay? Is something wrong?"

Hermione didn't know where to begin. She wasn't sure if it was enough to tell him that she was grateful that he made up with Harry, or how she found it sweet that he always went on high alert whenever he thought that something was wrong with her, or for the fact that it was always apparent that he loved her even though she hadn't seen it. All she could do was throw her arms around him. He held her close. "Hey, tell me what happened. What's wrong?" he asked softly in her ear.

She pulled away and shook off the few tears. "Nothing is wrong. I, um, I just really wanted to see you and let you know that I love you. I love you so much, Ron."

He wiped away a tear that she missed and grinned. "I love you, too."

She hugged him tightly again. "I know you do."

He chuckled. "Bloody hell, you sat out here just to tell me that?"

She pulled away once more and looked to Harry. "Not entirely."

She, Harry, and Ron took the long way to potions so she could tell them about what Dean had told her. Harry's jaw was nearly to the floor. "He can't honestly think that."

"I should kill that asshole. Ginny would never do anything like that," Ron said through his teeth.

"Ron, I didn't tell you so you could beat him up. I only thought that you two should know why he's been so upset. I honestly don't think it's completely about you, Harry," Hermione explained.

He shook his head. "What am I supposed to do? It's obvious that he hates me. He bloody thinks that I personally did this to him."

"Well," Ron said slowly, "he could have a point, right?"

"Let's not start this again!" Harry groaned.

"I'm only saying that there could be some truth to it," he said.

Hermione frowned at him. "Ron, Harry didn't try to hurt Dean. You know that."

"Yeah, I didn't help Ginny cheat on him, either," Harry added.

Ron looked between them and rubbed his neck. "Yeah, I know you didn't. That would be horrible, and I know you're not that type of person. Besides, that would mean that you've already done stuff with her and you haven't."

Harry quickly looked to Hermione, and she vaguely shook her head. She had almost forgotten that they were still not being completely honest with Ron. "Right. Maybe we should drop this, then. I'm sorry that I even brought it up," she said.

"Yeah, I really don't want to go through explaining myself again," Harry said, looking at Ron.

"You know how I feel about you, Harry, so don't get mad at me for being honest. Rather it was intentional or not, you did complicate things for Dean and more importantly, Ginny," Ron said.

"So, you're taking his side, then? It shouldn't matter that she and I are okay. You think that I should stop being with Ginny because he's still upset about it?" Harry asked.

"Guys, come on. We're almost to class," Hermione said, tugging on their sleeves.

Ron ignored her. "No, I'm not taking his side, but I'm not going to pretend that he doesn't have at least some reason to be upset or wonder about what's really going on."

"And what's really going on, Ron? Besides Ginny and I wanting to be together? I thought you were all for it," Harry said, getting right in his face.

Ron didn't budge. "I am all for it. I'm on your side, and I'm on Ginny's side. I want you both to be happy, and I know you're a good person, but I also know what it's like to think that you're getting fucked over. I've been there remember?" He walked away from them and headed into class.

Hermione mentally slapped herself. "I'm sorry, Harry. I should have told you alone. I just thought that maybe you both knowing would help you to help Dean. He's so miserable."

"Yeah, well, he's not the only one in a difficult place. I can't make my life about pleasing him just like I apparently can't get Ron to fully forgive me or trust me again," Harry said.

"I'll talk to him, Harry. I think he feels a little uncomfortable about all this. He's okay, though," Hermione reassured.

Harry sighed. "That's easy for you to say."

She didn't know what to say to Harry all through class. He seemed so angry. "I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong impression, Harry. I don't think you should schedule your relationship around Dean," she said in his ear.

"I know. I'm at a loss here. Ginny and I are getting to a good point, but she's still uneasy about Dean. I'm honestly at my end. I don't care anymore, Hermione. I really don't. I've tried, but he won't listen. I can't do anything else," Harry replied. "I have to deal with this, too. It's not always so easy for me. I

want to tell the bloke to bugger off and get over it, but I can't."

Hermione was about to respond but she heard a terrible giggle. "Ms. Brown, is there something that you wish to share with the class?" Slughorn asked.

"No, sir. I'm sorry," she answered.

Hermione turned back. Lavender was pink in the face and smiling wide. She whispered something to Ron, who was sitting right next to her, and he nodded. It caused her to giggle again but quietly this time. She swallowed the spite. Lavender caught her eye and winked. She touched Ron's shoulder and showed him something in her book. Hermione quickly looked away and tried with all her might to keep from using a nonverbal spell on her. She couldn't let Lavender get to her.

"Believe me, Harry. I understand what you feel but sometimes you just have to keep at it. Things are bound to get better over time," she said.

For the rest of the day Hermione's mind was turning in different directions. She felt so wound up and stiff. No matter how well and calmly she prepared herself in the morning, she was stressed and achy by dinner. Tonight was no different. At the table she flipped through her potions book and tried to study and eat at the same time.

"You should take a break," Ron said, tearing his roast sandwich in half and giving her a piece.

She tried her best to smile. "Thanks, but I really want to get this chapter finished. Of course, since I didn't have work for one class another one made up for it."

"It doesn't mean that you shouldn't eat. Come on," he urged.

She sighed and took the sandwich. She took a bite and chewed as swiftly as she could. "There. Are you happy now?"

"No, but at least you won't go to bed hungry. You have to eat, love," he said gently. He put his hand on her knee and rubbed it with his palm. He had such concern in his expression. She smiled more genuinely this time. It meant so much to her that he cared and she wanted nothing more than to bring him close and kiss him the way she had wanted to all day, but she couldn't.

"Maybe you two should get a room or something, yeah?" Ginny said.

Hermione and Ron broke their gaze. "Maybe you should keep your eyes on your food or something, yeah?" Ron answered.

Harry laughed. "What, like you were? We were ready for you two to go at it right here on the table."

"That hasn't been ruled out," Ron said with a wink.

"Oh, leave us alone. We were having a conversation," Hermione shot, feeling herself blush at the tasty image.

"And staring at each other like mad. It's okay, Hermione. We understand," Ginny said sweetly. She and Harry started to laugh again and it annoyed her. In fact, it bothered her greatly. She gathered her books and school bag and left the table. She took sharp and loud strides as she made her way back to the Common Room.

"Hermione, slow down," Ron's voice said.

She stopped and it didn't take long for him to catch up with her. She didn't expect it to. It wasn't even as if Ron was particularly fast, but his legs were so long that he could easily outrun anybody or catch up to them. His legs were incredibly lean and lightly sprinkled with freckles. She could feel the thin layer of ginger hairs from his legs on her fingertips. Hermione bit her lip. She didn't believe that she cared too much about what people's legs looked like, but she knew that she loved Ron's. She wanted to feel them and wrap her own around his as they rolled around in bed. She wanted to drag her tongue up the pale stalks to feel him shake, hear him sigh, and call out her name deeply as she kissed him in just the right spot!

"Hermione, what are you doing?" he asked loudly, shaking her.

She looked up at him. "Huh?"

His expression was one of disbelief. "Do you need to go to the hospital wing?"

"No, I'm fine," she said, shaking him off.

Ron frowned. "Then what in the fucking hell is wrong with you? You stormed off without saying anything to me—"

"Harry and Ginny were getting on my nerves. Apparently, we can't even look at each other without everything thinking that we're about to do something," she interrupted.

"They were only joking. Why do you care so much?" he asked.

"Because! I don't like people joking about that stuff in mixed company. I've been on McGonagall's bad side for too long now. I don't want her hearing anything even if it's not true. No one seems to understand that," she explained.

He rolled his eyes. "Okay, whatever. So, why were you staring off with your mouth open just now? Did you try that drink that Seamus made last night?"

Hermione flushed with color. "I would never! How can you ask me that? Why would I ever?"

His mouth twitched as if he was holding back a smile. "Well, you should have seen your face."



She didn't know what to say. She couldn't tell him that the reason she probably looked drunk was because she had been thinking about his legs, which turned into her daydreaming about giving him oral sexâ€¦again. "Well, I'm not intoxicated or anything. I'm just tired. A lot has gone on today."

"You need to learn to relax. It'll help," Ron said.

She put a hand on her hip. "I know now to, but I can't just relax, Ron. Things don't get done that way. Like now, I have to work on my charts so I can read my potion book."

He rubbed his neck. "Well, um, you can't right now. We have hall duty."

Hermione slapped a hand to her forehead. "Oh! That's right! It's our turn. I'llâ€¦I'll have to read later. Stay right here. I'll put my bag away really fast."

She practically sprinted to the Common Room. The last thing she needed was to be late for hall duty. She had to keep things in order and on time, so she speedily walked through the portrait hole. Lavender and Dean were on the couch. For some reason seeing them together unnerved her. Lavender was the first to look up. "Hi."

"Hello. No dinner tonight?" Hermione asked, looking between her and Dean.

"We're actually about to go there now. We were just talking," Dean said with a small smile.

Her stomach flipped. The topics that Dean Thomas and Lavender Brown could talk about were endless and she found her and Harry's name at the top of the list. "That's nice."

"Are you and Ron going to dinner? If you haven't, then you should go. He's always the hungriest around this time," Lavender said.

Hermione couldn't tell if she was being bitchy or not. There was nothing in her tone and her face seemed pleasant enough. "Yes, I know he is. We already ate. Hall duty is tonight...I need to go."

Ron was leaning against the wall and twisting his wand between his fingers when she got back to the hallway. His calm expression and casual stance was what made him Ron, and she wished that she could feel a part of it. For once she didn't want to feel so wired. He smiled and pushed himself off the wall. "Are you ready?"

"Yes, we should probably start on a higher floor since mostly everyone is still eating," she said.

He nodded and the two set off. Hermione kept her eyes on the ground. She didn't know if it was worth telling him about Lavender and Dean. She knew what he would say. He would tell her to not worry and to relax. It was something so much easier said

than done. "Hermione, how long are you going to keep this up?" he asked.

She looked to him. "Keep what up?"

"The way you're acting. You're tense and more than usual. Did something happen?" he asked.

"No, nothing happened. I really just have a lot on my mind. We're getting closer to the end of the year. Schoolwork and Prefect duties are piling on, and I'm concerned about Dean and Harry and Ginny," she said, leaving out her curiosity about Lavender as well as her growing sexual frustration.

"You can't fix everything and everyone, Mione. How many times am I going to have to say it? You'll make yourself sick," he told.

"I know that I can't fix everything, but they're my friends, Ron. I want to help, and I feel like I should." She didn't know how to explain to him that she felt like some of their grief was her fault.

"Even if it makes you stare off like a nutter?" Ron asked with a smirk.

She hit his arm. "I'm not a nutter, but I guess even so."

They walked the halls slowly. He kept trying to take her hand and pull his arm around her waist, but she refused it. No matter what she wanted to stay professional during hall duty. "You need to learn some self control," she said as he tried and failed to take her waist again.

"Why? Are you saying that you don't want me to touch you?" he asked, sticking his lip out a bit.

"I do but not now. We have to remember that we're Prefects first and foremost. We have a job to do correctly, Ron," she explained as sternly as she could. She couldn't deny, however, that she did want him to hold her. She had wanted to be close to him all day. It was a fine price to pay, though. Watching him pout and beg was sort of a guilty pleasure for her, and it made her that much more attracted to him.

He sighed heavily. "Fine. I won't touch you unless you give me permission to, okay?"

"Thank you," she said sweetly. They shared a smile before walking again. "Can I ask you something?"

"I reckon it might be safe," he answered.

"Why did you give Harry a hard time today? Do you really think what's going on with Dean is his fault?" she asked.

Ron shrugged. "A little. I'm not saying that he should beg Dean for forgiveness, but he shouldn't act like he has no idea why

Dean is being the world's biggest prat right now. I don't see why that makes me an arse. I got lied to as well."

Hermione nodded, slowly understanding Ron's reasoning. "Does that mean that you still have something against me? Do you still blame me for Lavender being upset?"

He slowed to a stop. "Hermione, I really don't want to talk about it. If you're worried that I'm mad at you or something, then don't. I'm not. What happened with us is over now, and I don't want to go there anymore. You and me are different from Harry and me. Besides, Lavender is doing fine from what I can tell. She seems happy."

"Yes. She had a really good time today in potions," she said dully.

Ron laughed. "We were talking about the book assignment and how much of a twat Slughorn is. It's good to know that I'm not the only one who isn't impressed by him."

She gave him a look. Of course, Ron had no clue that she was being sarcastic about Lavender. His comment only bothered her more. "That's nice!" She started walking again.

"Wait," he said. "Are you mad at me or something? Did I say the wrong thing?"

"No, you're fine. Let's just keep going," she said. He didn't follow her. She turned back to him. "What?"

He looked at his watch. "We've only got about forty-five minutes left. Can we stop or at least take a short break? I reckon you could use one."

"We should really get this finished. Then, we'll have the rest of the night," she said.

"But it will be our first official skive as a couple. Please, we've done it plenty of times before. We know these halls and what's going on by heart. There's nothing to break up but a few bratty first years trying to find secret pathways and a seventh year couple snogging by the window two corridors down," he explained.

She rubbed her lips together and thought about it. "I don't know..."

"Don't tell me that my charm has worn off already. We haven't been dating for that long. I still have the rest of our lives to use it," he said, giving her the famous lopsided grin.

She heart officially melted into a puddle of affection. She couldn't deny him anymore, and she couldn't pretend that he didn't have her yes at the first request. Ron Weasley would always be her biggest weakness. "Oh, alright, but the first sound of disruption and we get back to it."

"Deal, Ms. Granger. Come on," he said. He held out his hand. "Can I take it now?"

She smiled and placed her hand in his. "Yes, you may."

They walked up to the Astronomy Tower and found a cozy spot near the balcony. It was a clear night and the moon gave them all the light they needed. Ron sat down and opened his legs. He took off his cloak and laid it between his thighs. She sat on it and rolled her shoulders. "Ah, it's nice to sit down. My back hurts."

"I can help you with that," he offered.

She raised her eyebrow. "How?"

"You'll find out, if I have permission to touch you," he said.

She felt heat rise on her skin. "O-okay." Ron twisted his finger, and she looked ahead. He placed his hands on her shoulders and pressed into them with his fingertips. She immediately slouched. "Hmm, that feels great."

"I reckon it does. I told you. You work too hard," he said. "You're all wound up."

"I have the aches of an old woman," she teased, curling her fingers into her knees. Ron's hands were big and strong, and they felt incredible on her muscles.

"I'd probably get a better grip if I got right to your shoulders. Is that okay?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," she said, unbuttoning her dress shirt. She unbuttoned enough to where Ron could get under her shirt collar and to her shoulders. The feeling of his hands on her bare skin was automatic. She moaned and bit her lip. His skin was so warm and her muscles seemed to soften under his touch.

"Not so bad, eh?" he asked.

"This feels amazing. I didn't know that I needed it so badly," she said, her hands moving from her knees to his.

"I'm here anytime you want me," he said softly in her ear. She closed her eyes. Ron's touches and words spurred something inside her, and she tried desperately to keep it under control.

For a while the only sounds came from her random gasps and moans. Hermione didn't feel the need to think or scrutinize over anything. For the first time all day, her mind was completely clear and her body wasn't rigid. "Hermione," Ron said out of nowhere.

"Yes?" she breathed as he went under her bra straps to massage her collarbone.

"Were you really okay when you came to my class? You seemed off," he said.

"No, everything was fine, honestly. Dean said some things that really made me realize how lucky I am," she answered.

Ron stopped massaging. "What did he say?"

She turned to him. "He told me that Ginny's feelings for him were never certain but in my case, you were always obvious about how you felt about me. He said that you've always talked about me."

He blushed. "Yeah, I have. You don't know how many times I got stuff chucked at me for bringing you up. Harry and Neville were okay with it, but Dean and Seamus were the main ones taking the piss of me or hitting me for saying your name."

She chuckled. "I had no idea, Ron."

He shrugged. "Yeah, I didn't fully know, either."

She grew a little more serious. "He also said that when you were with Lavender, you still seemed to be thinking about me."

"I did. I told you that," he said.

"I always thought you liked that she was so forward and so ready for everything. I thought you enjoyed it all," she confessed.

"Well...", he began, "I don't want to lie to you and say that I never did. It was nice being with her in the beginning. I liked feeling close to her and just close to someone in general, but whenever we got serious I couldn't pretend or shut my thoughts out anymore. I'd always think about you, Hermione. Snogging was okay, but when I thought about doing anything real, I thought about you. I always have. I think I should only do that stuff with you. Like my hands should only touch your body or something. Does that make any sense?"

"I think it does," she said softly. "I feel like my body was personally made for your touch. It sounds strange, but it makes sense to me. With you I can let go and not think so much. It simply is what it's supposed to be. I could never be this way with someone else."

He gazed at her in such a powerful way. "Good. I don't want you to be this way with anyone else."

"I never wanted you like this with Lavender," she admitted.

He took her hand. "I wasn't, not really. It might have been her there, but it was always you in my head. It's not something I'm proud of. I knew it was wrong to her, but I couldn't help it."

"You don't have to justify it to me. I like that you thought about me," she said, her face flushing.

She turned back around and leaned against him. He held on to her securely. Before she could speak, he pulled her collar back and placed a light kiss on her shoulder. It made her tremble. She

could feel Ron wholly. She felt the slight hairs on his lip and chin that followed the trail of kisses from her shoulder to her neck to her ear. She felt the firmness in his hand and his hardness that hit her back as he hunched over her. Then, she felt his teeth that hit her skin as he tenderly bit on her shoulder.

"Hmm," he moaned as he nibbled on her skin.

A pleasurable cry escaped Hermione's lips as the urge to turn around and kiss him started within her. She tried to move, but his hands held her in place. "Ron?" she questioned. She could feel his warm breath hit her as he chuckled.

"Shh, Mione. Just trust me," he whispered.

He placed his hands back on her arms. She felt them move, trailing firmly up her arms and gripping onto her shoulders again. His movements were so sensual and precise and it flooded her brain with so many questions. She wondered how he knew this was what she needed. Not just the knots taken out of her muscles but the feeling of his hands on her body. The past couple of weeks had been full of uncertainty and sexual desires, and it seemed as if Ron was reading into her mind and knew what she needed to feel. Also, she wondered if he knew what he was doing to her as he touched her. He rubbed his fingers into her back, and she moaned with every grip. A fire of passion burned all through her, and she felt dizzy.

"Your hands are wonderful, Ron. They feel so good," she said breathlessly.

"I told you that you needed this. I'm glad you decided to trust me," he said.

"I really do, Ron, more than anyone else in my life," Hermione confessed but for some reason she figured he knew that.

"All I want you to do is let yourself relax every now and then. You get so worked up, and it worries me. You have to let things go sometimes," he told.

All she could do was nod. She didn't feel the need to disagree with him. As his fingers plunged into her skin deeper, a forming wetness settled between her legs and a roughness in her stomach begged for more. She moved her back against his hands as the itch started to creep up. Her legs slightly moved apart in an unrestrained desire to be touched in new areas by him.

He made an indistinct noise and kneaded his hands deeper into her back. She rubbed her body against his, and he moaned into her neck. She didn't know what she was doing but it felt good, and while she tried to hold on to him and feel him against her, he pried himself away. He trailed his fingers around to her stomach and began to massage there. She whimpered and dug her nails in his knees. "Oh, Ron."

He kissed her ear. "Good?"

"Mmm-hmm," she moaned. Ron's fingers traced all over her stomach and made her hairs prick up. Her skin seemed so cold in comparison to his. He burned right through her and liquefied everything. The stressful knot in her body was loosening.

"Do you remember that time in McGonagall's office?" he asked.

"W-which time?" she answered, finding it difficult to concentrate.

Ron prodded her naval. "The time I, um, sucked your finger?"

Hermione could feel his blush radiating off him. She grinned. "Yes, how could I ever forget that?"

"Did you like it?" he asked.

She moaned again, not only at his talented hands but also at the memory of how warm his mouth had been and how charged she felt. "Of course I did. Why would you ask that?"

"I dunno. I've never done anything like that before, and I didn't know if I even wanted to do things like that. I haven't stop thinking about it since it happened, though," he answered.

"Ron, you don't have to worry. I liked it a lot. You have no idea how good it felt," she said.

He paused before rubbing the sides of her waist with his palms. "Actually, I think I do."

Hermione pushed back into his chest. His hardness hit her lower back and it caused him to take in a sharp breath. "I guess I can believe you. Do you remember the time at your house when we were on the couch?" she asked.

He kissed her neck. "Several times a night on occasion, yeah."

She laughed nervously and squeezed his knees. "I never wanted you to stop. Even with everything going on between us. I would have loved for that to go on all night."

He used his index fingers to trace around her stomach. "Me too. I wouldn't have stopped until you told me to. I know it's a bad thing to say, but it's true."

Hermione shivered and moved her hands to his lower thighs. What they were talking about was too much. What they were doing was too much. Everything was overtaking her, and she couldn't fight against it. "Well, even though it's wrong, I wouldn't have asked you to stop."

Ron kissed her cheek and his hands traveled to her legs. He rubbed her knees with his thumbs, and Hermione shook as he did. Her heart raced and sweat coated her skin. "I have to tell you something," he said deeply. "That time you held me after Malfoy said all that shit, Iâ€¦you made me so hard just by holding me like that and talking to me the way you did."

She let out a choked cry and scratched into his legs. "I remember. I saw it, and I felt the same way. It was so difficult not to feel anything. I had to respect our situation, but I wanted you to kiss me. I wanted to feel you."

His hands traveled higher up her thighs. His nails ever so lightly pinched her skin. It burned beautifully and felt like a pleasant fire. "I'd never been like that before, and I didn't know what to do," he said huskily in her ear. "You drive me so bloody crazy, Hermione. It doesn't even have to be something sexual. Just the expressions you make and how you say things. I get so turned on, and I want to do so many things with you. Don't ever think that you're not enough for me or that you're not as good as Lavender or any other girl. It's complete bollocks. You have no idea what you do to me and what you've always done to me. The things you make me think and feel—what you make my body do."

"I do know. Part of the reason why I've been so tense lately is because I'm constantly thinking about you and all the things I want to do. I can't help it. Oh, Ron, I can't help it." Hermione groaned loudly and pressed herself harder against his back.

His hands traveled higher and higher up her thighs until he was well under her skirt. "See, like that. That little sound you made makes me want to—"

"Please, do it," she choked out, automatically opening her legs wider.

"Really?" he asked. She nodded. "Okay," he whispered, kissing her ear.

Ron's hands went all the way up her skirt, and he skidded his fingers across her knickers. Hermione's body tensed and a fiery current went through her. The touch was so powerful and new that it made her heart skip. She couldn't think or focus on anything. All she could do was listen to Ron's unsteady breaths in her ear. He swept his fingers across the fabric again. She sucked in air and shut her eyes tightly. He finally stopped hesitating and pressed his pointer, middle, and ring finger against her middle and rubbed gently and slow. Hermione arched her back and moaned. The feeling was like nothing she had ever experienced. Every time his fingers rubbed and pressed into her, a shock of pressure and fire charged her. It was strong, but it wasn't enough. She didn't bother thinking about what to do next. She knew what she wanted.

She put her hand over his. "Wait," she breathed.

He immediately stopped and tried to pull away. "You want me to stop?"

She shook her head. "No, I just want you to really feel me." She gripped his wrist and slowly took his hand underneath her knickers. She could hear his intake of breath and the pounding of his heart. It went with the thunderous beating of hers. She was



horribly nervous at what he would think. His fingers touched her bare middle and Ron ever so quietly swore.

"Bloody hell, Hermione. I can't believe how good this feels," he panted as he bit on her shoulder again and slicked his fingers in her wetness.

She relaxed and felt the nervousness disappear. "This is what you do to me," she whimpered. "This is how you make me feel. You make me like this." She slowly pushed into him. Ron familiarized himself with her. He took two fingers and felt around her folds as his thumb pressed against her nerve. Hermione cried out and dug into his thighs. It was unreal. He quickly found out where to rub and how hard to press. He flicked her nerve between his thumb as his other fingers went lower and teased her.

Hermione felt the burn already. She hugged his neck and rocked against his fingers. "Yes, Ron! Oh my god that feels so good!"

He kissed her cheek again and pressed against her more. "You're so smooth. You're silky and warm here just like everywhere else." She couldn't speak. She could only act. She pushed her arse into his crotch and felt every bit of his excitement. She sighed and whimpered over and over as he touched her. The burning was at every inch of her body and a building pressure traveled from her chest and hit her middle. She was close already.

"Hmm, hmm, Ron," she panted. She could release, but she still wanted more. She wanted his fingers to push their way inside of her. She wanted him to make her feel. And while words were filling her head to express it, nothing audible was escaping her lips. Hermione was lost and remained so until a new warm wetness hit her. He began to trace her middle once more, sending her head against his chest. She pushed her body up against his hand expecting him to plunge his fingers inside her, but he ignored the movement. She tried moving into his hand but he held it away.

"You want me to?" he asked quietly. She nodded, unable to speak. "Then say it. Say it, Hermione. I promised that I wouldn't do anything without you giving me permission first."

Hermione groaned. She knew what he wanted. She could feel the tips of his fingers at her entrance and could hear the teasing sound in his voice. She knew what he was trying to do. He wanted her to ask for it, to give in. He wanted her to give up some of her control. He was using their game to his advantage. "Ron..." She pushed in aggravation and he more than chuckled this time - he laughed. His enjoyment of the situation leaked from the sound of his laughter as her impatience grew.

"I won't move until you say it. You know I won't," he breathed in her ear. It was true. She knew it was. It wasn't their first game between each other, and it wouldn't be their last. They would always challenge each other to see who would give in first. She made her move by not letting him touch her earlier, and now he was using it to make her beg for him to.

Normally, she would find a way around the banter but she couldn't. She pouted and pushed and strained for him, but she caved. "Please, Ron. Please, touch me. I want you to. You have my permission." She closed her eyes and begged for him to touch her - to satisfy her like she always wanted. She wanted him to place his fingers inside of her and move his hand in such manners that she would release in a way that she had never experienced but fantasized about for years.

He took his other hand and brought it under her knickers. "See, that wasn't so hard," he teased. She pushed up against him and licked her lips. Hermione gripped his legs again and tried to prepare herself for what she was going to feel.

Ron took a couple of fingers from his left hand and gently started to rub her middle. He focused completely on her nerve and played with it. She felt the temperature in her skin continuously rise and her heart felt like it would burst. Then, he took his other hand and slowly eased a finger inside, then another. She winced at the pressure and stretch. His fingers were a lot bigger and longer than hers. They opened her up in a way that had never been done before.

She heard him swallow hard. "Okay?" he asked.

She nodded and pushed against his fingers. "Yes."

He pumped his fingers slowly, going deeper with each stretch of her insides. Hermione cried out and shut her eyes tightly. She couldn't understand how he was doing so much with both hands. He massaged her gently while pushing inside her middle harder and deeper with every drive. She was right. No one was supposed to touch her but Ron. There was no way another guy could make this feel so marvelous and intense while still making her feel safe.

He kissed her neck, and she whimpered and groaned as his fingers went in and out of her and rubbed her all the while. Her body jumped and quivered at his touches. The feeling was too strong. She couldn't hold it in much longer. "Don't stop," she told him even though it seemed like she was talking to the sky.

"I won't," he said, going faster with both hands.

"Oh, y-yes!" she choked. The pressure was pounding against her middle. She was steaming now. She would let go any minute and he must have known.

"You there?" he asked.

"Y-yes," she whimpered.

"I want to hear you say it," he whispered in her ear.

"Ron, please, please," she begged, trying to keep it all together.

"No, I want to hear you. I want to know. No one is here but you and me. You can let go, I promise. Say it, Hermione. Let it out," he practically demanded.

She didn't know what to do. All the feeling and pressure in the world was pushing down on her, but she had never been taken there before. She had never let herself totally feel or unwind in pleasure. She had to let go. If she didn't, then she would implode. She remembered that she was with Ron, and he was the one person that she could close her eyes and truly feel with. Ron loved her. She was lucky. He was her boyfriend and her best friend. He always had been in some way that couldn't be explained but only understood between them. The thought stuck with her and helped her to calm down. It was okay.

"Ron," she started, "R-Ron, oh Ron, I feel it so much! I'm there. I'm there. I'm there!"

It only implored him to go faster and harder. He licked her ear. "I'm right here. I want your best."

Hermione shook at his roughness. Her breathing became harder and shallower. She held her breath and let the pleasure fill her before letting go. Right as she was prepared to say something else, her orgasm shot through her as her cries filled the room. She almost screamed as she came and immediately felt him push his fingers even deeper inside and as her legs clamped around his hand. She came hard against his fingers and moaned his name as she rolled her hips.

She cried out, biting her lip as hard as she could. A blinding light hit her eyes and her stomach flinched. Her orgasm took over her body and mind. No words could describe the sensation. She felt as if she had released for the very first time, and Ron was right behind her, holding her all the way through it. She finally stopped jerking and unstuck her legs. Her breathing slowed, and she opened her eyes. Her vision was a bit hazy, and she could hear the beating of both their hearts so clearly in her ear. Ron slowly removed his hands. She, with difficulty, pulled herself up and turned around to him. He sucked his fingers and watched her carefully. His eyes were large and reflected in the moonlight beautifully. Even though she was so tired, she felt a raw energy seep into her.

He smirked. "You sound unbelievable when you let go."

"Thanks to you. I didn't know you wereâ€¦so talented," she said, lazily wiping sweat off her brow.

Ron sucked on his lip and rubbed her knee with his palm again. "You taste unbelievable as well. Why have you been holding out on me?"

She blushed. "I could ask you the same thing. I thought that I was the boss."

He shrugged. "I have my moments."

Hermione put her forehead to his and closed her eyes. She could still feel his fingers and the pulse continued to pound against her. "I've never felt anything like that before, and to be honest I was a little scared."

He pecked her lips. "Me too. I didn't know if I was doing it right."

She put a hand on his cheek. "You're fantastic, Ron. Hmm, you're so good at all this."

He raised an eyebrow. "Is that a fact?"

"Very much so," she answered, tracing his bottom lip.

He grinned. "I could always open up for business. There is this new Cannons shirt that I want."

She tapped his nose. "As long as I'm your only customer."

Ron chuckled. "Of course you are. Only for you!" He trailed off and licked his lips before looking down at hers. They closed the gap and kissed roughly. Hermione didn't know if she had any energy left, but she didn't want to stop. She hugged herself around him and he held her closely. She wanted to try. She wanted to give Ron what he gave to her.

Someone laughed and Hermione instantly jumped away from him. They both stood and she tried desperately to readjust her sticky knickers. The laughing grew closer. "What do we do?" Ron asked.

"Ah, um, pick up your cloak and follow my lead," she said, looking to the ground as if it would provide answers. She knew that they were caught. It was written all over her that she had just experienced the greatest orgasm of her life, and Ron's smirk couldn't get any bigger even if he tried.

The laughter was in the room now. Two people wrapped firmly to each other stumbled into the room. They were half giggling and half snogging. "Oh!" the girl said. Hermione recognized them immediately. They were the same seventh years that always snogged around the castle after hours.

Her boyfriend rolled his eyes. "Shit, we thought that you two were finished. Aren't rounds over?"

"Well!" Ron started, scratching his head.

"Yes, they just finished. We came up here to scare off some first years. It's too dangerous for them to be up here unsupervised. We'll leave you to it. Goodnight," Hermione said. She took Ron by the hand and dragged him away.

She continued to say nothing as they made their way back to the Common Room. "Um, are you going to explain what that was? You never let people go," Ron said.

She shrugged. "I'm not in the mood tonight. Besides, it would be rich coming from me afterâ€¦all that."

He grinned. "I love you, you know it?"

She stopped and put her hands to his chest. "I do," she said gently. She stood on her toes and kissed him right in the middle of the corridor. She didn't even stop him from squeezing her arse.

As Ron kissed her harder and as her mind cleared of all the stresses of the day, Hermione realized that maybe she had given both Dean and Harry the wrong advice.

Sometimes, letting go was best.

\*\*\*\* Lol, yeah. We'll come back to the big part...First, it's really important that Hermione had that talk with Dean. Not only because of what she found out about Ron but also because you all need to know what he thinks about Harry and Ginny at this point. Harry couldn't get the same information out of him in the same way, so, he talking to Hermione about it is better. Now, Dean's insecurities made him jump to the idea that Ginny must have been cheating, but he doesn't actually think she's some sort of banshee. He's trying to find his real place in their relationship so he can move on. To go with this, Ron's apprehensions to completely take Harry's sideâ€¦just remember that, okay? Lol ;)

Now! Lol. Ahhh! The last bit is my natural element, lol. I have no shame in saying that I am first and foremost an R/Hr smut writer. I've written so many R/Hr one-shot or real short story fictions that are mostly humorous/passionate smut that shows their dynamics and this game of "who's the boss?" lol. It wasn't till later on that I went past plot-what-plot stories and wrote actually fictions with multiple layers. So, it's been so hard for me not to write Ron and Hermione all over each other like this. This is home for me so I'm warning now that for most of the sexual situations R/Hr get into in this story, they'll be graphic like this. I hope you don't mind. I'll do my best to keep it tame and somewhat summarized like I did this situation but this is my passion. I love love love love Ron and Hermione's romantic relationship to death but their sexual relationship and their different roles in it are my obsession so, just a fair warning!

One more thing, I love neurotic Hermione! Lol. She's so tightly wound and anal and mental sometimes because of all the things she thinks she- "has to do and keep up with and in order because if she doesn't everything will fall apart and won't get done and she won't be Head Girl and-" \* takes a breath\* lol, like that. To me it's part of the reason why Ron is so drawn to her. He's nothing like that at all and he finds it a little frightening and strangely attractive/intriguing. He worries about her being so wound up but at the same time he doesn't mind it because he thinks it's fascinating and he loves to unwind herâ€¦as you could see. ;) Also, I love Sexual!Hermione. Too often people think that she's bloodless or doesn't feel that burn. Of course she does. She good at hiding it but on the inside it drives her insane and she thinks about it and of course analyzes over it. I see this

very intense sexual drive to her and I like writing her with it. I think it's canon. Same goes with Ron.

So, I hope you all enjoyed this. I did, of course. If you're thinking, "What about Ron? He deserves some pleasure!" Well, not to fear. I love Ron and I love Ron getting his even more. Not to mention, it's ME, Rose, so of course I'm going to let Ron have his turn. Just keep reading and REVIEW and you'll see for yourself!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 41

Thanks for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry finally stopped laughing. "Honestly, I don't see how I passed. I shouldn't be here this year."

"If you're not supposed to be here, then I should have been cursed the moment I walked back in school. I did horribly," Neville said.

"Obviously not since you're both still here," Ginny said.

"I agree. Stop talking like that and stop trying to scare us. It won't work," Luna added. "OWLS aren't that bad, I'm sure." Harry and Neville looked at each other before bursting into laughter again. It was a beautiful afternoon and the four of them were outside talking about upcoming exams. It wasn't the funniest topic of conversation but Harry didn't care. He was with Ginny and the two of them were happy.

Ginny nudged his side to stop his laughter. "You're such a git, Harry. You're supposed to be supportive and helpful."

He took her hand and held it in his. "I'm sorry. I am trying to be helpful. That's why I'm being honest. It was horrible."

"Potions almost killed me. Actually, I think it did," Neville said.

Luna rubbed his shoulder. "You're doing better this year."

"Only because I have you to help. I don't know why you're even bothering to study. You know all the material," Neville said.

"No, I don't," she answered pointedly. "There are some exceptionally challenging ingredients to a few potions that I keep forgetting."

"Stop being so modest, Luna. He's right. I feel completely thick when we study together. Shit, I know how Ron must feel when he's studying with Hermione," Ginny cheeked.

Harry started laughing once more, but he tried to stop himself out of loyalty. "Hey, don't take the piss. Ron is doing okay this term, and it's hard to feel smart when Hermione is around."

"She's probably the reason why he's doing so well," Neville said. "She's always making him study which gives me laugh."

"That's only when they're not snogging," Ginny said with an eye roll.

"I think it's fantastic. I've always known that a lot of Ron's rudeness was directly related to his relationship with Hermione. He's still rude, of course, but it's not as bad," Luna said.

"Yeah, it's great to see him happy. It's nice to see them both happy," Harry said.

"Like you two?" Neville asked with a smile.

Harry put his arm around Ginny and she moved against his chest. They looked at each other for a while and smiled. "I'd like to think so," she said gently. The group went back to talking about exams for a while before Neville and Luna decided to leave to enjoy the rest of the day together.

"Finally, we're alone," Ginny said, lying completely against Harry's chest.

He held his arms around her waist and took in the fruity smell of her hair. He kissed the top of her head. "I'm only joking about all of this. I'm sure you'll do great."

"Thanks. I'm nervous about it, but there are a lot of other things on my mind, like Quidditch," she said.

"We'll be fine. Practices are going really well, and Slytherin won't know what to do once we're back in the air with them. Just keep being my star chaser and we should win, easily," he said in her ear.

She turned to face him. In the sunlight her hair was richer and redder than usual. Her brown eyes popped, and every freckle on her skin was noticeable. She was so beautiful and fiery. "Wow, I've never heard you speak so confidently before. Aren't you usually reserved about our chances?"

He put his forehead to hers and pecked her lips. "That's in front of the team. When it's just you and me, I'll be completely honest."

She turned her body around so she straddled his lap. "That's a bit unfair. Isn't that some sort of bias or choosing favorites?"

He felt heat travel through him as their bodies touched. "I don't mind if you don't."

She smiled and looked down at his lips before pressing hers against his. He let out a contented sigh like he always did when

they kissed. The wind swept over them and her long hair flowed in front of his face. He chuckled as they tickled his neck. Ginny pulled away. "What's so funny?" she asked.

He took a few of her strands and felt them between his fingers. "Your hair was tickling my face."

"Maybe it likes seeing you smile. You don't smile enough, Harry," she said.

He took her hand and ran his thumb over the splash of freckles. They stood out on her tiny hand. Harry sometimes forgot how small Ginny was. Though he loved her big and strong personality, it was nice to hold her small frame snugly against him. He loved that she was a small ball of fire. "I think I do now."

She put her hands on his shoulders. "Just as long as you don't turn into a Creevey brother."

"What? You don't like the idea of me being bubbly about everything that moves?" He smiled extremely wide and looked around in mock awe. Ginny laughed and kissed him again. She licked his bottom lip, and he parted his mouth to let her in. He ran his hands up her thighs and cupped her arse. She moaned and gently nipped his tongue. Already, the current pushed against him. Someone cleared her throat.

Ginny pulled away and the two looked up. Cho was standing before them with amusement written all over her face. Ginny hopped off him and Harry stood up. "Umâ€¦heyâ€¦"

"I'm really sorry. I don't mean to disturb you two. Hey, Ginny," Cho said, waving.

"Hi," she answered. Harry grinned. He didn't have to see her face to know that she was holding back an eye roll.

"Is something wrong?" Harry asked.

"Not at all. I have a quick question. Will you be using the pitch tomorrow?" she asked.

"No. I booked it for later on in the week. I don't want to wear everyone out," he said.

She let out a breath of relief. "Good. I can use it."

"But you just won against Hufflepuff. You're in the championship," he said.

She smiled proudly. "Yes, but I want to keep practicing during our break. You're playing against Malfoy and the boys soon and after you win, your team will already have an added advantage of vigor. I want to be ready for you."

"I reckon you should practice, then. I plan on walking away with a trophy my first year as captain. You know this," he said.



Cho pretended to shake. "Oh, well, I better get started. See you. Bye Ginny."

Harry shook his head as he watched her walk away. It was almost unreal to think that there was a time when he could barely talk to her. He sat back down next to Ginny. Her eyebrow was raised and she was smirking. "What?" he asked.

"I don't think I've ever seen you and Cho so normal before," she said.

Harry didn't know if she was being sincere or not. He couldn't read her expression. "We're friends."

"I know. I'm not saying anything bad about it. I think it's great. Seeing you and Cho talking makes me think," she stopped for a moment and peered over the pond. "Well, it makes me think that I can work things out with Dean."

It took all of his effort not to roll his eyes. Of course, his perfect day couldn't be complete without the mention of Dean at least once. "Have you talked to him recently?" he asked.

"I know you don't want to hear about it," she said.

She was right but he had to be supportive anyway. "I don't mind. I care about how you feel."

She shrugged. "We've talked some, yeah. I don't know what happened. He seemed okay for a while but out of nowhere he stopped coming around. I don't know if he's avoiding me or what."

"Maybe you shouldn't worry about it. If Dean is going to be dick about this, then let him," he suggested.

"Hmm, thanks babe. That's great advice," Ginny said.

"What do you want me to say, Ginny? Maybe this is his way of moving on. Blokes don't always like to talk. We need time alone to think and work shit out," he said.

She sighed and rubbed her eyes. "I'm sorry. I know you're right, but this whole thing has taken so much out of me. I don't want to be a bitch."

"You're not. You've been more than great. If anyone is a bitch, it's him," he said.

Her eyes widened and a blush crept over her cheeks. "Harry, what's gotten into you?"

"I hate that all this is upsetting you so much. I can tell how much it's taking out of you. It's not right. You deserve to be happy," he said, running a hand through her hair.

"If the circumstances weren't so bad, I'd say that this is a major turn on for me. I love you like this. I miss it," she said. "I think all this has changed the both of us."

"But it stops now. The end of term will be here before we know it, and I don't want us miserable the whole time," he said.

"We won't be. I'll stop putting us through this. If Dean and I can't come to some sort of medium, then I guess this is where we'll stay. I don't want it like this, but it's not worth it. I want you to be happy, too," she said.

"I am happy. I'm with you so everything else can bugger off. I don't care," he said before kissing her again.

After a while they went back inside. Ginny returned to her dorm to study and Harry headed to his room. He made sure to jiggle the handle before entering. With just about everyone in a relationship, his dorm room had easily become the getaway spot. There wasn't a return jiggle so he walked in. However, there were people inside. Ron and Hermione were standing next to his bed arguing about something. Papers and weird cut out flowers scattered his blanket.

"Hermione, that's not going to work. No one will be able to figure it out but you!" Ron said, his neck matching his hair color.

Hermione gave a frustrated sigh and pointed to some sort of chart. "Just because you didn't pay attention during the presentation doesn't mean that no one else will! Is it so wrong to want something a bit more elegant than champagne and beans on toast?"

He shrugged. "Sounds brilliant to me. Besides, the champagne makes it elegant."

"In Merlin's name, Ronald! You are absolutely hopeless. I'm not doing this with you anymore. We'll have to work this out later. I have better things to do," she snapped.

He chuckled. "Like what? Make some more impossible riddles for the seventh years to sweat over. Oops, I mean enjoy as they celebrate leaving school?"

She clenched her jaw. "Take that back."

He folded his arms over his chest and smirked. "No, and if you ask me say it again, then I will."

It was curious. Harry could see how angry they were at each other, but there was something so playful about how they were staring at each other. He made a noise to signal his presence before the two either started arguing again or snogging. Hermione jumped and grabbed at her chest. "Harry! Don't ever do that!"

"Yeah, how long have you been standing there? Bloody hell," Ron added.

"Not long. I can come back," Harry said.

"No need to. I'm leaving. Ron and I are done here," she shot, glaring at him again.

Ron shoveled all the charts and flowers off his bed. "Yep, we're done for sure."

"You're insufferable," she said.

"And you're mental," he answered.

They glared at each other again before Hermione stood on her toes and kissed his lips softly. "I'll see you later."

"You better not bring those bloody charts to dinner," he said, tucking hair behind her ear.

She gently pushed him. "You really annoy me sometimes, Ron."

"I love you, too," he called as she left the room. He flopped back on his bed. "Fucking hell that woman."

"Don't pretend that you don't enjoy it. I reckon you do it on purpose just to get her going," Harry said, helping him pick up the charts and flowers.

"Yeah, sometimes I do. There's nothing sexier than a hot and bothered Hermione Granger," Ron said, wiggling his eyebrows.

"I'll have to take your word for it, mate," Harry said. "What were you two on about anyway?"

"What else makes us like this? Bloody McGonagall once again! She wants us to help decide the activity program. I think the lot will want to eat and get as pissed as they can off the champagne. Of course, Hermione wants this elaborate game that tracks all the courses and spells and other shit that they learned over the seven years of being here using flowers," Ron explained.

Harry snorted. "I can't really imagine Cho wanting to do that."

"I know. I certainly don't want to do that next year, but it means a lot to her so maybe we can find a way to make both work," he said.

"Is that right? A compromise from Ron, that's new," Harry teased.

Ron gave him the finger. "Shut up. I just don't want her to be mad at me for more than one thing at a time. I know that I'll say or do something stupid soon enough, and this is an easy fix." They stacked the material on his bed and sat on the floor. "But enough about that. How's my sister?"

"She's fine. She's studying with Luna some more. I feel like a prat. We never studied that much last year," Harry said.

"Yeah, well, she doesn't have Hermione's constant nagging to turn her off from it like we did. Fucking hell, she's so damn smart."

She almost got as many OWLs as Percy did, I think." Ron stared off and smiled.

"Don't get a stiff one. I don't know if Hermione will be the mood to work it out for you," Harry said.

Ron kicked his leg and blushed. "Fuck off, Harry. I was thinking about something that I'd like to do for her, but I'll need your help."

"What is it?" he asked.

"I dunno yet but I want it to be nice so I may need Ginny's help, too," Ron said.

"Just let us know. I'll help however I can," Harry said.

Ron nodded and fidgeted with his shoelaces. "Actually, you can help me with something now."

"Go on," he said.

Ron rubbed his neck. "Um, I was just wonderingâ€¦have you and Ginny done it yet?"

"What?" he asked out of breath.

"I know I shouldn't be asking but have you?" Ron said.

Harry didn't know what to say. He didn't want to lie, but the truth didn't seem like a better idea. "No, we haven't."

"Oh," Ron said.

"Why do you sound so disappointed?" Harry asked.

"I'm not. It's good that you haven't. I mean I guess it's good. I don't have to worry about you two, but I don't know. I need some advice is all," Ron said.

"Advice about what?" he asked.

Ron rubbed his neck harder. "I don't know. Like how am I supposed know when it's the right time to suggest it or just start doing it and see if she goes along with it. I don't know about what timeline I should follow or what signals I should look for. Bloody hell, girls are confusing, and I'd hate to try and make Hermione angry, but I also don't want to not try and make her angry."

"I get what you're saying. I wish I knew, but I'm just as confused," Harry said. For him it had been easy. He didn't think. He just acted. He and Ginny both had. He couldn't tell Ron that, though. He couldn't bring up snogging her roughly, lifting her on her dresser, feeling up her warm wetness, or shagging her like it was the end of days.

"Harry?" Ron said, snapping him out of his thoughts.

"Huh? Oh, yes, um, I don't know what to tell you, mate," Harry rushed. Ron's chest deflated and he nodded. It made him feel even more like a tit. He had to help in some way. He had to make up for lying again. "If I had to say anything about sex, then I reckon there isn't some timeline you have to follow. As long as you both are ready and trust each other, any time can be good. Also, make sure you do it because you want to and not because you think you have to or because you're trying to make up for something."

"What do you mean by that?" Ron asked.

"Well, don't think that you have to shag just because you're really angry and you have to not be angry anymore or because you feel like your relationship won't mean anything without it," Harry said. His stomach knotted as he spoke. Looking back on it now, he wasn't sure what his and Ginny's reason had been for having sex. He was so sure it was because they both wanted to, but now he wasn't so sure.

Ron chewed on his nail. "Shit, there's a lot to consider. Dad warned me but still. How do you know so much, Harry?"

"I don't. This is only what I think. You're lucky. You can talk to Hermione about all this and she loves you, so it won't be too bad," Harry said.

He smiled. "Yeah, we've been good at talking about this stuff. We, um, we're getting there. There isn't a rush or anything, but I'm ready. For once I feel like the smartest bloke in the world. I'm glad that I didn't have sex with Lavender. Everything would be different if I had."

"I'm sure Hermione is glad, too. She worried a lot about that," Harry said.

"She told me. We talked about it. She knows that I didn't, and I know that she's never really been with someone, so she's all mine." Ron leaned back and supported himself on his palms. "Am I a tit for saying that this has been my dream for years? What I have is exactly how I've always wanted it. I get to have her."

"No, I don't think you are," Harry said. He smiled at his best friend but he couldn't stop the wave of jealousy and disappointment. He would never have that special moment with Ginny and worse, his first time with her was nothing like what he had dreamed of. He spoiled it all.

"Harry, are you okay?" Ron asked.

Harry looked to him. He decided to be somewhat honest. If there was anyone in the world that he could talk to, it was Ron. "Yeah, I'm okay. I just wish that I could have what you do. Ginny's got to her first and as much as he may love her, I know it wasn't what it might have been if I'd been there instead. I want to kick myself in the bollocks sometimes."

Ron scooted over to him. "Don't get upset over it. Dean might have you know with her first, but that doesn't mean that it can't be better and special with you. I know that if I had done it with Lavender, it wouldn't make me want it with Hermione any less. If anything, I'd probably want it more."

"It's different, though. Your feelings for Lavender aren't the same as Ginny's feelings for Dean. Did you know that up until this afternoon she was still waiting around for him? She's still trying. They have a real history. I don't know what he did, but it's changed her. She acts so differently when he's involved," he explained.

Ron rubbed his temple irritably. "What that wanker did was make my little sister feel like something she's not and something she never will be. I know it. She told me. It took everything I had not to strangle him. Let it go, Harry. You both need to let him go."

"I know. I told her to and she agreed, finally. All I care about is my relationship with her. Aside from him, we're going great. We're actually really happy," Harry said.

Ron patted his knee with his foot. "Good. You deserve it. I mean that, regardless of what you think I feel. I can still be a bit upset about what you and Hermione did and be happy for you and Ginny at the same time."

"And I can still have the best intentions even though I lied," Harry said. He and Ron eyed each other as if silently challenging their statements.

Ron was the first to look away. "Alright, that works for me, I reckon."

The doorknob jiggled and without a pause, Seamus burst through with Hannah Abbott on his arm. "Get out, twats. We need the space to shag."

Hannah let go of his hand and gasped. "Seamus, please."

"What? They know what's going on, don't ya boys?" Seamus said.

Harry and Ron got up. "Sure, we'll leave. Ron, we can toss the quaffle. Might as well start training for the game."

"I don't care what we do. Let's just get out of here," Ron said, frowning at the snogging couple.

Seamus pulled away from Hannah and kicked off his shoes. "Ron, Hermione isn't comin' round anytime soon, right? I don't want her catching Hannah in here again."

"I don't think so. I'll see her in a while, so I'll keep her away," Ron said.

Seamus laughed. "Thanks, mate. Maybe next time you and her can watch and learn a few things."

"Seamus!" Hannah said, hitting him.

Ron shivered. "No, we're fine. Have a good time and clean up after yourselves." They hurried out of the room just as the sounds of zippers erupted. "Ew, those two are a nightmare."

"You could always ask him for sex advice," Harry cheeked.

"Yeah, the key word is sex. What he does with Hannah doesn't meet the requirements. What they do is so much more," Ron said, shivering again.

They walked downstairs and out of the Common Room. As they made their way toward the castle doors, Harry noticed two people standing very close near the wall. He squinted and noticed them right away. "Is thatâ€¦!"

"Ronnie! Harry!" Lavender said. She moved from the wall and over to them.

Dean followed closely behind. "Hi guys."

"Hey," Harry said, looking more at Dean than at Lavender.

Ron didn't seem to realize the oddness. "Hi, Lavender. Dean."

She flipped her hair and puffed out her chest slightly. "What are you two up to?"

Harry thought it was obvious. "Well, we have our brooms, so we're going for a fly."

"This isn't an official practice is it, Harry?" Dean asked, almost cheerfully.

"No. We had to get out of the room. Seamus and Hannah," Harry said.

Dean chuckled. "That bloke can't get enough. I think he has a problem, eh?"

Harry was frozen in confusion. He didn't know why Dean was being so nice and indifferent. Ron took over for him. "I asked him to clean up afterwards, so it won't be like last time."

Lavender playfully pushed his chest. "Oh, Ronnie, stop it! That's nasty."

He chuckled. "You don't know him like we do."

"Okay. I trust your word and everything else," she said, gazing at him manically. She slowly pulled her bottom lip between her teeth and sucked on it. The gesture was so overwhelmingly sexual that Harry blushed. Not surprisingly, Ron didn't seem to get it. He simply shrugged.

"If there isn't practice going on, then I reckon we can keep going, Lavender," Dean said, tapping her shoulder.

She stopped and flipped her hair again. "Right. See you at dinner, maybe. Bye Ronnie." He nodded, still oblivious to what just happened.

"Nice talking to you, Harry," Dean said.

"Yeah, you too," Harry was finally able to say. Dean gave him a small smile and walked off with Lavender. It was eerie and Harry almost felt like he needed a shower to wash off the discomfort. "What the hell was that?"

"What was what?" Ron asked.

Harry gave him a look. "What just happened? What was that?"

"I don't get it," Ron said slowly.

"Open your eyes, Ron. You don't find it weird that Dean and Lavender are spending time together? What were they talking about?" he asked.

Ron shrugged. "I dunno, and I don't see why it matters. They were just talking, Harry. Friends do that."

"Yeah, but as long as we've known Dean and as much as you know about Lavender, does it make sense to you for them to be so close like that?" Harry asked.

Ron looked at him vacantly. "Not everyone has a scheme. Maybe they're finding some relief in each other. I think it's great that they're doing whatever they're doing. It means that Dean can leave you and Ginny alone, and I don't have to stand like a git between Lavender and Hermione. Now, come on. The sun is in a good spot. Let's not waste it."

He walked off but Harry couldn't share his mindset. He couldn't ignore his instinct. He knew there was something more to it. However, he kept it in and decided to wait until he could talk to Hermione. He didn't have to wait long. The day slipped away from them and before long, they returned to the castle for dinner. He sat next to Ginny and looked around their table. Both Dean and Lavender were missing.

"Are you okay?" Ginny asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Harry said, returning to his pudding.

"I'm finished. Do you want to get out of here?" she asked.

The light from the candles morphed her pale face into a light creamy color. Somehow she always found a way be even more beautiful. "Yeah, I do, but can I meet you somewhere? I need to do something first."

"How about your room?" she suggested.



"No, Seamus and Hannah were in there this afternoon. I don't know the state of it. How about the Prefects bathroom?" he said.

"Okay," she said. She broke her biscuit in half and tossed a piece at Ron.

He turned his attention from Hermione. "Oi, what's the matter with you?"

"What's the password to the Prefects bathroom?" she asked.

Ron looked from her to Harry and smirked. "Why? What do I get for it?"

Harry rolled his eyes. Hermione tapped his nose. "Be nice. It's apple wood," she whispered.

"Cheers, Hermione," Ginny said, tossing the other half at Ron. She kissed Harry. "Meet you there."

"Don't go do anything till I get there," he said, squeezing her hand before letting her go.

"You two should really quit using us for our passwords, especially if food will be thrown at me," Ron said.

"We can't get your attention any other way. You and Hermione are always seconds away from letting it out right here," Harry answered.

Ron sniggered for a second before stopping abruptly. "That's not true. Hermione is too professional for that, and anyone who says differently doesn't know what they're talking about."

Hermione sat up straighter and smiled at him. "Thank you, Ron."

"I do listen to you on occasion," he said. They looked at each other again as if they were sharing some deep conversation. He took a big gulp of juice to help them remember that he was at the table. It worked. The two returned to their food.

Harry almost felt annoyance. He didn't know how he was supposed to talk to Hermione without Ron. Now that they were together, it was hard for him to get any alone time with either of them. He knew it was a necessary consequence of his two best friends dating, but it was inconvenient at the moment. "Hermione, can I talk to you for a minute? With the Quidditch finals coming up I want to do something for the team, and I need some help figuring out what McGonagall might or might not find appropriate."

"Right now?" she asked with a slight frown. "Is it happening tonight?"

"No, but I want to get started on the planning tonight. There might be a lot to do if it's approved," he came up with.

"If what's approved?" Ron asked. "What are we getting?"

"I can't tell you. It's a surprise for the whole team. That's why I need to talk to Hermione alone," Harry said, eyeing Hermione and hoping that she understood.

She nodded slightly. "Okay, lets go for a walk. I have a few minutes before rounds start. Come find us later, okay?" she said to Ron.

They got up from the table and Harry walked as fast as he could out of the hall. "Finally," he breathed, as they were alone.

"What's going on? Am I right to say that this has noting to do with Quidditch?" she asked.

"No, it doesn't. It's about Dean and Lavender. I saw them together before Ron and I left to practice. Maybe I'm mad but something seemed wrong. Dean was nice in a way that he hasn't been in a long time. Ron doesn't think anything of it. Maybe he's right," he said at once.

Hermione looked at him for a while before saying anything. "If you're mad, then so am I. It feels wrong to me, too."

Harry wanted to hug her. Sometimes he forgot how similar they could be. "So, it's not just me?"

"Of course not. Something is going on. Lavender has been even more bizarre than usual. She's being really nice to me, but sometimes she says something or looks at me a certain way that makes me feel like she's hexing me. I don't know what to think of it," she said.

"It's the first time Dean's been like this with me. Well, sometime back he stopped by me and Ginny's table and he talked to us like he wasn't upset, but this was different. What really gets me is that I've never seen him that close to Lavender before. Do you think they're dating?" he asked.

"Not a chance. Not with the way she stares at Ron and touches him all the time. I can't stand it," she said.

"What does he think?" Harry asked.

"What he always thinks. To him she isn't doing anything because he can't see her doing anything. He says it's great that she's being nice. I'm overreacting," she said.

"That what he basically told me. I want to believe him, but I can't help what I feel. Ginny said that Dean is practically ignoring her these days, but at the same time he's hanging around Lavender and acting nice to me? It doesn't make sense," he said.

"What can we do about it? We honestly have nothing to go on but our feelings," she said.

"I don't know, but we have to figure out something. I can't bring this up to Ginny. There's enough on her mind that involves him. I'm not going to give her anymore," he said.

"I don't think she or Ron can help. This is something we did, Harry. Dean and Lavender know it, and I know she told McGonagall about Ron and me. I haven't stopped believing it," Hermione said.

He nodded. "Yeah, me neither. I have no idea what Dean's plan is. Fucking hell, I just want this term to end. I'm so fucking tired of feeling like this. It's not like I don't have enough on my mind."

Hermione took his hand. "Harry, calm down. We'll figure out something. For all we know they're just trying to push us away from them. This could all be plain intimidation."

"I'm not intimidated by Dean. If he wants to go there, then I'll meet him any day," he said through gritted teeth.

Hermione sighed and put a hand on her hip. "Not everything has to be settled with fists. When will men understand that?"

"Never. Sometimes words don't get the point across," he said with a smile.

"Well, they'll have to this time. Until we come up with a plan, try not to be around him for too long and try to not let it get to you. I'm still here for you, Harry. We'll still be in this together," she said, returning his smile.

He squeezed her hand. "You have no idea how thankful I am for that."

"Hey, sorry to interrupt," Ron said, strolling up to them. He looked nervously between them and Harry dropped her hand. "Did you get it worked out?"

"Yes, I think we came up with something nice," Hermione said. Ron still looked nervous.

Harry felt even more annoyance. Not even his best mate would trust him and let him be. "I'll leave you to it, then. Thanks for your help, Hermione." He walked away without giving them time to respond. He had so much on his mind, but he blocked it out for the time being and grinned as he made his way upstairs and to the Prefects bathroom. Ginny was waiting for him in the tub. "What are you trying to do to me?" he asked.

"What?" she said innocently. "It's comfortable in here."

He sat next to her and stretched out his arms. "I guess your right. We'll have to try out the entire experience someday." She laughed and sat on top of him again. He held her around the waist and looked into her eyes. So much love and passion charged between them. He didn't think he could ever love someone the way he loved her. Somehow she always lifted him to where he needed to be.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked, moving black bangs out of his eyes.

"You. I love you so much, Ginny. I'll do anything to keep moments like this. They mean everything to me," he said, feeling tightness in his chest. Speaking his feelings always made him vulnerable.

She held on to his collar and pulled him closer. "They're everything to me, too. I can't imagine being any different than how we are now. You mean so much to me. I fucking love you. I really do."

"I won't let this change. I promise that I won't," he said, hugging her tightly.

"Don't break that promise," she whispered against his lips.

"I won't," he mumbled before kissing her powerfully. They moaned as the feeling passed through them. His heart pounded and her taste and her body erased everything from his mind. Ginny healed him in a way that no one else would ever be able to, and the idea of losing it because of his mistakes made him kiss her harder.

She wrapped her legs firmly around his waist and he leaned forward. He guided her back until her head rested against the wall of the tub. He pulled off his jacket and placed it under her head without parting from her mouth. Ginny reached under his shirt and touched his stomach and chest. He groaned and squeezed her thighs. His mind moved so much slower than his body did. He pressed his palm against the middle of her jeans, and he felt how warm she was. She shook and bit his bottom lip. Her hand traveled to his jeans, and she brushed it against his hardness. He finally broke out of the snog and moaned. He kissed her neck and she pulled on his belt buckle.

"I miss your body, Harry. It's been a long time," she said softly.

He licked to her mouth. "I know it has. I haven't forgotten, though. I feel you all the time."

She moaned and pulled out the strap. "It's all I think about sometimes." They kissed again and every ounce of pulse and pressure he had flooded past his groin. He couldn't believe it. However, a loud bang against the door broke his passion and he fell off her. They both stood and he quickly fixed his belt.

"Prefect rounds started a while ago. It's probably one now," he said out of breath.

"Fucking hell," Ginny said. "Maybe it's for the best. Come on." He raised an eyebrow. He wanted to ask why it was for the best but when she opened the door, his concentration faded.

Dean was on the other side with a towel draped over his shoulder and his shower bag. "Oh, sorry, I didn't know--"

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Harry interrupted.

"What does it look like? I want to take a bath," Dean said.

"Why in here? There are plenty of places to do that. This is the Prefects bathroom," Harry said.

"I fucking know that, Harry. You aren't the only one who can get the password. Besides, you're in here. Are only certain type of people allowed in here?" he asked.

"Oh, that's a load of bollocks," Harry said.

"Stop it, both of you!" Ginny said. She looked at Dean. "I tried to find you today."

"Well, I was busy. Like you are now," he shot.

"Hey, don't talk to her like that," Harry shot back, walking closer to him.

Ginny put a hand on his chest. "Harry, stop. If Dean is in the mood to be an asshole right now, then we'll let him. He's doing a great job."

"Cheers, and thanks for your permission, Ginny. Can I come in now or are you two still at it?" he asked.

"Yes, we're still at it. Fuck off," Harry said.

"No, Harry! Stop it!" Ginny said loudly. "Go ahead and take it if you need to wash yourself that badly."

"Nice," Dean said sarcastically.

He pushed past Harry as he waked in, and it was just enough to set him off. Without thinking Harry's anger exploded and he shoved him. "Watch where you're going."

"You dick!" Dean growled.

"Just fucking stop it!" Ginny shouted. "Why does it always have to come to this?" She hit Dean's arm and then Harry's before storming away.

"Ginny!" Harry called. He began to walk after her but against his better judgment, he glanced back to Dean. He was grinning slightly. It made him feel sick and the anger twisted tighter but he would have to save it for later. He finally caught up to Ginny. "Wait. I'm sorry, okay."

"Don't apologize. I should have known something like that would happen. Why would anything run smoothly," she said.

"Ginny, you saw him. He tried to make me loose it," he said.

"I'm not thick, Harry. I know he did. I get it. I was wrong. I was wrong about everything," she said.

"What are you talking about? What are you wrong about?" he asked.

She shook her head and rubbed her neck. From being around Ron for so many years, he knew exactly what that meant. She was holding back something. "Nothing. We're too upset to talk about it right now. Maybe we should head on to bed or something. I still have a lot of homework to do."

"Don't give me that again. If you have something to say, then say it," he said.

She leaned up and kissed him. "I love you, Harry. I'll talk to you in the morning." She walked away and Harry didn't bother going after her.

He went in the opposite direction and walked as swiftly as he could to keep from going after Dean. As he turned the corner he saw Ron and Hermione near the end of the hallway. She stood with her back against the wall, and he stood in front of her with an arm stretched out by her head. He whispered something in her ear that made her laugh and she nodded. He then kissed her and moved his hand from the wall to her waist. He ran his finger across her stomach, and Harry turned around and walked away.

\*\*\*\* Oh, I really love Harry in this chapter. His fierce side has always been something I've found attractive and it gives him a lot more depth. Things are heating up with Harry/Ginny/Dean. It's pretty intense right now, and I'm not going to apologize for it. I live for conflict like this and particularly for those three. Don't worry though, I have something really great planned for Harry and Ginny, and it's coming up soon so keep the faith!

As for Ron and Hermione \* sigh\* I worship them! lol. They're great aren't they? BUT, I feel like it's only fair that I warn you lot. If you think their relationship is going to be all giggles and snogs for the rest of the story, stop it. Just letting you know nowâ€¦

I can't say enough how important it is to pay attention to the conversations and small events that happen in this story. This chapter alone has a lot of illusions to things that are right around the corner! So, if you want to find out what happens nextâ€¦review! I promiseâ€¦it'll be worth itâ€¦heheâ€¦thanks for reading!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 42

Thanks for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Hermione turned the page of her book. "There you are," she said as she found the definition to the word that had been plaguing

her all night. She was finally able to finish her essay. A contented smile hugged her lips. Academic success meant the world to her. As a female Muggle-born, she had to be the best. She would never give anyone a reason to hold her back. She closed her books and went over her many lists of things to do in her head. She had finished her defense essay, completed her herbology course work, and had properly brewed the contraceptive potion. Her smile grew. She and Ron had worked all afternoon on the potion. They brewed tube after tube until they were both absolutely sure that they could make it blindfolded and under the imperious curse. Once that was over, it was only right that they treat themselves with a little snog session, a very heavy and sticky snog session, ending with Ron's hand down her knickers and her crying out against his neck.

She felt rather guilty for being so sexual. She knew that people talked about them. They did kiss and touch all the time. She tried her best to keep it professional when she had to, but she couldn't lie and say that it was easy to deny him and his hands. For years she had yearned for him and now she had him. She wanted to enjoy him and all his many talents, and the bloke was certainly talented. No matter what anyone said about Ron's book smarts or Quidditch skills, there was no denying his massive intelligence when it came to sex. He was a physical masterpiece and a sexual beast. She longed to have his confidence and skill. She wanted to touch him. She wanted to watch as he lost it because of her. She wanted to hear him moan her name as he came. Thinking about Ron's orgasm made her skin burn. She moaned slightly and squeezed her thigh. She had to stop thinking about Ron or she would relieve herself right there in the library.

Almost as if he had been listening to her thoughts, Ron walked into the library and came over to her table. Her eyes were still closed as she was still thinking about Ron cumming, but she knew that he was there. She could smell the overpowering aroma of earth, sweat, and apple. It was Ron's smell. It was Ron's unique scent after Quidditch practice.

True enough, when she opened her eyes, Ron was standing next to her dressed in his scarlet Quidditch robes. His fiery hair was damp and his skin was flushed. He rested his palm and his weight on his broom, and he smirked with casualness and humor. He was, in short, sex on very long and freckly legs. "Are you alright?" he asked.

After a while she remembered how to speak. "Yes, I'm fine, a little tired."

"Yeah, me too. Harry really tore our bollocks off out there. I'm gonna go shower, and I'll meet you in the hall." He bent down and kissed her forehead. The smell was right against her nose and though his lips were slightly rough and cracked, it felt good. As soon as he pulled away, she stood up and pulled him with her. She rushed them to the back of the library and pushed him against a shelf.

"What did I do?" he asked.

She could see the concern in his eyes but excitement hid there as well. She put her hands on his shoulders and spread her legs to place her feet on the edge of the shelf behind him. Ron held her firmly by the arse as she lifted herself. This way, she was more eye level with him. "This is better."

He raised an eyebrow. "I'll never understand you."

"Why do you say that?" She used the back of her sleeve to rub away mud that was on his ear.

"The library is like your bloody home. You're never more serious and bossy about rules then when we're in here, but you're standing on a shelf and my hands are on your arse. Anyone can walk by and see us."

"No one comes down these aisles," she assured, tracing her fingers over his nose and jaw line.

Ron shivered. "Still, Filch could walk by to clean or something, and in this position it looks like we're about to shag."

She only allowed herself to view the image for a second. "Well, we're not. I just want to give you a proper kiss before dinner."

He crinkled his nose. "I don't see why you want to. I know that I smell horrible. I've got rubbish all over me. Can't be pleasant."

She put her forehead against his. "We've had this conversation before. I'm not a delicate girl."

Something in his eyes changed. She knew that the statement did something to him because it did something to her, too. That night in McGonagall's office was still so clear in her mind, and the love and passion from that evening charged between them. "No, you're not," he whispered. They leaned in and kissed. Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck, and he squeezed her arse. She moaned quietly as his tongue roamed her mouth. She tried her best to stay in control. They were in an open library. However, it was difficult. Ron's lips were so salty, and his hands burned right through her. He heaved himself off the wall, and she squeaked as she secured her legs around his waist.

He shuffled until her back was against the opposite bookshelf. He broke out of the kiss and nibbled on her earlobe. "We really could, you know? I can fuck you right here against these books. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

She jerked and pressed her lips together to keep from screaming. Every part of her was on fire. Ron's tone was deep, husky, and playful. Even his sexual banter was incredible. She didn't know what was wrong with her. She actually considered his offer for a whole minute before hitting his arm. "Ronald Weasley, not only is that inappropriate, but you make it sound so vulgar. Why can't you use proper language?"

He shrugged. "It's not vulgar. There's nothing wrong with the word fuck, and there's nothing wrong with us fucking right here."



She hit his arm again as the pressure throbbed against her middle. "R-Ron, stop it."

"What? I will fuck you in this very spot. I'll fuck you till my legs give out. I'll fuck you till you're too tired to feel it anymore. We'll fuck like mad over and over, and it will be the sweetest and most non-vulgar thing in the world. I'll tell you how much I love you and how beautiful the flowers are or whatever to make it seem less vulgar if you want, but I won't call it anything else either than us fucking because that's how it's supposed to be done in a library. We're supposed to fuck each other senseless while staying silent and hidden. That's the whole point and fun of it. Isn't that right?" He smirked at her confidently.

She had nothing to say. Her mind melted and evaporated. She opened her mouth to find something witty or overly intellectual to spurt back, but she had nothing. All she had were the visions of Ron pumping into her, while she stuffed his Quidditch glove into her mouth to keep from making noises. The cheeky bloke had won. "Put me down, please."

Ron obeyed and lowered her to the ground. He crossed his arms over his chest. "Are you mad at me?"

"No, I just can't believe that you managed to use that word nine times during this conversation. You should feel proud of yourself." She tried to sound as sternly as possible, and she tried to walk back to the table without stumbling. Ron had seduced her successfully, but she couldn't let him know. She couldn't give any indication that she wanted everything that he had described.

As she walked back to her room, her mind played over their encounter. Ron had smoothly and effortlessly ruffled her. He got under her skin so easily and always had. It made her blush. He was right. She wanted sex rough and desperate, but not for the first time. No, she wanted something slow and easy. She wanted to get through the pain and embarrassment. She wanted Ron to be gentle. She knew that he would be, but she was terrified. As wild as sex made her feel, she was horribly frightened, and she worried that Ron's desires wouldn't be met. She hated not knowing and not being an expert. For once everything was totally out of her control. Hermione opened the door to her dorm room. Lavender and Parvati were on Parvati's bed. She was crying, and Lavender held her and ran her fingers through her air. She stayed frozen at the door. She didn't want to disturb them.

"Padma warned me. She told me that it was a bad idea to get involved with him, but I didn't listen. She's the smart one, and I'm the dumb one," Parvati sobbed.

"No, you're not," Lavender corrected. "Just because she's in Ravenclaw doesn't mean that she's smarter or better. You trusted him. There's nothing dumb about that. People can't help who they fancy."

Parvati pulled away and rubbed her eyes. "I should have been able to. I should have known. We could never work. He's a bloody Slytherin."

Lavender frowned. "That doesn't matter, Patty. Don't let your sister or anyone else tell you that it matters. People always have something to say about relationships, but no one but the people in it can make a difference. You should talk to him."

"And say what? We broke up. There's nothing left for us to talk about." Parvati let out another batch of tears.

Lavender caressed her back, and her eyes dampened. "If you care about him, then there's always something to talk about. He cares about you, Patty. You know Blaise doesn't smile, but he always did when he was around you. He cares butâ€¦guysâ€¦they like to pretend that they don't care even when they do. Trust me. You've got nothing to lose."

"But Lavender--"

"I don't want to hear it. Talk to him, Patty. No matter what happens, you need to know for sure. I'll be here for you either way. I'm always here." Lavender wiped a tear away and smiled.

Parvati sniffed. "Oh, Lavender, you're my best friend in the world. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"You would drown in your own mascara," Lavender teased. She handed her a tissue. "I love you, Patty, and I'm going to help in any way that I can. You're my best friend."

Parvati blew her nose. "I love you, too. Thanks. Shit, I need to wash my face before dinner. I don't want Padma or any of the Slytherns to see me like this."

Hermione quickly pretended that she was just now coming in. They looked up at her. "Sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt."

"No, it's okay. Um, I need to wash my face. I have to clean up." Parvati wiped her eyes again and grabbed a change of clothes. She walked past her without looking up.

Lavender clutched her pillow and looked after her. "Is she okay?" Hermione asked.

She got up and started making Parvati's bed. "No, she's not. She and Blaise broke up. She felt it coming, but she still wasn't prepared. I guess it's a bad term for relationships."

There was sharpness in her voice, but she didn't look at her or roll her eyes. Hermione walked to her bed and put her books away. "I guess it's not."

Lavender still didn't look at her. She folded and refolded the blankets. "I told her to talk to him. Sometimes things just happen in the heat of the moment."

"I heard you say that. It's good advice," Hermione said. She felt something in the air. She felt as if she and Lavender were dancing around an issue. Both were trying not to bring up their situation. "I think that they'll be able to work it out. I agree with what you said. Blaise always seems happy with her. I'm sure that it's some sort of misunderstanding."

"So do I. Parvati deserves to be happy, so she shouldn't give up on him." Lavender finally stopped fusing with her bed and looked at her. "I don't think people should simply give up if their heart is fully invested. I'm a big believer in love and relationships, Hermione."

It sounded like a challenge, but for some reason Hermione took it as something else. To her it was almost like justification. "I know you are. That's a good thing. I've always found that enduring about you."

Lavender's body seemed to relax, and she actually smiled. "Thanks. Sometimes I wish that I could have a bit more self control about it, like you."

She gave her a look. "What do you mean?"

"You waited and good things came to you. That's lucky." Lavender went back to straightening Parvati's sheets. She wasn't sure how to take Lavender's statement. All she knew was that it was the first civil conversation they shared, and she didn't feel apprehensive about it. She changed her shoes and left Lavender alone. At dinner she scanned the Slythern table. Blaise wasn't present.

"Am I gonna have to force you to eat again?" Ron asked.

"No. I'm looking for someone," she said.

He frowned. "Who?"

She looked around their table. Parvati and Lavender were gone as well. "Blaise."

"Oh, so is Draco. Harry told me at practice that Malfoy has been on him about the breakup. He's concerned that it will affect his playing ability. What an arsehole," he explained.

"How do you know that they broke up?" she asked.

He rolled his eyes. "Everyone knows everyone's business around here. I'm sure people are watching us right now, waiting for something to talk about."

"We're not going to give them anything, unfortunately," she shot.

He peaked around for a moment. "Are you still mad at me for gaining one on you?"

"You didn't gain anything. You were obnoxious and vulgar and out of line--"

"And sexy and right and right and sexy," he finished with a wink.

She shook her head slowly and grinned. "Maybe those things, too."

"Look, they're giving each other the eye again," Ginny said as she and Harry sat across from them.

"Look, you're in our business again," Ron said.

Harry winced and stretched his back. "I'm sure that I pulled something."

"Blame yourself. Somehow I mucked up my stomach," Ron said.

Ginny rubbed Harry's back and kissed his cheek. "You'll be fine, and so will Ron. The pain is necessary."

"Are you okay?" he asked.

She shrugged. "I'll be fine. I'll be even better once we beat Slythern. Malfoy has been giving me more shit than usual."

"Just let me kick his arse for you," Ron said.

"You're a Prefect," Hermione said.

"And I can take care of myself," Ginny added.

"I know you can, but you're my sister. No one messes with you and especially not that prick. Him talking to you is reason enough for his bollocks to be kicked in." He glanced at the Slythern table and glowered at Draco.

Harry laughed. "You're wicked, Ron, and you're right. I won't stop you, mate. In fact, I'll probably be too busy helping you to stop you."

"Then I guess that I'll be the one pulling you two off him. Violence isn't always the answer," Hermione said.

"Says the girl who hit Malfoy a few years ago," Harry mumbled.

Ron and Ginny burst into laughter. "That's right, Hermione. That was very vulgar of you," Ron said.

She pursed her lips. "It was a different circumstance."

"It doesn't matter. The less we talk about ferret, the more I'll be able to enjoy my pudding," Ron said.

They went back to eating and Hermione went back to looking for Blaise and Parvati. She didn't know why she was so invested in what they were doing. She didn't like the idea of people breaking up over petty fights. It seemed as if fighting was growing more throughout the school as the months till summer holiday drew thin. She turned her attention and watched Harry and Ginny talked. She knew about their row with Dean, and it worried her.

She wanted to know what was really going on. She held her tongue until they were finished and back in the Common Room.

Hermione sat next to Ron on the couch. Ginny sat in the chair next to them, and Harry sat on the floor in front of her. He tapped her foot; she bit her lip and pulled off her shoe. He massaged her foot. "Hmm, that's nice."

"It's the least that I can do. I worked you really hard out there," he said.

Her cheeks flushed. "I don't mind you working me hard." He returned her blush.

Ron sighed. "Blood hell," he whispered. "You know, Harry, you worked me pretty hard, too. Does that mean that I get a foot rub?" he said louder.

Hermione nudged him. "Do you have to, Ron?"

"He's jealous that his feet are too disgusting for you to rub, Hermione," Harry told.

Ginny took off her other shoe and rubbed her foot against Harry's upper thigh. "Yeah, and I don't think she has the stamina. It would take hours to rub his boat feet."

"Okay, that's enough. The both of you should bugger off," Ron said.

Harry ignored him and massaged higher on Ginny's foot, near her ankle. She giggled and pulled away. "Ah, that tickles."

"Sorry," he whispered. They stared at each other deeply.

Ron fidgeted with the cushion. "Maybe we should start talking about something."

"Like what?" Ginny said, still staring and smiling at Harry while her foot inched higher up his leg.

"How are you two doing?" Hermione blurted.

Harry and Ginny finally broke their gaze. "We're fine," he said.

She scooted closer to them. "No, I mean it. I hate to bring this up butâ€¦I mean with everything going on. Are you two still okay? How was Dean at practice?"

Even Ron seemed to be interested. He perked up. "Yeah, are you okay? I didn't see him go near you, but maybe I missed it." He looked at Ginny as he spoke.

Ginny looked down and tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. "It's fine. He didn't say anything to me. I haven't talk to him since that night, but he hasn't been any more of an arse about it. I'm not gonna think about it. We aren't friends, and we're not going to be. I'm accepting it."

"And I'm accepting that Dean is always going to hate me. Whatever. Really. Ginny and I are together, and that's all that matters." He gazed at her again and started rubbing her calf. "That's all that matters to me."

She moved down and sat in front of him on the floor. "It's all that matters to me, too. I love you."

"I love you, too," he said before kissing her.

Hermione automatically turned to Ron to prevent him from saying anything rude. He stared at Ginny and Harry with a pained expression. He slightly shook his head, and he gripped his wand forcefully. The gesture was incredibly powerful and it bothered her. "Hey, let's give them some room."

"Yeah," he said. He took her hand, and they left the Common Room.

"What was that in there?" she asked.

He kept his eyes on the floor. "I dunno."

She stopped him. "Yes, you do. Are you angry with Harry or something?"

"No. I'm mad at Dean, and I'm confused. What the hell was he doing there?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said.

Ron fidgeted with the belt loops of his jeans. "I don't know what to think. I don't know if Dean doing this on purpose or what. I mean I give him the password when he asks, and I know other Prefects don't mind. It's just strange. I'm worried about Ginny and Harry."

"I don't think that Dean would ever really want to hurt them not matter what he feels," she said.

"It's not just him. I'm worried-I'm worried about them hurting each other." He leaned against the wall. "They're not like us, Hermione. I used to think that they were, but they're not."

She shook her head. "I don't understand."

He rubbed his neck and shifted his weight. "It's justâ€¦you and meâ€¦when we fight it's horrible, but it's like there's this understanding between us, too. Even when you're yelling at me and I'm yelling at you and we're both so angry, I never think that it's over, you know?"

She leaned against the wall as well. "Yes, I do. Apart of me always feels like we can turn it around."

"Exactly. I used to think that Harry and Ginny had that understanding. I used to be so sure that they'd always pull through, but I don't know anymore. They seem so fragile. What if

one says the wrong thing and then it's all over? Fucking hell, it's like they're constantly on alert," he said.

"It's rough, Ron. Even for people as strong as Harry and Ginny, it's rough. It's complicated, but it won't always be. They'll get through this," she assured.

"They better. It's my little sister and my best mate. If it doesn't work out for them, then who else deserves it? They're great people and they deserve to have something special. I'll do anything to help," he said.

She rubbed his arm. "They know that you would, but like you tell me, you can't do everything yourself. They have to get through this themselves. You have to stand by and be ready. Be the best friend and older brother that you've always been."

He pulled her into a hug. "I care about them, Hermione. I'm a prat with words, but I really care."

"I know you do, sweetheart, so do they. Harry and Ginny love each other so much. They may not be like us in some senses, but they love like us. They'll do everything to make it work. Just like we will for us," she said, taking in his scent and closing her eyes.

"I will. I'd do anything for us, Hermione. I'd do anything for you. I love you so much. Anything and everything you want from me, it's yours." He held her so tightly that her feet left the ground.

She swallowed the emotion. "Ron, we're okay. I have all that I want. I love you. We're okay."

He finally pulled away and took her hand. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I worry, too. I always worry. It'll be okay." She tried to be bright, but his spirits didn't lift. He wouldn't say it, but she knew that Harry and Ginny's situation hurt him and stressed him completely. She had to do something. "You know, you said fuck nine times and at the time I thought it was fucking impressive, but saying fuck only nine times is actually pretty fucking unimpressive. Now, saying fuck twenty times or a hundred fucking times might be a little fucking better. What the fuck do you think about that?" Her face flushed terribly, and she felt embarrassment sweep over her. She had never sworn so much in her life, and it sounded awful.

However, Ron's eyes grew and his jaw dropped. "Merlin!"

She straightened her clothes even though they were fine. "What? Was that too vulgar?"

He laughed and pulled her close. "No, that was perfect. I just didn't know that you had it in you."

"I'm full of surprises," she said, still feeling unkempt.

"Hmm, that was really sexy. I got a stiffy, you know? Please, say all that again," he said.

She pulled away and was thankful that he was better. "No. That was a once in a lifetime speech. I'm actually kind of tired. I don't see how you swear all the time."

"Eh, it's natural for some people." He took her hand and kissed it.

She smiled and they began walking back. She examined her boyfriend who always appeared so laid-back, but she knew better. Mrs. Weasley was right. Ron's love was beautiful and when he worried, it was everything. "I'd do anything and everything for you, too, Ron. I love you."

He wrapped his arm around her waist. "Then say fuck again."

"No," she said.

"Oh, so, you were lying just now?" he asked.

"No. I'll do anything but that!"

They continued to bicker all the way back to the Common Room.

The next morning Hermione got dressed and went to Ron's room so they could go to breakfast. Harry answered the door. "Ron's not here, if you're looking for him."

"Where is he?" she asked, noticing the irritation in his voice.

"I don't know. He banged on my curtain real early and took Ginny somewhere to talk. He said that they'd be back for breakfast," he explained.

"Oh, that's sweet," she said.

"I guess," he mumbled.

She sat on his bed. "Are you okay?"

He shrugged. "Yeah, I'm okay. I hope he's not saying anything! I dunno."

"You know Ron. He probably wants to give her the speech that he always does," she said.

"Yeah? Which one is that? The one where he asks if I'm being an arse, and that he'll take care of me if I'm hurting her?" he asked.

She patted his knee. "He wouldn't. Ron cares just as much about you, believe me, but Ginny is his little sister. You know how much he takes that responsibly seriously."

"Yeah, I do. I know Ron, Hermione. I know him just like you do, and I know when he's holding things in. He looks at me



differently. I don't know when it started, but it's different now. Whenever Ginny is involved he gets this expression and something changes. It's exactly what I didn't want. It's weird between us now." Harry crackled his knuckles and stared off.

"Harry, I think the stress over Ginny and Dean is making you see things a little unclearly right now. I get why you're upset, but don't make it seem like Ron is doing something to add on to it. He wants to help," she said.

He chuckled. "Right. I'm just making it all up. It couldn't possibly be any different from how you see it. Maybe you haven't noticed but you being his girlfriend doesn't change things with him and me. He still doesn't trust me, Hermione, and if one thing isn't fucking up than another is."

"What's the matter with you? Why have you gotten so harsh lately? I thought you and Ginny were fine," she said.

"We are fine. Last night she was in here with me, and it was great. I wanted to do something for her this morning, but Ron dragged her away, and Dean grinned like a fucking tit for no reason at all. I want to be left alone, Hermione. I want to enjoy things, too, without feeling like it's almost necessary for them to be taken away from me." He looked away. "So, if that's harsh then fine. I have a right to be."

She felt terrible and guilty for being so absorbed in other things. Harry had been there for her through ever step with Lavender. She had to do the same. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine. I'm just out of my mind right now. I'll feel better once the game is over. It will be one less thing for me to think about when I'm supposed to be sleeping," he said. He looked at her again. Harry had always had rather sad green eyes, but there were even heavier and dark these days. "So, are we going to talk about Dean and Lavender? They were talking again this morning. She actually came here for him."

"I don't know what that could mean. She never brings him up in the room. Parvati hasn't said anything either." She thought about Lavender and their conversation. She didn't even know if there was reason to worry anymore.

"Dean's been quiet as well. Then again, we don't talk. I dunno. I'd really hate for them to be up to something," he said.

"Well, maybe they're not. Maybe they're just being friends to each other. Ron left her and Ginny left him. They have common ground," she said.

He snorted. "You can't be serious. You honestly think that's all that's going on?"

"I don't know, but is it really worth investigating and getting worked up over? They aren't hurting anyone and Lavender was actually very nice last night. I didn't feel any animosity," she explained.

Harry stood up. "Oh, right, once again I forgot. If things are good for you, then they're great for everyone else."

"Stop it, Harry! You're being unnecessarily difficult. I'm sorry that I'm not going through what you are. I'm sorry that Lavender didn't walk in on Ron and me and push me. What do you want?" she asked.

"I want my friends back! I want to be able to talk to you without you writing off everything I say because it doesn't fit into your perfect world. I want Ron to trust me. I want Ginny to be honest and say what's on her mind. That's what I want! It's all I have, and I've about lost every bit of it. Without you lot I'm nothing. I want my damn friendships back, including yours!" He grabbed his school bag and stormed out of the room.

Hermione stood to go after him but her tears weighed her down. She tried to wipe them away, but she couldn't stop them. Harry often said things that made her want to cry, but they were always about something involving his parents, Voldemort, or his childhood. It was rare that Harry made me cry because he hurt her feelings and when he did, it made her stomach curl. Her relationship with Harry was different. They always had a mutual respect and understanding. It wasn't supposed to be like this. She didn't know how long she had cried, but it was long enough to not notice Ron come back. He rushed over to her and gripped her arms. "What's wrong?"

She shook his off. "Nothing. I'm fine. I was waiting for you."

"And now you're crying. What happened? What did Harry say to you?" he asked.

She stopped crying. "W-why would you assume that it's Harry?"

"He was the only one in here, and he didn't seem too happy when he caught up with Ginny and me. What did that prat say?" he asked again.

"He's not a prat. He's your best friend, and he didn't do anything. We're having a disagreement. I'm fine." She stood and wiped her eyes.

Ron was livid. "Why won't you tell me what he said? He made you fucking cry. He justâ€¦he doesn't know what he's doing anymore."

She frowned at him. "He's going through a lot, Ron. He's going through all the stuff that we talked about last night. Don't you see it? This isn't helping. You're so ready to be mad at him. Why are you always so ready to distrust him?"

He turned away from her. "Whatever. If you don't want to tell me then fine."

"Ron, answer me. What happened to last night?" she asked.

"It's different, okay? The stuff with Dean isn't his fault but this is. When he makes you cry it's different. Just like when he stresses Ginny out and makes her cry it's different. Things are just different, okay? I don't know. I can't explain it. Can we go? I already have a fucking headache." He grabbed their bags and put them over his shoulder.

Hermione didn't know what to say. She didn't know how to talk to him as his best friend without feeling like it overstepped her duties as his girlfriend. The intertwining of their relationships was too complex at times. "Okay, lets go. I'm fine, really. Please, don't make a big deal out of it."

"I won't. Not right now anyway," he said.

She sighed and walked past him. All day the three of them acted as if nothing had happened. It was almost as if a silent agreement was passed between them that they wouldn't bring it up. It wouldn't be worth the arguing. Hermione felt something build between Ron and Harry. She had never seen them so strained before, but they didn't talk about it. She couldn't understand how two people who cared about each other so intensely could be so closed off.

As the day went on she worried about it more and more, but she couldn't help but worry about it a little less by evening time. She and Ron were currently walking back from a Prefects meeting and he was fuming. He had received a heated lecture from McGonagall. "You have to control yourself," she said.

"Why should I? Malfoy was out of line. He had no right to question you like that," he spat.

"No excuse. It was in front of everyone," she said, although she didn't care. During their meeting Malfoy had rudely questioned her plans for the activities during the closing ceremony. Ron had come back with a name so repulsive and uncomfortable that Draco's entire face and neck went pink and everyone laughed, including Pansy. Hermione pretended to be offended and unfazed but inside she laughed and danced.

"Even better. That wanker had been asking for it. Messing with you and Ginny isn't tolerated, ever," he said.

She grinned at him. "I'm learning that. So, what about Harry? Does the protection extend to him?"

"Of course it does. I meant everything I said last night. Being angry doesn't take it back," he said.

"You should tell him that," she said.

"I don't want to tell him anything right now. I just want to change and get some dinner." They went up to his room. He jiggled the handle and when there was no answer, he opened it. "Brilliant, no one's in."

"Why does it matter?" she asked.

Ron shut the door and leaned against it. "Because it gives us some time."

"To do what? You don't deserve anything from me," she said, though excitement was already growing in her stomach.

He pouted. "But I defended your honor."

"That doesn't matter. You could have lost your badge," she said.

"Who cares? I'm only a Prefect as a joke for the professors to pass around. I don't care," he said.

She walked closer to him. "That is not true. You're a fantastic Prefect when you apply yourself, and I think that you do care. I think deep inside you're dying to be just like Percy."

He stuck out his tongue. "I'd rather lick Hagrid's giant bollocks."

She hit his arm. "Ronald Weasley, that's disgusting. I can't believe you think of these things to say. Besides, I used to sort of fancy Percy."

His eyes grew. "You're taking the piss."

"No, I'm not. It was back in first year. Even before I fancied you," she cheeked.

He frowned and crossed his arms. "Well, it's good to know that I was your second choice for a Weasley."

She laughed. It was the reaction that she had expected. "Oh, sweetheart, don't get upset. I'm only trying to tease you."

"Leave me alone. Go have dinner with Percy. I'm sure that he'll recite the origin of everything you eat, if you ask him to," he said.

She laughed again and grabbed his arms. "Don't be mad at me. It didn't last. I realized right away that I didn't want someone like me. I wanted someone who got under my skin and would stand up for me not matter the consequence. Plus, on a purely superficial level, I knew right away that you were the better Weasley because you're better looking. You're the most handsome out of all your brothers."

Ron lowered his arms and tried to hide his grin. "Really?"

"Yes. I don't understand why people say it's Bill," she answered.

"I don't either. I reckon it's the earring," he said casually.

She raised his chin. "I think you're right. Now, are you still mad at me?"

He shrugged. "A little."

"Maybe I can make it up to you," she said, pulling on his tie.

He looked her up and down and licked his lips. "Yeah? How?"

She thought about it. She wanted her turn. "I canâ€¦help you changed into something a bit more comfortable."

He put his hands on hers. "I like that idea."

She moved his hands away and kissed him. She unfastened his tie and slowly pulled it off. She then took her time unbuttoning his dress shirt. He watched her all the while. His gorgeous blue eyes burned into her, and she could see the passion. She tried not to shake. She pulled it off his shoulders, and he grabbed the hem of his undershirt. She slapped his hand. "No, I got it."

"Okay," he said softly, raising his arms.

She slowly pulled his shirt off and gasped. Though his skin was like milk and muscle stretched against his freckles, the reason for her surprise was due to a large, circular bruise on his left side. It was purple and green, and it looked painful. She gently touched it, and he flinched ever so slightly. "Ron, why didn't you tell me that you got hurt?"

"Because I didn't," he said.

"Then what is this?" she asked. The bruise was bigger than her fist.

"I got it at practice the other night. I told you that Harry worked us. It looks a lot worse than it feels," he assured.

"I highly doubt that. This looks awful, and it must hurt a lot. Did you at least go to the hospital wing?" she asked.

He sighed. "For what? I tried to make a save, and I caught it with my stomach. It happens. It's Quidditch. I didn't tell you because I don't want you to worry. I'm fine."

"Of course I'm going to worry, Ron. I know that Quidditch is dangerous and that you'll get hurt, but it's still going to worry me. I'm supposed to worry. It's better that I know than find out like this," she said. "It will only concern me more if you're hiding it."

"I'm sorry. You're right, okay? I'll be more careful," he said.

"You better be more careful. You have to be safe out there every time and even at practice. Anything can happen, but what can't happen is something seriously hurting you. I don't know what I'd do if--"

He put a finger to her lips. "Love, I get it. You don't have to worry. I'll always be around for the next game. I promise."

She put her forehead to his. "You better mean that."

He kissed her. "I do, but I must say that I'm a little disappointed. I thought that you'd find it sexy. I thought girls liked bruises and scars on blokes. Only way I reckon so many girls fancy Harry."

She ran her hands down his soft arms. "You've got a point there. I personally don't find his bruises sexy, but I guess in time I can like yours. They make you tough."

He pulled her close by the waist. "I am tough."

"Yes, you are. You're my big tough man," she teased before snogging him.

His tongue brushed against her mouth and she opened up. She kissed his hard and sloppy. He was half naked and his smell and skin was everywhere. She moved out of the kiss and licked to his neck. She sucked on his sensitive skin, and he moaned and squeezed her hips. Her hands roamed his chest and grazed his nipples. He jerked. "Watch it."

"Why?" she mumbled against his neck. Her hands went lower and outlined his abs.

He moaned again and pulled on her hair. "Mione."

She left his neck. His face was flushed his eyes were large. "What?"

"I...don't know. I don't know what your plan is," he said.

She smirked. "Who says that I have a plan? Now, can I get back to it?" He bit his lip and nodded. She kissed his neck again, and her hand went lower. She touched his naval and her palm tickled against the trail of ginger hair that went lower. Her knees shook. She wanted to touch him. It's all she wanted to do, but she was scared. She didn't know what it would mean or what it would lead to.

"Hermione," Ron said softly.

She looked at him. "Yes?"

He grinned. "I'm not like you, you know."

Her heart dropped. "W-why do you say that?"

"Well," he said, taking her hand and placing it against his bulge. It was hard and warm even through his trousers. "If you want to touch me, then do it. I don't require permission. You can touch me any time you want to."

She whimpered faintly as she cupped him. She couldn't think of anything clever to say. She did want to touch him, badly. "O-okay." He nodded and let go of her hand. She looked down and gradually unfastened his belt. She could hear his heart racing

and his breath came out so shallow. She trembled as she pulled down the zipper and reached her hand in.

Warmness. Hardness. Smoothness. It all hit her at once. Her hand melted against his cock as she gripped it and pulled it out. Ron sucked in air and balled his fists. She couldn't breathe properly. His length was pale and barely sprinkled with freckles. Ginger hairs covered the base and a thin layer of liquid slicked his head. Her mouth watered, and her knees almost gave out. She felt weird for finding it so enchanting.

"Hermione?" Ron said.

She looked at him. He was watching her almost as if waiting for a verdict. She licked her lips. "You're incredible and well endowed, Mr. Ronald Weasley."

He blushed and relaxed. "Glad you approve."

"I do," she said. She looked back at it. Her hand trembled, but she tried to get over it. She had no idea what to do, but she slowly and loosely moved her grip up and down his shaft.

He groaned and closed his eyes. "Fucking hell," he breathed.

She switched between watching him and her hand. It was so tan against him and more liquid oozed from his head. She moved her hand from the base to the head, getting some on her fingers. Ron's knees wobbled. "Is this okay? Am I doing this right?" she asked. She had no references or anything to compare to know if she was doing it properly. It had to be good. She had to give Ron what he gave her.

He nodded. "Yeah, yeah, you're doing it right. You can grip a little harder if you want. You're not hurting me."

She adjusted her firmness. "Like this?"

He moaned. "Hmm, yeah, like that. That's perfect."

Hermione smiled and calmed. She pumped him in her hand and loved the feeling of it. She wanted to do more. Her mouth practically dragged to him, but she was too timid. She simply did not have Ron's confidence when it came to things like this. She needed more vindication. She kissed him. Ron automatically opened his mouth and squeezed her sides. She pulled his tongue between her lips and sucked on it in the same rhythm that she stroked him. Ron moaned loudly and stomped his foot. She felt every part of him shake. The more she sucked and pumped, the louder Ron got, but she was still unsure.

To her horror, someone jiggled the handle. She automatically jumped away. Ron kept his eyes closed and jiggled the handle. "Piss the fuck off!"

"Damn it, Ron. Can I get my potions book real quick?" Neville said from the other side.

"You can take your arse to the library and read all the potion books you want there. Now, piss off!" He jiggled the handle again. He waited a moment before opening his eyes. "Okay, that gives us another half hour."

She didn't know what to do. Ron's cock was blocking her vision and her mind. She wanted to start again, but she didn't know how to take it to the next level. "Iâ€¦I don't know."

He nodded frantically. "Yeah you do. You were doing great. You were doing really well. If you don't want to anymore then okay, but don't think that I wasn't enjoying it. I was. I loved it so much andâ€¦and I want to finish. I want you to make me cum so badly, Hermione. You're so perfect, and it feels so bloody good when you touch me."

She whimpered again and her heart burst. Her mind evaporated, and her body took over. She slowly walked back over to him and ran her finger down his nose. "Okay." She watched him as she dropped to her knees. Ron's chest and stomach jolted. She placed his shirts under her knees for cushion and outlined the bruise with her finger. She kissed it tenderly, and gripped him again. His cock was pink now and the liquid dripped from the head. It looked so delicious, and she wanted it. She wanted it in her mouth. She quivered all over and her heart raced. Without really thinking about it, she took a short breath and put her lips on the tip of him. She licked the pre cum. It was salty and sticky and tasted wonderful for some odd reason. She could feel the heat of his body radiating from between his legs. She then kissed the skin just under the head. A low long moan came from Ron. She watched him bite his lip and flush marvelously. He closed his eyes and rested his head against the door as his body squirmed. She then lowered her whole mouth on it slowly, swirling her tongue all over the part inside her mouth as she started to take all of him in.

"Oh, that feels so good," Ron groaned. While one hand was balled at his side, the other hand moved to her hair and his fingers tangled in her thick strands. She took it as a sign to keep going. She tried to get as much of the skin in her mouth as possible before sucking and licking him. He rubbed her scalp gently with one hand as his other found her shoulder.

Hermione sighed softly as the muscles in Ron's body flexed and relaxed in an involuntary rhythm. He was so large, stiff, and steaming. She loved the taste of him. Once she found a pace, she opened his eyes. Ron peered right down at her. His skin turned a bright shade of red, and sweat dripped down his brow and down to his chest. An erotic pulse bounced between them. She had to close her eyes so she could focus. She started to bob up and down on his cock. She loved how he felt in her mouth. Ron did not push it into her nor did he push her head down on it. He allowed her to set the pace. It made her feel more confident. She continued to bob and started to add some suction to the sensations she gave him. Instinct took over. Ron whimpered loudly making her already soaked and fiery skin more stimulated. She moaned at his sexiness and continued. Occasionally she looked up and saw that he was



clearly enjoying it. He sucked on his bottom lip and rolled his eyes back with every pump of her mouth.

She went faster and Ron bucked. "Oh, yes, hmm, yes. Hermione. Like that." His breathing became more and more heavy as his whispered words came out broken and panting. "Yeah. That's it...oh! That. Feels so good. Yeah, right there. You're so good, Hermione. Your mouth is so warm. It's so bloody warm."

Hermione felt her heart beat out of her chest and sweat dampened her everywhere. Not only was she completely turned on by Ron's pleasure and praises but also she assumed that he was about to cum. She was excited and nervous about what was next. Then it hit her. She pulled her mouth away but kept stroking him lightly.

Ron opened his eyes. "W-what? Did I hurt you? Was I gripping your hair too hard or something?"

She shook her head. "No."

His breathing was rough. "Then—then what? Why did you stop?"

"Because," she said innocently, "I require permission, remember?"

He rolled his eyes and stomped his foot again. "Oh bloody hell, Mione. I'm sorry, okay? I was just joking. Please, don't punish me for it."

"I'm not punishing you. I'll continue if you do your part," she said. Ron didn't say a word, only glared at her. She shrugged. "Okay, you're loss." She started to pull her hand away.

"Okay, okay, fine. You win. I'm an asshole. You win. Please, please, please, please finish. I'm asking you to let me cum. Make me do it," he begged. He looked at her in such desperation and it gave her wicked satisfaction.

"That's good. Okay, you can." She tried to look at him sternly though she was about to pass out from passion.

"Thank you," he breathed. "Now, get back to it."

"Is that an order?" she asked.

"No," he moaned, though he tugged on her hair anyway.

She chuckled and decided to change her ways. She sucked closer to the tip and pumped the rest of his length in her hand rapidly. Ron groaned longingly. "Yes! Don't stop. Don't stop. I'm there." She moaned and slightly nodded. It did not take too much longer. Ron pulled on her hair and arched his back. He cried out loudly and came. Thick liquid flooded her mouth. She tried her best to swallow, but the sensation was so potent and she pulled away. He moaned repeatedly, and she watched him lose it. "Oh, Hermione, Hermione!" he hollered.

He continued to spill into her hand, and she was finally able to take the first wave down. She watched him orgasm and watched his

juice drip over her fingers. Nothing in the world was sexier or more amazing. Years of fantasizing didn't compare. Finally, Ron stop jolting and he untangled his fingers from her hair. He opened his eyes. His breath was uneven and his face was flushed, as was his chest. They gazed at each other, and she let go of his cock. She sucked him off her fingers and his legs gave out. He slipped down the door and continued to catch his breath. She felt terribly nervous. He smiled and wiped the sweat off his brow. "You're a tease."

"What?" she asked.

He waved a hand. "I'm on to you now. You pretend that you have no idea what you're doing then you literally pull off something like that. I've never cum like that before. You're the best at everything like I always say."

She let out her first honest breath since starting against the door. "It was okay then?"

"Don't start. You know that it was amazing. I can't even stand. You're mouth. Hmm." He adjusted himself back into his trousers and rubbed his forehead. He closed his eyes and jerked again. He looked absolutely spent and content.

She could still feel him in her mouth, and his taste was strong. A weight seemed to lift from her shoulders. She hadn't been terrible. Ron was pleased with her work. Everything was okay. "Ron."

"Yes?" he said.

She sat on his lap, and he moaned. "We should probably get up then, yeah?"

"Whatever. Neville can stay downstairs. Besides, I have to return the favor and help you dress for bed," he said, wiggling his eyebrows.

She wanted to. She wanted him to taste her and so much more. It's why she couldn't allow him to. Her nerves were jumpy enough. "Oh, I'll let you have this one for free."

"But I want to," he said, kissing her neck.

"I know, but we've already taken the room and after all that I'm sort of hungry," she said, pulling him away.

He didn't seem angry. In fact, he grinned. "You live to torture me, don't you?"

"So, you've finally figured me out." She pecked his lips before getting up. She held out her hand and he took it. She almost fell over as he pulled himself up.

"Let me at least change my shirt. We can use that excuse," he said.

"Yes, it takes this long to change your shirt," she said.

He shrugged and reached for his black cannons t-shirt. "It got lost."

She smiled and watched him slide it on. Every day it seemed to get a little tighter on him, and it was of place with his black slacks and school shoes. It was mismatched and sexy. It was perfect and totally Ron. She was so lucky. "Hey, come here."

He walked over to her and held her close. "Change your mind?"

"Don't get excited. I just want you to know that I love you and if you tell anyone that I sucked you off against this door while I had my Prefect badge on, I'll make sure that Hagrid's parts are the only parts your tongue will ever meet again," she said severely.

Ron's eyes widened and he chuckled. "Okay, that's fair, if you promise me something."

"What's that?" she asked, putting her ear against his chest so she could hear the powerful rhythm of his heart.

"Don't make me beg like that again. You're evil for it," he said.

"No. I was getting even. What you did in the library wasn't very nice. You knew that you were driving me mental," she said. "You're the real tease."

"I learn from the best," he said. He kissed her ear and held her tightly. She held him back and closed her eyes. Once again, they had done something sexual, but it didn't feel weird or extreme afterward. She trusted Ron and trusted him more every day. She had no choice but to feel comfortable. She was safe with him.

They continued to hold each other until the knob jiggled again. "I really need my book. It's got all my notes in it!" Neville said.

Hermione pulled away. "Open the door, Ron."

He sighed and yanked it open. "Yeah, mate?"

Neville glared at them. "You had your thirty. Any more and you'll have to use a pass."

"No need. We're heading to dinner," he said. "Still hungry?"

"Yes, I'm faint. I could really use some meat!" Before she could stop herself she said it, and her face blushed horribly. Ron keeled over with laughter and Neville stared between them.

"Um, did I miss something?" he asked.

Ron looked at him and for a second she thought that he was going to tell. "No, Neville. It's a joke from our Prefect meeting. You wouldn't get it. Come on, love." He pulled on her hand and guided

her down the stairs. He continued to laugh and she continued to blush.

"You can stop now," she said.

"Why? You need your meat. Apparently one portion wasn't enough for you," he said with a wink.

She hit his arm. "Leave me alone."

"Should I be jealous?" he asked. "You don't like the school's meat better than mine, do you?"

She hit his arm again. "Oh! You really annoy me sometimes, Ronald Weasley! You're so vulgar!"

He laughed. "I love you, too. Now, about your favorite meat."

"Oh, Ronald!" she snapped, as she hit his arm once more. He joked and she hit his arm all the way to the Great Hall.

Their interlocked hands never parted.

\*\*\*\*I just want to say that Hermione isn't a bloodless girl. I like writing her as I think a teenager in her position would. I don't think her sexual desires take away from her character, nor do I think that her lusting after Ron makes her any less of a strong woman. For the people who have pm'd me and typed (in all chaps) that this is the case, I'm sorry, but I disagree. There's always a sense of analysis and this sort of "is it okay that I feel like this?" to her and she does sort of feel out of her usual when she is really sexual, BUT it's still apart of her and she still loves it. It's a new side to her but a side that's always been there. Also, I love the idea of her always trying to hide it but has these moments where she just lets go. This is my Hermione and it's how I've always seen her. With Ron, maybe i'm bias, but I see him more on the playful side and more aware of sexual things. He seems so physical to me and though he's got a lot of self doubt, I think when it comes to sexual things and Hermione, he just sort of knows. On the outside things are so clear for him, but in his mind he is frantic. But this story isn't from his view, so we see what Hermione's sees. To go along with this \*clears throat\*

Ronald Billius Weasley+Hermione Jean Granger=Eternal Love. If you don't believe in it, then it's your loss. I don't mind if you ship other people or don't particularly care for this couple but don't fuck with R/Hr. Why bother bashing it or saying that they aren't meant to be? Forget that it's canon or that JK has said it time and time again that's it been them all along. Just read those two characters. Feel their souls, understand their minds, and see their connection. It fits. They. Just. Are. I'm not crazy for loving them and devoting myself to their love. I'm not mad for having a tattoo of their patronus' playing in a pond together on my back. Even if I amâ€who cares? If being sane means not loving R/Hr, then I'll be the bloody Mad Hatter. \*exhales\*

Sorry, I had to get that out. It's been a bad couple of weeks in terms of people trashing the things that I love. I said my deal, and I'm sticking with it. Um, sorry, my train of thought is a little off. I'm so mental right now. While this chapter was mostly R/Hr and their great sexual games, the parts that weren't, please, keep in mind. Everything is significant at this point. Something is happening with The Trio and the Harry/Ron and Harry/Hermione relationships are shifting. So REVIEW and you'll see why! It's that simple. :)

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 43

Thanks for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Thanks for helping me with this. I can't believe that the essay slipped my mind," Ginny said as she scrambled to finish her last few lines.

Harry stacked her books and put all of her papers into a pile. "Of course, but I honestly don't know why you asked me. I'm not the expert at essay writing."

She looked up at him. "But you are an expert at conquering dementors. There's no denying that, and if you try then I'll hit you."

"I swear you Weasleys' are violent. Is it the blazing hair that makes you overly tempered?" he cheeked.

She narrowed her eyes but grinned. "I'll let that one slide, but don't take the piss out of us gingers."

He chuckled and pulled a few of her long, red strands between his fingers. Her hair was extremely soft and thick. "I'm not. I love gingers, and it just so happens that I'm dating the most talented and gorgeous one available. She's also completely ready to turn her essay into Snape."

Ginny pushed the work aside and moved closer to him on his bed. She put a hand on his knee and looked into his eyes. "She's also three seconds away from kissing you."

He licked his lips and stared at hers. "Huh, I reckon you better go, then. I don't want to miss my opportunity." She pinched his leg before closing the gap between them. Harry closed his eyes and pressed his mouth as firmly against Ginny's as he could. Every part of his body tensed at the electrifying moment of their lips meeting, but it quickly relaxed as he once again found himself unable and unwilling to think about or feel anything else. It amazed him that something as simple as a kiss from Ginny could make his world seem so much brighter and happier. He slicked her bottom lip with his tongue, and she opened her mouth with a heavy sigh.

She tasted amazingly and her tongue painted the roof of his mouth. Blood and energy raced through him and settled in his lower stomach. His hands found their way to her waist, and he held the small of her back. Her hair brushed against his knuckles, and it made him deepen the kiss. Ginny responded by bringing her arms to his shoulders. She gripped them and moaned, as their mouths seemed to melt together. Harry snogged her deeper. He wanted to stay in the moment forever. There was no other place that he'd rather be than with her. So much was going on between them, and there were so many words that needed to be spoken and so many actions needed to be taken to keep them together. He knew that. He knew that he had to do something and talk it out, but in the moment, he felt as if all he had to do was kiss her and hold her close. He felt as if it was the only way to get his feelings out and make her understand that he would do anything for her. Sometimes, saying I love you wasn't enough for him.

She gave his tongue a gentle tug between her lips before pulling away. Harry slowly opened his eyes. Ginny was slightly pink, her mouth was wet, and her smile was beautiful. She made him feel so much stronger yet tranquil at the same time. "I love you," he said. The words weren't enough, but he felt better saying them anyway.

She took his hand between hers. "I love you, too." They simply gazed at one another, and he would have been content with staying that way all day. However, the door to his room opened and broke their gaze.

"Oh, sorry," Seamus said.

Ginny pulled her hands away. "That's okay. It's your room, and I need to finish getting ready." She packed her school bag and gave him another deep kiss. "I'll meet you at breakfast, yeah?"

"Yes. I'll be down soon," he answered. He watched as she left his room.

"Wow, did you get some this morning?" Seamus asked.

Harry turned to him. Seamus was scrubbing a towel over his damp, sandy hair. "What?"

Seamus rolled his eyes and sat on his bed. He pulled his tie over his collar but didn't bother fastening it. "You have the thickest look on your face. Ginny must have given you something this morning."

"It's none of your business," Harry said, "and sometimes you can just be happy with your girlfriend."

Seamus laughed loudly. "Spoken like a true virgin. Look, I love my babe. I have all the fun in the world with her, but I don't get a look like that unless I get a bit of head."

Harry threw a pillow at him. "Fuck off, Seamus. You don't know anything about Ginny or me."

He took the pillow and walked over. He sat across from him on Ron's bed. "All right. Don't punch me. I won't talk about you or your girlfriend. You blokes are too sensitive. But, um, you two are okay, then? You seem better and from what I heardâ€¦"

"What did you hear?" Harry asked.

Seamus shrugged. "I dunno. Dean and I were talking and--"

He held up a hand. "Say no more."

"Come on," Seamus said.

He shook his head. "Whatever Dean's told you I'm sure isn't true. Ginny and I are okay. We hadâ€¦are having some small things going on, but I reckon Dean didn't explain why."

"Hey, don't talk like that," Seamus said, growing serious.

"Like what? Sorry that I'm not surprised or moved by that fact that Dean is talking about me and Ginny. He always does," Harry explained.

"I know that. You're not the only one with a best mate around here. Dean and I talk, and we did have a conversation about you and Ginny. He feels like a dick for what's going on."

Harry wanted to snort, but he kept it in. "That's great."

"You know, you can be a real twat sometimes," Seamus said.

His jaw dropped. "Me? What did I do? Maybe you've forgotten what's it's been like lately."

"No, I haven't. I'm not excusing Dean. I'm not gonna act like I get everything that's going on with him, but I'm not just gonna sit back with my thumbs up my arse and let you or anyone else say things about him either. He's a good guy. He always has been, but he's having a hard time," Seamus explained.

If Harry had to hear one more time about how hard things were for Dean, he was going to rip his hair out. "Yes, I know. I know he's having a hard time. I've heard it more times than I've heard anything else. I'm not ignoring that, but the excuse is only going to work for so long. Ginny and I are trying to move on, and you need to tell your friend to do the same."

"It's not that simple, Harry," Seamus said softly, "and you should probably tell him that yourself. Dean has been my mate since we were eleven, and I've never seen him in a state like this. He's completely gutted. Wouldn't you be?"

"I was, Seamus. I was in the same place that he's in now. That's the point. I get it. I've never tried to dismiss his feelings, but I can't make him listen to me. It's not even really about Dean or me. It's about Ginny. She feels really badly, and I hate that he's putting that pressure and guilt on her," he said.

"He doesn't want to. He still loves her, and he cares about you. You know Dean. He cares," Seamus urged.

"Well, he's not showing it very well. He has to stop acting like this before something happens," Harry warned.

Seamus raised his eyebrow. "What do you mean by that?"

"I don't know," he said honestly, "but there's too much tension, and I feel like something might happen if something doesn't change. I don't want there to be this feeling between us but there is. Believe it or not, but I want to be friends with him again. Dean has always been a good friend."

"He says the same thing, Harry. That's another reason why this is hard. If you were just some random bloke, then I'm sure that he and I would have kicked your arse ages ago." There wasn't a hint of humor in his expression.

"Why?" he asked dryly. "Because I'm with Ginny?"

"No, because you got with her regardless of his feelings. You couldn't get to her fast enough. That's what Dean says. He sort of feels like it was a kick in his bollocks, like you didn't care," Seamus said.

Harry crossed his arms over his chest and set his jaw. "And what do you say?"

Seamus clicked his teeth and fiddled with his tie. "Ah, I dunno but my reasons are a lot more basic. You hurt my friend. It's the only reason I need. I know how much you care about Ginny, and I know she really loves you. I think it's great that you two are happy together, but I'm gonna stick by Dean."

"That's fine with me. I want you to know that I'm not trying to make his life miserable, though. That's what he's trying to do to mine," Harry said.

"He's not, Harry. I mean that," Seamus said.

He couldn't hold back a snort. "Really? So, what's going on with Lavender? Why is he always around when something bad is happening with Ginny and me? What are they up to?"

Seamus looked away. "Iâ€¦don't know. I asked him why he's suddenly spending so much time with her. At first I thought it was because she's got huge tits and a nice arse and maybe he just wanted some good shagging with her, but that's not it, apparently."

"Seems like you don't know as much as you say you do," Harry said.

He shrugged. "Maybe, but one thing that I'll always know is Dean. I won't believe that he is trying to ruin you or Ginny."



"I wish that I could be that optimistic," Harry muttered.

"It's not optimism. It's loyalty. Dean is my best friend, and he's one of the only people in my life that truly gives a shit about me. I'm always going to be his shield. I would think that you could understand. You're the same with Ron. I'm sure that you'd be there for him no matter what and would take every hit for him. Even if he was a bit mental and didn't tell you every detail of his life." Seamus got up. "You know, Harry, you spend all your time telling people that you're not the perfect guy that everyone expects you to be. Well, everyone else is human, too." He swung his bag over his shoulder and left.

Harry took off his glasses and rubbed his temples, feeling like an asshole. He never imagined that a talk with Seamus would leave him with so many questions. He grabbed his things and headed to the Great Hall. He walked to his table and saw Ginny, Hermione, and Ron. Hermione and Ron were bickering, but he noticed that Ron's hand was discreetly and firmly holding Hermione's thigh, and her hand loosely gripped his wrist. Ginny ate her cereal and searched through her potions notes. They were the most important people in his life, and all three cared about him. If nothing else, letting go of the past and all the aggravations would be worth it for them and for the preservation of his friendships. He sat next to Ginny.

"That took a while," she said.

"Sorry, I couldn't find a quill," he answered.

"You could have borrowed one of mine. I have too many in my bag," Hermione said.

"That's not the only thing that you have too many of," Ron murmured.

She glared at him. "I'm going to pretend that I didn't hear that rude comment."

"Yet you're still talking about it," he said.

"Oh! Youâ€¦youâ€¦" Hermione yanked his hand away and shoved her books into her bag.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To class!" she shot, getting up and walking away. Ron sighed and dropped his spoon into his bowl of cereal.

"What was that all about?" Harry asked.

"Ron was being insensitive," Ginny said.

"Shut up!" Ron growled.

"She'll be okay. You've seen her a lot worse," Neville helped.

"Yeah, I know!" he said quietly. He pouted and poked at his soggy cereal.

Harry turned to Ginny. She was already looking at him. She nudged her head in the direction of the door. He nodded. He loved that they didn't need words to talk to each other sometimes. He wrapped a couple of pieces of toast into a napkin. "Come on, Ron. We've got a bit of time before class."

"Okay," he breathed. They slowly walked to the classroom, and Ron kept his eyes on the floor. Harry didn't say anything. He waited for him to start. "Ginny's right. I was being insensitive."

He took his cue. "About what?"

He dug his hands deep into his pockets. "Hermione's work schedule. I asked if she would skive a meeting with me so we could do the thing that I have planned, but she said no. I kinda lost it. I was really hoping that she would be up to it."

"You know Hermione. She's not nearly as angry as she's acting. Maybe you should explain why you got upset," Harry offered.

"No, I want it to be a surprise. I'm getting worried about the timing. I don't want to miss out on this. I couldn't tell her that without giving it all away," Ron said.

Harry looked at him and could see the distress all over his freckly face. He knew that if things were ever going to go back to how they were, he'd have to take the first step. He had to make the change. "We'll work something out. I know that we have a lot of practices come up, but maybe I can let you skip one."

Ron gaped at him. "Really? You'd do that?"

"Sure," he said casually. "You've been planning this for a while, and I know that Prefect duties, Quidditch, and schoolwork have to be a lot to balance."

"Fuck, it is. I never get a bloody break anymore. Hermione doesn't either. She has even more to do than me. That's why I want this to work," Ron explained.

Harry patted his arm. "It will work. Don't worry so much. Besides, it will probably be for the best that you miss a practice. You're doing really well, and I'd hate for you to strain yourself too much if you don't have to."

Ron rubbed his neck. "I'm not that great."

"I wouldn't lie to you, mate. You've significantly improved, aside from catching quaffles with your stomach. Hermione gave me a lecture about keeping an eye on you, you know?" Harry said.

He laughed. "Yeah, I got a lecture, too. She's sweet for it, yeah?"

Bringing up Hermione always seemed to put Ron in a better mood. It was great to see him so happy. "Yeah, she is." He suddenly felt the need to talk more. His conversation with Seamus dug into his shoulders. "Um, about the argument with Hermione. I know that I never really gave you an explanation."

"Yeah, let's just forget about it. I'm sure that whatever it wasâ€¦it's okay now, right?" Ron asked.

Harry didn't know what to say. He honestly didn't know if it was. "Yeah, it's okay."

"Good. I don't want any trouble. There's enough going on as it is," he said.

Harry frowned at him. He knew the tone and expression too well. "Regarding what? Like with Ginny?"

"Harry," Ron began.

"What? Is that what you mean? Is that why you talked to her the other day? Do you think that something's going on?" Harry asked.

He stopped walking and chewed on his lip for a moment. "I don't know, Harry, maybe. She's my sister, and I like to keep up with how she's doing. You know that."

"Yes, I do. I also know that if something truly important were going on, I'd let you know. It's like I said before Ginny and I started dating; I understand your feelings, and I'm trying to honor them," he said.

"I know. I appreciate it," Ron said.

"Good, so honor mine," Harry said.

It was Ron's turn to frown. "What do you mean?"

Harry took a breath before speaking. He had to bring it up to make things better. "Well, I'm her boyfriend, Ron. I know she's your little sister and she's been that for a lot longer, but she's still my girlfriend. We have to work things out and at times it doesn't go right, but it doesn't mean that we don't care about each other or that-

"I know, Harry," Ron interrupted.

"Do you? Do you honestly? I feel like everything I do is wrong in your eyes. Like every time Ginny's upset you think it's my fault. I don't mean to upset her, just like you don't mean to upset Hermione. I'm still Ginny's friend, and I'm still your friend. I don't plan on that changing just because she and I are dating. You have to start trusting me." Harry looked him as plainly in the eyes as he could. He wanted Ron to know that he was sincere. He wanted to move on from all the space between them.

Ron sighed and his face softened. "I know. I've been thinking about it a lot and when I talked to Ginny she told me the same

thing over and over. I'm sorry. All this is still sort of new and confusing for me."

"For me as well. I don't want this to be any more difficult than you do. I also don't want to be late for class. I'm sure Snape is dying for a reason to throw us in detention," Harry said, cracking a small smile.

He returned it. "Then let's not give him one."

Harry wasn't sure if Ron would actually start believing him again, but he certainly felt something change. As they sat together during class, he felt Ron pull his guard down a little. It wasn't completely gone, but it was enough to make him believe that they could possibly have the level of friendship that they used to.

After class, Hermione walked passed their table and through the door without a word. They scurried to catch up to her. "Hermione, wait, please!" Ron called.

She stopped and turned around. "What? Do you have any other grievances? Do you not want me to get to my next class on time? Is that too much for you as well?"

Harry stepped back and let Ron have her full attention. "I'm really sorry, okay? I didn't mean toâ€¦"

"Make fun of me?" she helped.

"Yeah," he said lowly. "I think it's great that you care so much. I was angry, all right? I didn't mean any of it, I swear." He walked closer to her. "If I hurt you, please, kick me in the bollocks. I deserve it. I justâ€¦I want to spend time alone with you. I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important." He touched her cheek for a moment.

Her hard expression faded somewhat. "That's sweet, Ron. I want to be with you, too, but it doesn't give us a right to abandon our duties. You may not care, but I do. I care a lot."

"I know you do, and I'm an arse. Please, kick me." Ron held on to his tie and spread his legs.

Hermione shook her head. "I'm not doing that."

"Why not? You know you want to. Take hold of what's between here," he said.

Her cheeks went pink. "I'm not listening to you anymore. Harry, tell your friend that I'm not listening anymore." She gave Ron a wink before walking off once more.

Harry stepped next to him. "So, do you think that she's forgiven you?"

"I hope so. I meant it, though. She can grab hold of me anytime," he said, wiggling his eyebrows.

Harry put his hands over his ears. "I don't need to hear this."

"I think you do!" Ron said, following him down the hall.

By the end of the school day, all Harry wanted to do was relax but he, Ron, and Hermione had yet another test to study for. They went to the library and opened their books. Harry tried to stay awake as he read over the different uses of dragon scales. "This is horrible. Why are we having so many exams? It's not even the end of term."

"It's all practice, Harry. How we do will determine how we'll perform next year for NEWTs. There's no such thing as learning too much, is there Ron?" Hermione asked.

He dragged his eyes from his book and strained a smile. "Nope. A bloke can never learn too much," he said sarcastically.

Hermione didn't seem to care. She pecked his lips. "That's what I like to hear." Harry started to laugh, and Ron hit his foot.

"I hate to interrupt," Ginny said.

Harry turned to her and a rush of pleasure went through him. He stood up. "Hi."

"Hi, are you ready to go?" she asked.

"Go? No, that's not fair. We have a test," Ron said.

Harry packed up his things. "Yes, I'm more than ready."

"Mione, stop him. If we have to be here, then so does he!" Ron whined.

Hermione kept taking notes. "Ron, if he wants to go then he can go."

"Yeah, listen to your girlfriend, and I'll listen to mine," Harry said, patting him on the back. He bit his lip to keep from laughing at the agony on Ron's face. He let his laughter out when they made it out of the library. He took Ginny by the arms and walked her back against a wall. He kissed her hard. "Thank you for rescuing me. I didn't know how much longer I'd last in there."

"Yeah, you owe me," she said, pulling on his collar and kissing him again.

He pulled away as an idea came to mind. "Yeah, I do. Grab your broom and meet me in the Common Room." He didn't give her time to answer. He rushed off and went straight to his room. He collected his broom and the quilts from his and Ron's bed. Ginny was by the couch when he got back.

She glanced at the blankets. "What are those for?"

"You'll see. Follow me," he said. Ginny followed him and the two quickly made their way outside. They ran off to the Quidditch pitch and to the practice tent. He sat the blankets on the bench and opened the equipment trunk. He took out a quaffle.

"It's a little late for practice, isn't it?" she asked.

Harry gave her a once over. She was still in her Hogwarts uniform and she nonchalantly leaned against her broom. Everything about her made his skin tingle. "It's never too late for Quidditch. I thought you understood that." He passed his broom between his hands and smirked.

She eyed him and shifted her thighs. "Let's go then, Potter. Show me what you've got." She tugged a hair tie off her wrist and pulled her hair back.

They straddled their brooms and took to the sky. Harry's broom was a lot faster than Ginny's, but she held her own like she always did. They tossed the quaffle back and forth and took turns guarding the posts. It was incredible. He knew that he would never be able to do this with any other girl. Ginny was special. For a while they laughed and playfully teased each other while playing in the crisp air. Every bad feeling disappeared as the mixture of flying and Ginny filled him up. However, as it got darker, they decided to stop. They touched the pitch again, and Harry made a space for them on the plush grass against the wall of the gate leading to the bleachers. He laid a blanket for them and the two snuggled close and pulled the other over them. "This is really nice," she breathed.

"Yeah, I'm glad that you thought of heating the blankets. Great idea," he said.

"I try," she answered. "It's the least I could do considering your idea of coming out here was so brilliant. I love it out here." She put her head against his chest, and he wrapped his arms around her waist. Her smell of spice was all around him, and it was comforting.

"Me too. This is way better than studying," he said, kissing the top of her head and closing his eyes. "I had a talk with Seamus today," he added before he could stop himself. It was quiet for a while.

"About what?" she finally said.

He moved a leg under hers so his sandwiched it. "Dean. Seamus says that he's not trying to cause us problems but that it just keeps happening."

She moved her leg up his thighs and he felt the burn through his trousers. "Do you believe that?"

"I don't know. I think there's a lot more going on with him than he's telling Seamus, but I want to believe it," he said.

"That's how I've always felt. I want to believe that this hasn't totally changed him, but what if it has? I know that we said that we wouldn't care, but I do. I can't help it." Ginny moved away and peered at him. In the moonlight, her brown eyes reflected so dazzlingly.

"I care, too, and if for no other reason, then for the fact that I know how he feels," he said.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"It wasn't that long ago that I thought you were in love with him and not me. I know what it feels like. Do you think that I should say something? If it will help, then I'll try with him again," he said.

She smiled and touched his hand. "I think it might. Maybe if you make the effort then he'll listen. That's only if you can talk to him without losing it. There's so much fighting going on. "

He squeezed her hand back. "Yeah, I know. I want to work things out with him and with Ron. This has been the hardest year for our friendship."

"I want to tell you something," she started. "Ron means well. He really does. I know that he can be out of line and mean about things, but he never purposely decides to be. It just takes him longer to come around and realize what's going on. I let him have it that day when we talked. I told him that he has to let me live my own life, but I understood him, too. Don't tell him, but I love him for caring so bloody much, even though it's annoying and overbearing."

He laughed and felt his love for her grow even more. "Your secret is safe with me."

She moved closer to him. "Harry, no matter what happens, I know how kind your heart is and so does Ron and so does Dean. You're wonderful, and I love you so much. I love you."

"I love you, too," he said softly. He put a hand to her neck, and Ginny's hand went to her hair. She pulled her hair tie out and shook her head. Her fiery hair flowed down, and Harry forgot how to breathe. He didn't know how a person could be angelic and totally dripped in sex at the same time. "You're so beautiful, Ginny. I can't believe that I'm with you. I'm so fucking lucky."

She moved to his lap and brushed messy black bangs out of his eyes. He instinctively moved away, as she saw his scar. He hated people looking at it. "Don't," she said.

"Sorry, it's a reflex. I don't like it being out. I want to hide it as much as I can," he confessed.

She kissed his forehead, and he shivered as her lips grazed his scar. She pulled away. "You don't have to hide from me. I know who you are, and it's not your scar. You're Harry, and it's all I

want. You're the beautiful one, love. You are always going to be beautiful."

Out of all the words that could be used to describe him, he never thought beautiful would fit. Yet hearing it from Ginny made him believe, at least for a second, that it was true. They gazed at each other, and Harry felt every ounce of his body connect with Ginny. He breathed with her, and his heart beat in the same time that hers did. An overpowering sense of love and devotion washed over him. He couldn't hold back. He took her and kissed her fiercely.

She kissed him back, reaching over and holding him to her by the back of his neck. He opened his lips over hers and swept his tongue into her mouth, stroking and sliding it against hers. She gasped into his mouth and sank into the kiss, sucking his tongue. He gripped her knees. He didn't think about what he was doing but only acted. His body listened to the signals that Ginny's body sent out. She whimpered into his mouth as she pulled on his tie and lay back on the blanket. He lay on top of her, kissing her the whole time. His heart left it's normal pace and advanced. When he finally let her mouth go, she was panting. "Someone will see us," she whispered.

He examined the area and saw that no one was around in the darkness of the pitch, but he stopped anyway. He pulled away from her even though his body was burning. "You're right." He ran his hands through his hair and tried to calm down. His skin was on fire, and he couldn't ignore the hardness in his trousers. He didn't know what to say. He knew what he wanted, but he didn't know how to ask Ginny what she wanted. He felt all his sex advice leave him. He was full of bollocks.

Ginny tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. He saw how flushed and out of breath she was. "Harry?"

"Yeah?" he said, trying not to grow harder from the way she breathed his name.

"Come here," she ordered. He obeyed. He moved over to her in a trance. She kissed him gently, lightly licking his lower lip. She trailed her hand up his inner thigh and sucked his lower lip into her mouth, tonguing it softly.

"Ginny, m-maybe we should stop," he growled against her mouth. He desperately wanted to be noble but everything inside him screamed at him to take her.

"What if I don't want to stop?" she whispered against his lips.

He pulled back slightly. She stared at him fixatedly and confidence overtook her features. He felt his bravery increased as hers did. "Do-do you want to?" It was more than a question. It was a declaration of where their relationship was and how much she trusted him.

Her chest heaved, and she nodded. "Yes, I want to. I want to if you do."



His body shook with excitement and each breath was a shallow cough. He swallowed and tried to find words. "Yeah, I want to."

She nodded frantically. "Okay."

He rubbed his hands together nervously and felt a terrible case of déjà vu. "I don't have any potion. Um, I can go find some," he said awkwardly.

She scratched her head and crinkled her nose. "That's okay. I know the spell now, are you comfortable with that?"

Harry thought about it. He was apprehensive, but he trusted Ginny. She wouldn't use it if she weren't sure. "That's fine, if you really know it."

"I do," she quivered. She took a breath and held her wand to her lower stomach. She closed her eyes and mumbled something under her breath. She was still for a moment but then wiggled her feet. She opened her eyes and heavily exhaled. "It worked."

"Yeah?" he asked, feeling woozy.

"Yes. Well, um, you can come back over," she said. He chuckled timidly and slowly leaned forward. He kissed her deeply, pushing his tongue into her mouth and groaning. He felt her hands against him, massaging his chest and running her fingertips over his nipples through his shirt. He pulled back.

"Ginny," he whispered harshly. "Are you absolutely sure?" He hoped that she was. He wanted her. He wanted to feel her more than anything.

"Yes, I'm sure," she whispered into his ear. She pulled his shirt from his trousers and touched his skin.

He groaned and bent his head to lick her ear. "I love touching you," he moaned into her neck, sucking it gently.

She pulled away. "Don't stop." She unfastened his belt buckle, unsnapped his trousers, and slid his zipper down. He lifted his hips. She pushed his trousers and boxers down. She slowly stroked him in her hand and smiled at him. He bit his lip hard and tried to control his breathing and his need to let go. He didn't know what to say or what he was supposed to do. Everything was so much harder when he had time to think.

"Ginny," was all he could say. She seemed to understand. She got on her knees and moved down. She opened her mouth and fluttered her tongue over the head, back and forth, over and over. His breathing hitched, and he dug his hands into the grass. He couldn't believe what her mouth was doing. He roamed his eyes around frantically. They were still alone so he could enjoy himself. He looked down and watched her take him in her mouth. He moaned and realized that he needed to keep quiet for whatever reason. She swallowed him, working her tongue on the underside of him and moving her hand up and down him while she sucked him. She

moved her head back and forth over him, making him even stiffer. She was a goddess, but it didn't last long. She slowed her pace and eventually took her mouth off of him. He was rather thankful. He knew that he would never last watching her.

Her face was even redder and her mouth was slicked. She sat back down and he reached under her skirt and pulled her knickers off. They never lost eye contact. He kissed her again and guided her back against the blanket. He leaned into her and kissed her deeply. He slid her skirt up her legs and reached between her legs, stroking her with one finger. She was so smooth and wet. He had to control the urges again as he familiarized himself with her.

He pulled out of the kiss and looked into her eyes. They were both panting extremely. He stroked her with one finger and pushed another finger inside her. She moaned, grinding against his hand. "Yes, Harry, yes."

He panted against her mouth. "You're amazing," he whispered, still stroking her slowly.

"Hmm, Harry, I want you so badly," she whimpered against his lips, pumping her hips against his hand. She reached down, took him in her hand, and stroked it in rhythm with his hand against her middle. "I want to feel you again. Please, I want you inside me," she said as he inserted another finger into her.

"I want you, too. I want you so much," he said, pulling his hand away and pushing into her, lifting her legs around his waist. "I just want you," he repeated.

She moaned, pushing herself up by gripping his shoulders. He reached between them and took his cock in his hand and guided it to her entrance. He slipped a couple of times, but she let him find his way. He kissed her softly and tried to control his wobbling arms. "You ready?"

"Yes, I'm ready," she said in a shaky voice. He kissed her again and slowly slipped the head into her opening. He held her hips and pulled her up onto him, sheathing himself inside her hot middle. He buried his face in her neck and sucked on her skin. The electric, silk, wet blanket once again met him. "Oh my god!" he choked out.

She moaned loudly and ground against him. "Harry, yes!" She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and laid her forehead against his. Every pant she made gave him more power, and he put everything into concentrating on what he was supposed to do. He wanted it to feel and mean more than last time. She kissed his lips, pushing her tongue into his mouth.

"You feel so good. So good," he said, pushing slowly. Everything around him hazed, and all he could feel and hear was Ginny. It felt so right.

"H-harder!" she cried.

He opened his eyes. "You sure?"

"Yes, please, I want to feel all of you," she purred. He instantly minded and began pumping harder. He shifted his hand to hold her neck and kissed her deeply, thrusting into her deeper. A new burn and pressure suctioned him, and a new flood of pleasure erupted. He wanted it to last forever, but it couldn't. He could feel his orgasm grow and blaze in his groin. He left like a prat and he was disappointed in himself, so he desperately tried to hold on. The more he tried to, the more he was unable to.

"I'm gonna cum, Ginny," he said.

"So am I. I am. Ohâ€¦y-yes!" she choked. She clung to him as he moved his hips harder. She bit her lip, let her head fall back against the blanket, and closed her eyes. Her body began to tremble and he felt her muscles clamp down on his hardness. He covered her mouth with his, and she cried out her pleasure into his mouth. She ground against him.

He slapped one hand onto the ground while holding her and felt himself explode inside her. She held his head against her neck as he moaned and came. He bucked and felt every emotion, good and bad, drain from him. It was all replaced by smoldering, blinding pressure and ecstasy. He kept rocking until he couldn't feel anything but bliss. He slowed to a stop and settled his hips against hers, wheezing against her neck. He kissed her neck and pressed his forehead to hers, breathing heavily. They were both trembling, and their sticky bodies clung to their clothes. He brushed her hair away from her face and kissed her lips gently. "I love you," he whispered against her lips.

"I love you, and you're fucking perfect," she said.

They held each other for a while and caught their breath. He eventually pulled away from her and pulled his boxers and trousers up. Ginny's face was clammy and flushed. He picked up her knickers and handed them to her. She slipped them back on. "Thanks."

"No problem," he said. His head was foggy, and his body felt light. However, he suddenly felt a wave of concern. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. You didn't hurt me. I wanted you to." She bit her lip.

He blushed. "No, not about that. Well, um, I'm glad that I didn't hurt you, but, um, I meanâ€¦did you want to do that?"

She gave him a look. "Of course I did. Why would you ask that?"

"Well, last time weâ€¦we did it and I know that it wasn't really what we both wanted. I need to make sure that you wanted it completely. It's pointless to ask now, but I want to know the truth. I wanted it, but it's more important that you did," he tried to explain.

She touched his face. "Harry, I wanted to. I wanted to just as much as you did. I promise. Besides, nothing could be more romantic than making love on the Quidditch pitch, yeah?"

He laughed and the worry faded. "Sometimes I forget how much we have in common."

She smiled looked toward the sky. He could see the faint mark on her neck where he bit her as he came. He felt guilty for it but a little thrilled about it, too. She pulled out blades of grass and ripped them into pieces. "You know, Harry, that was the first time that I've ever had an orgasm during sex."

His eyes grew. "Really? It was your first time ever? Not evenâ€!"

She shook her head. "No, never before tonight. It was because of you, and for some reason I've always known that you'd be the only person to make me do it."

His heart skipped a beat. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. "I'm glad," he said honestly. "I want to be the one who takes you there, Ginny. I want to be the only person, always."

Her bottom lip trembled, and she wiped her eyes. "I'm sorry, Harry."

He held her close and let her collapse against his chest. "Sssh, it's okay. We're together now. That's all that matters." He swallowed the bitterness.

"You make it feel so good, Harry. I love you so much, and I could never feel like that with anyone else. I haven't. Not with him, I promise," she sobbed.

He pulled her away some and gazed at her. Seeing her so sorry almost broke him, but he stayed strong for her. He ignored his feelings for her. "I know. I love you, too. I've never stopped. You feel incredible, and you can't imagine what it means to me to know that I was the one to truly make you feel it. It means so much."

She sniffed and rubbed her eyes dry. "You're my first, babe. You'll always be the first and only to me."

"I love you, Ginny," he said before grabbing her and kissing her again. He kissed her with everything that he had. Once again, words weren't enough. He couldn't tell her how much it panged him that Dean was her first, and he couldn't explain that it didn't make him want her any less. If anything he wanted her more, to prove that he could make her happy and make her feel loved.

Later that night, they slipped into the castle and tiptoed to his room. He opened the door; all his mates' curtains were closed. He took Ginny's hand and led her to his bed. They quickly slipped out of their clothes and crawled in. He closed his curtains tightly and put a silencing charm up. He was exhausted for many different reasons. He lit his wand and took in her pale, freckly

skin only covered by her knickers and bra. Her body was small and supple, and already he felt himself growing hard again.

She ran her fingers through her hair. Her eyes were puffy but otherwise she seemed okay. "Please, don't drool all over the sheets."

He blinked. "Sorry."

She chuckled. "It's okay." She trailed her finger up his chest and across his arm. "Quidditch has been really good to you."

"How do you know that I wasn't born this way?" he asked, moving closer to her.

She rolled her eyes. "My mistake." He took her hands and interlocked them with his. He kissed her neck and took in her smell. She was intoxicating and her slight moan forced all the blood to move south. He was tired but energy sparked through him. "Harry."

"Hmm?" he mumbled against her skin.

"You want to?" she asked.

He pulled away and saw the wicked smirk on her face. "That's rather brave of you, Ms. Weasley."

"I'm a Gryffindor and so are you," she said, pulling down her bra straps. Harry didn't need to be asked twice. He pounced on her and found his way inside her heat once more.

The next morning he opened his eyes and automatically smiled. Ginny was snuggled against him. He kissed the top of her head and sat up. He yawned and rubbed his eyes. He felt very well rested though his legs were weary. He hadn't worked so much in one night before. He covered his girlfriend's beautiful naked body and inched opened his curtains to pick up his boxers. Once they were up, he stepped up. Ron was already awake, and was leaning against his bedpost with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Hey!" Harry said slowly.

Ron pointed to his crumpled blanket on the floor. "Was that in your possession last night?"

"Oh, um, yeah. Thanks," he said, reaching for his glasses.

Ron sighed heavily. "And those—were they in your possession as well?"

Harry followed his finger. Ginny's pink and white knickers were on the floor next to his bed. He snatched them up and balled them in his hand. Almost as if the world was trying to make his life more complicated, Seamus, Neville, and Dean seemed to magically wake up at the same time and pull open their curtains.

"Oi, Ron, why are you being so loud?" Seamus asked.

"Yeah, mate, calm down," Neville said.

Harry didn't know what to say. "Umâ€¦!"

Ginny poked her head out of the curtain. "Ron, leave him alone. Harry, give me my knickers and the rest of my clothes, please."

"Oh, shit!" Seamus said before bursting into laughter. Neville joined him, and Harry couldn't help but to smile at Ginny. She was fearless. He quickly handed over her clothes.

"Good morning," she said.

He kissed her. "Good morning to you, too."

"Hey! What the bloody hell is going on?" Ron demanded.

His curtain opened and Hermione stepped out in his orange Chudley Cannons shirt and his blanket wrapped around her waist. "Oh, let it go, Ron. Let them be!" She pushed her hair back and reached for her skirt. She straightened her shoulders and cleared her throat. "I think everyone in this room needs to grow up andâ€¦and get dressed!"

"Spoken like a true Prefect," Seamus said.

"Bugger off, Seamus," Ron shot.

He kept laughing. "Fucking hell! If I had known this was going to be a party, then I would have brought my girlfriend, too! We could have had an orgy!"

"You're disgusting, Seamus!" Hermione said.

"Oh, bloody bollocks, I need to shower! I need to forget all of this happened!" Ron said, leaning against the post and slipping down.

"Mate, it's okay. We, um, were safe," Harry tried.

Ron only shuddered and stuck out his tongue. "I'll never eat again."

"We all know that's not true," Neville said.

Hermione sighed and emerged again with her clothes on. "I'm going to my room to get ready. I don't want to hear any of this outside of the room. That goes for everyone. I mean it." She kissed the top of Ron's head. "Don't hit anyone. If you do, then you'll be the one in trouble. Got it?"

He nodded and huffed. "Yes, I hear you." She patted his shoulder and gave Harry a wide beam before leaving.

Ginny emerged as well, fully dressed. "I'll be back, too. Thanks for a great night," she said pointedly, looking at Ron as she kissed Harry.

Ron pretended to throw up. "Enough!" She chuckled and walked toward the door. Harry grinned at her and noticed her glance at Dean, who was looking at her. They shared a quick expression, but she just as quickly turned from him and walked out the door. Dean sat back on his bed.

Harry decided to focus on something else and not the sharp jab of concern. He looked down at Ron and lightly tapped his leg with his foot. "Hey, are you going to live?"

Ron put his hands over his face. "I don't know."

He rolled his eyes. "Well, try to. I need you to hold it together for practice today." He held out his hand. Ron looked at it for a moment before taking it.

He rubbed his neck so hard that Harry thought he'd rub the skin off. "Um, you were safe, right?"

"Yes, I told you that. I'll always be careful and smart. You have to trust me and just so you know, we only used your blanket for warmth. We didn'tâ€¦on it," Harry said.

Ron held up a hand. "Yeah, yeah, say no more. I'll let you keep your prick another day. Fucking hell, I really need a shower! Am I too young to have a heart attack?" He grabbed his clothes and ran out.

Harry shook his head and sat on his bed. He noticed something stuffed under his pillow. He pulled out the white and pink knickers, and his ears burned. He stuffed it back under his pillow, hoping that later she'd want to retrieve them. He lay back and closed his eyes. He could use with a few more moments of sleep.

\*\*\*\* Ha! Go Harry/Ginny! They deserve some bliss, yeah? I think their relationship is so physical and heated, and it's great to write them that way. Um, I can't really think of anything that needs explaining. Pretty straightforward chapter. Let me thinkâ€¦um, no, honestly, nothing comes to mind, lol. So, thanks for reading and REIVEW!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 44

Thanks for the reviews! You lot really are the greatest!

Okay, I know that I took a long time to update. Truthfully, I spent a week or so reading over this entire story, editing it, and discovering what I've done that I'm proud of/not so proud of. I've changed and grown so much over the course of this story and so have the characters and their relationships. I've had a lot of great moments and some moments that I wish I never had opened. However, this is where I am, and I'm bloody pleased. I've had a lot of written abuse thrown at me over this story. I've had a lot of haters and shippers get on me about how I've "allowed" this

story to turn out. However, I've also had some of the best reviewers and people at FFN read, review, and pm me with such kind and loving words. Thank you all so much and you all know who you are. You're the reason why I'm still here and why I'm no longer uneasy to write this story the way that I want to while always remembering to stay as canon as possible. This is me and my interpretation of how the teens would react in this situation. This is how I write them in this universe. So, if you are honestly still unhappy with how it's going, then maybe you should find something else to read. BUT if you're enjoying it, keep reading! Lo.. Cheers.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry blew his whistle. He watched as his team stopped at different times and flew back down to the ground at different times. He waited until the last player touched the pitch before saying, "Again." He blew his whistle. Everyone groaned, mounted their brooms, and flew back into the air. He watched them fly around the hoops and decided to spell out his full name, taking a two second break in between each letter, before blowing it again. This time, they were quicker to come down but it was still sloppy and out of synch. "Again," he sighed, humming the chorus to a Weird Sisters song before blowing his whistle once more. He surveyed his panting and perspiring teammates as they touched the ground at different times. "We will do this all afternoon and into the night until you lot learn to touch down together. Why am I making you do this exercise in the first place?"

Ron, who was drenched in sweat and breathing roughly, stuck a hand out while resting his other on his knee. "I know."

"Yeah?" Harry said.

He raised himself and reached down the front of his Quidditch trousers. He seemed to cup himself and massage his bollocks. "It's to make sure that some of us never have kids," he said with a wince. Ginny and a few other people on the team laughed.

"Clever, but not exactly what I'm going for," Harry said with a grin.

Katie ruffled Ron's hair and said, "It's to get us to think as a team and feel when one of us is lacking."

"Exactly, Katie! Look, there's been a lot of talk lately and a lot of shit building up between Gryffindor and Slythern. This match is much more than a game. Draco and his team aren't going to hold anything back this time around. I know they're going to play dirtier and harder than they ever had. They have it in for us," Harry explained.

"No one here is afraid of them. We've beaten them in the past," Dean said.

"I know but this game decides if it's going to be us or them against Ravenclaw. It's not about fear. It's about teamwork. Slythern is a group of individual blokes doing everything they



can to win. We're not like that. We're a unit. Each member has something to offer, and we have to stay involved and in contact with each other at all times." Harry snuck a glance at Ginny as he said this. She was staring fiercely at him and had a loving smile on her face.

She nodded. "Yeah, we all know that they don't mind taking people down. They forget what's a bludger and who's a player a lot of the time."

"That's why we have to look out for each other," Harry added. "It's not just the beaters protecting the chasers and the chasers shouldn't only pass to each other and stay close to the keeper. Everyone here should know what his or her teammates are doing. We'll need to know when slack needs to be picked up and who's hurt. They're counting on taking us down one by one. Let's not let them."

Ron rolled his eyes. "Can I leave my post if Draco goes after any of our players and just kick his arse? I've been wanting to get that fucker all year."

Harry couldn't hold his laugh in. "You know what, if we're bleeding them dry and there's no possible way that they could come back, then sure. Just make sure that you make it look like an accident. We need you for the finals."

"Yes! You got it!" Ron said, bouncing on the heels of his feet in excitement.

"Well, before you get too excited, Ron, why don't you get back on your broom with the rest of the team." Harry put his whistle to his lips and blew. "Again." Everyone groaned and hung their heads. "Don't make me add ten laps around the pitch. There are things that I'd like to get to today."

"Me too," Ginny said, eyeing him again. "Come on, lot. Captain Potter gave us an order." She winked at him, and he felt himself grin like a prat as she and the others took to the air. He felt so lucky to have her on the team.

Finally, he was able to get them to fly and touch down in unison. He made them do it several times until he was sure that they could do it blindfolded. Everyone grumbled as they packed up their things and headed off. "Great practice, Harry," Katie said.

He smiled. "I knew you'd appreciate it."

"That and being under Oliver for so long got me used to this. I'm glad that you're hard on us. I want that cup this year. Cho's not going to be the seventh year with it," she said. She gave his arm a squeeze before walking away.

Ron and Ginny came over. Both Weasleys were flushed and their blazing hair was plastered to their faces. Ron slumped on a bench and leaned his forehead against his broom. "My bloody balls hurt."

"Over share, Ron. No one cares about your nasty bollocks but Hermione," Ginny said, walking over to Harry.

He chuckled. "You've got a lot of nerve talking to me about over sharing. What about when you had your nasty knickers right in front-"

"Hey, let's give it a rest. I'm tired and I really don't want to referee you two again. Fucking hell, just get along," Harry said. More than ever Ron and Ginny were at each other's throats.

Ginny rolled her eyes and placed her hands around his neck. "I'll get along with Ron when he minds his own business." She kissed him and Harry kissed her back strongly. It had been difficult to watch her fly around and get all sweaty and not touch her. Now that they were having sex, it was a constant idea in his head and Quidditch practice only drew his attention to it more.

"Well, I'll mind my own business when you stop doing shit to purposely make me angry," Ron said loudly.

They pulled away. She glared at him. "What? You think I'm that immature? Do I not have anything better to do than get on you?"

He stood up and glared right back at her. "I don't know, Ginny, you sure as hell act like you don't. You are always saying or doing something just to antagonize me. You think you're so bloody great."

"And you're out of your mind. Whatever your problem is has nothing to do with me. You're not that interesting, Ron. I don't give a fuck about what you're doing day-to-day," she shot.

His cheeks flushed. "Then stop following me and my friends around all the time like you've got nothing else going on in your life. Fucking hell, do you even have mates your own age, or have they all given you the slip because you act too much like a-"

"All right that's enough!" Harry stood in between them as the sick feeling in his stomach that he always got when they fought returned. They playfully took the piss out of each other all the time, but sometimes he knew that their insults were deeper than that.

Ginny backed away. "I'm going to shower. I'll see you inside, Harry. I don't want to be around this thick git any longer."

"Oh, good one. Did you come with that all by yourself, little girl?" Ron asked.

"Yeah, along with this," she said, giving him the finger before walking out of the tent.

Harry turned to Ron. He was rubbing his hands together and his jaw was set. "She can act like such a bitch sometimes."

"Don't say that about her. She's your sister," Harry shot.

"Exactly. She should know to leave me the fuck alone. I'm tired of her and her fucking problems and all the damn stress." Ron stood up and began to clean.

Harry didn't know what to say. Ron was his best friend, but Ginny was his girlfriend. It was one of those times when he didn't know where he was supposed to stand. "What's been going on? What stress? You two have really been at it."

"I dunno. I've been worrying about her all year, and she's throwing it in my face now, but then she always gives me those eyes when she's upset. What am I supposed to do? It's like she wants me there but doesn't want me there," he explained.

Harry helped him to pack away the Quidditch gear and move the benches back. "I know what you mean. Sometimes I don't know if she wants me to help her out or not, but you know how she is. She's tough."

"Yeah, and she must think that I'm not. She may intimidate everyone else but not me. I've been her brother for fifteen years," Ron said.

"Look, no matter what she appreciates what you do for her," Harry said. "She loves that you care so much. She won't say it to you but she does. Trust me on that. You and Ginny have got to stop this constant arguing."

"It's not the easy, Harry. You don't get itâ€¦it's likeâ€¦ all she does is criticize me, and she is always on my arse, but then she'll want something and I just have to give it to her because it's my job. It's just getting worse, but I don't have time to care. I don't care," Ron explained.

Harry shrugged. "Sure didn't look like that just a minute ago."

"You two should be out of here by now," a voice said.

They both looked behind them. Draco Malfoy was standing near the entrance of the tent with his hands crossed over his chest. Harry prepared himself to hold Ron back if necessary. "What do you want, Malfoy?" There was a certain dullness and irritation that Harry felt whenever Draco was around. The blonde-hair prick just wasn't worth his effort anymore.

"What do you think, Potter? You're not the only one who can book the tent. It's time for our practice," he said, walking in.

"Well, we're almost done. You and your boys can have it," Ron said.

"Thank you for your permission, Weasley. I really thought that I needed you to tell me what I can and cannot do with my teammates, and your retort at the end, very witty. Granger must be rubbing off more than her filth on you," Draco said coldly.

Ron, of course, took a step toward him, but Harry grabbed his arm. "We're going now, Malfoy."

"Let me know if your team needs to interrupt us for another practice. You're in the shit this year, Potter. Keeping Weasel and your little ginger girlfriend on the team was a stupid move," Draco said.

Ron lunged toward him again, but Harry got in front of him. He felt the spike of anger just as Ron did, but he was levelheaded enough to realize what was really going on. "Ron, let it go. Let the fucker say whatever he wants to."

"No, I won't," Ron said, glowering at Draco. "You keep my sister's name out of your fucking mouth, Malfoy. I'm sick of you and your goons messing with her. Go near her again and I'll--"

"You'll what?" Draco asked with a shrug. "Are you going to get Granger to send me to detention? Are you going to let your girlfriend be the man for you?"

"Go suck a cock, ferret," Ron said through gritted teeth, still pushing against Harry's back.

Draco only smirked. "Oh, so that's why you and Potter spend so much time in here. We were wondering why he's kept you on the team for as long as he has. You must be an expert at it by now."

Ron growled and pushed forward. Harry had to plant his feet firmly into the ground to keep him from reaching Malfoy. "Listen, I know what you're doing. You're trying to get us all upset so that we'll kick your arse and get thrown out of the next game. It's not going to work. Ron and I will be playing against you very soon."

"That's right, you rat-faced prick. Stop wasting your time. I'll bloody be there and afterwards I'll kick your arse anyway. You don't fuck with Ginny and get away with it," Ron said. He moved away and took his broom. He gave Draco one last look before leaving the tent.

Draco shook his head. "You keep pathetic company, Potter. You always have."

"Yeah, well, I'm not the one who's trying to get people in trouble because I realize that my team has nothing but brawn. You can't win on blood alone. You're the pathetic one, Draco, and just know that I won't hold Ron back next time." Harry picked up his Firebolt and left the tent.

Ron was waiting for him. He let out a breath. "I swear I want to rip his throat out."

"Save it for the game. You really need to be careful, Ron. All this arguing and wanting to fight that you're doing may actually get you in trouble if you're not careful," Harry said as they made their way back.

"I can't help it. I hate him talking about Ginny and Hermione. Don't you care?" he asked.

"Of course I do," Harry said, "but he's not worth it to me. He's a spoiled wanker with nothing to do but make everyone else as miserable as he is. I won't let him do that to me. We've got too much coming up."

"Yeah, like another practice in a couple of days," Ron mumbled, reaching to his crotch again.

Harry smiled. "You want that day off?"

He stopped walking. "Seriously?"

"Are you all ready for your plan with Hermione?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, I got the last bit this morning," Ron said.

"Then yeah, I'm serious. Use the day to do your thing with her," he said.

Ron bounced on the heels of his feet again. "Oh, Harry, thank you! This is bloody brilliant!"

"Just tell us what we need to do before I go set up that day," he said.

Ron nodded. "Yeah, of course. Fucking hell! This is great. I can't wait." His entire mood and body language seemed to lift and change. Harry was relieved. Anything to help dry out some of the anger from Ron was necessary.

When they got back to the castle Harry went to shower. Other than his mishap with Malfoy, he considered it a good day so far. His team was more conditioned and confident than ever, and he truly felt like a captain. The warm water soothed his aching muscles and brought a content smile to him. It only got better when he opened the door to his room and saw Ginny sitting on his bed and drying her hair.

"Hey, you can't just come in here whenever you want to. I could have been naked," he cheeked, walking over and sitting next to her. He kissed her neck and smelled the freshness of her skin and hair.

She moaned and leaned into his lips. "I was actually hoping that you would be."

"Damn. What me to try again?" he asked, pulling away.

She grinned and ran her fingers through his damp locks. "It's probably for the best. I just took a shower, and I'm too tired to take another one."

"Did I work you too hard?" he asked.

She snorted and used her towel to rub over his scalp. "Please. I was fine out there. I didn't mind it too much, and I didn't mind you working me. You're such a great coach."

"I try to be. I want us to win so badly," he said.

Ginny pulled the towel away touched his face. "Harry, we will win. We've worked really hard all year and everything you said about Draco and Slytherin was true. Don't worry."

"That asshole gave Ron and me shit when we were packing up," he said.

"I'm sure Ron acted like a mental case as always," she breathed.

"I think he did pretty well, and he was defending you," Harry explained.

She didn't seem impressed. "Yes, of course, Ron is always defending me, like I can't take care of myself."

"Hey, you should give him a break. He was looking out for you," he said. She shrugged. "What is with you two? Why have you been on him so much?"

"It's not just me, Harry. He's on me, too," Ginny said.

"I know but I don't understand why you're so upset about it. You know that he's stressed right now. He's got a lot of things to do for the graduation ceremony, and you know how much he's worried about the thing with Hermione," he said.

"I'm aware of all of that, Harry. I mean I helped him set it up remember? It's just—I don't know. Ron hassles me all the time and treats me like a child. He doesn't think that I can handle anything and every decision I make is stupid. He's not my dad and he forgets that a lot," she said. "You don't get it, babe."

Harry sighed. He might as well have been talking to Ron. "Okay, maybe I don't but what I do know is that all the arguing isn't good for either of you."

She chuckled. "You sound like Hermione."

"Well, she does know what she's talking about most of the time," Harry said. "Look, I'm not trying to tell you or Ron what to do. You've been siblings forever, I get it, but I honestly don't like seeing you two like this and if nothing else, I don't want it changing the team's dynamic. You two have a lot of influence over how practices and games turn out."

She looked away and let out a heavy breath. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize that. I'm sure that we'll be fine. We always are. Just—can we talk about something else, like how good you smell?" she asked, turning back to him.

He laughed and pulled his arms around her. "I don't know if I want to talk about it, but I don't mind hearing you." He kissed her neck again, and he felt her shiver.

"Mmm, well, you smell really fantastic. It's driving me mad right now," she said softly, moving her hands to his back.

Harry kissed and nibbled all over her skin. She tasted so incredible, and her body was warm. "Are you sure that you don't want me to try coming in again?"

She pulled on his hair and brought their lips close. "I might reconsider." She kissed him. They sighed and Ginny moved back. She lay against his bed, and Harry settled on top of her. He pushed his tongue in her mouth and moaned as the hot wave traveled through him. She pulled away and laughed. "Your hair is still too wet. It's getting all over me."

He shook his hair in her face. "How's that?"

She continued to laugh as he continued to shake his head. "Okay, okay, stop it! Fucking hell." She hit his arm. Harry grinned and loved how her freckly face was slightly pink. She took his hand. "I love you."

"I love you, too," he said with ease. They stared at each other and Harry felt every bad feeling and memory evaporate from his body as Ginny's kind brown eyes got through his barrier and touched his hidden parts. There was a knock at the door, but he didn't move. He continued to gaze at Ginny. The knocking kept on.

"Um, you should probably get that," she finally said.

"Yeah," he breathed. He bent down and gave her a kiss before getting up. Hermione was on the other side.

"Hi," she asked with a smile, peaking into the room.

"Hey. I think Ron is still in the shower," he said, letting her in.

"That's fine. He's not going to like what I have to tell him, anyway," she said, sitting on Ron's bed. "How was practice?"

"Long and hot. Harry didn't let up on us the whole time. What do you have to tell Ron?" Ginny asked.

"We have another unscheduled meeting tonight," Hermione said.

"That's the second one this week," Harry said.

"I know," Hermione breathed, "I was planning on studying tonight. I guess I'll have to push that back for the second time."

"I just want this term to be over with. It's been the most stressful year of my life," Ginny said, running her fingers through her hair.

"Me too," Harry said quietly. He had come such a long way since September, but he still felt as if there was so much longer to go.

Hermione looked between them. "It hasn't been all bad. You two have each other now. That's not going to change."

"That's the only thing I don't want to change," Ginny said, hugging his arm.

The door to the room opened. Judging by Hermione's wide smile, Harry knew that it was Ron. "Fucking bleeding bollocks my legs are sore," he said. "Hey, Hermione."

"Hello," she said out of breath. "I guess Harry worked you pretty hard, too."

He came over and sat next to her. He and Ginny looked at each other for a moment before turning away. "Yeah, the prat wouldn't let up," he said, throwing his towel at him.

Harry laughed. "You'll thank me when we win the championship."

"That's what I keep trying to tell everyone," Ginny added.

Ron ignored them. He placed his head on Hermione's shoulder, and she rubbed his thigh. "I almost fell over in the shower."

"Aww, my poor tough man," she said.

"I just want to lay down. Do you want to take a nap with me?" he asked her with a smile.

Harry could see the strain in her features. He had a feeling that she wanted to say yes. "That sounds excellent but we have a meeting in a little while."

"You're taking the piss. Another one?" he asked.

"I wish I was. McGonagall wants us to-"

"Bloody hell. That woman is off it. I mean that," Ron said, getting up.

"I'm sorry, Ron, but we have to go," Hermione said.

He shook his head. "No, we don't. At least, I don't have to."

"What are you saying?" she asked.

"I'm saying that I'm skiving. I'm not going to another bloody meeting. I want to sleep then start on my journal entry. I don't have time for this shit!" Ron snapped.

Hermione gaped at him. "You are a Prefect!"

"I think that's our cue," Ginny said in his ear. Harry nodded and the two discreetly left the room as Hermione and Ron started another one of their rows. They shook their head in bewilderment as they made their way down the stairs. "Do those two ever take a bloody break?"



"Not really. My day is usually off if I don't hear them argue at least twice. It's all a part of their thing," Harry explained.

Ginny smiled. "I reckon they get off to that, yeah? They have to. No one fights that much and snogs that much as well. There must be some correlation."

He laughed at her cheek. "Maybe. I really don't want to think about it, though. Are your legs about to fall off as well?"

"No, I'm fine. Why?" she asked.

"I was thinking that we could go outside. It's a nice day and I hate being stuck in here when it's nice," he said.

She took his hand. "I know what you mean. Yeah, that sounds great."

The two held hands as they strolled outside. Harry couldn't keep his eyes off her hair and how it flowed and glistened. He held her close and kissed the top of her head. "I got a letter from your mum this morning," he said.

She chuckled. "She warned me that she would send you one. What did she say?"

"It wasn't that different from her others. She wanted to know how classes were going, if I was staying out of trouble and if I'm eating. Then, she talked about you and asked if I was treating you right and what she thought were nice gestures that you'd adore," he explained.

"Sounds like mum. She gives me suggestions as well, if you can believe it," she said.

"I'm surprised that your dad hasn't written to me," he said.

Ginny stopped them. She smiled wide. "No. He's waiting until we get back to the house for that."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, suddenly nervous.

"Well, you'll be staying at my house as my boyfriend. There are different rules now. I'm sure he'll give you a speech about what will happen if you hurt me. Expect it from my brothers, too," she explained.

Harry swallowed hard. He abruptly got a vision of Mr. Weasley and all six Weasley brothers scowling down at him as they threatened his bollocks. "Brilliant. I can't wait."

"Oh, don't worry about it. It's all intimidation and nothing else. They're harmless," she assured.

"Still. I'd rather not have my manhood threatened," he said.

"A small price to pay," she cheeked. "You'll be fine, I promise. I'm excited for summer. I can't wait to spend real time with you. It'll be great."

The sun shined brightly against her skin and seemed to light up her body. He couldn't wait until he would be able to eat breakfast with her, swim in the pond with her, and play Quidditch with her all day if he wanted to. "Yeah, neither can I." They looked at each other and interlocked their fingers. They leaned forward and kissed. They moaned in unison and stayed against each other for quite some time. It wasn't until later that evening that they finally made it back to the castle.

"I'll meet you back in the room," Harry said. "I'm going to see if Katie is at dinner. I need to remind her of something."

"Okay," Ginny said, kissing him again.

He grinned and watched her walk off. The hot pulse was all over him. As he walked back toward the Common Room, he ran into Hermione. She was fuming and red. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"What do you think? I just came out of the meeting. Everyone wanted to know where Ron was. I can't believe that he honestly didn't go," she said.

"What did you tell them?" he asked.

She sighed. "That he got hurt during practice and decided to lay down." He chuckled. "Don't look at me like that. I don't want him to get into serious trouble and if anyone is going to punish him, then it's going to be me." She suddenly covered her mouth, and her face turned even redder. "Oh, ignore that! I didn't meanâ€¦!"

Harry patted her arm. "Hermione, it's okay. I know what you meant."

She eased a little. "Good. Where's Ginny?"

"She went upstairs. We couldn't stay outside all day, unfortunately," he said.

"I'm glad that you two were able to enjoy the weather and each other. It's great to see you both so happy. You deserve it, Harry," she said, taking his hand and squeezing it.

He felt a warmth and love grow for her. She had done so much for him, and she was still on his side after he had acted like an arse to her. "Thanks. Are you heading back to the room?"

"Yes, I need to inform your friend on what he missed. He's lucky that I'm as nice as I am," she said sternly. They walked back to the Common Room and when Harry walked through, all of his easiness faded. Dean and Lavender were huddled together on the floor near the fire. He had his arm wrapped around her shoulder, and he was whispering something in her ear. The portrait hole closed and they looked up. The four of them looked at one

another. Harry glanced at Hermione, and she seemed just as uneasy as he felt.

Dean and Lavender stood up. She appeared upset at first, but she flipped her hair and covered it up with a smile. "Hey you two."

"Hi," Hermione said. "Um—are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine," Lavender said sweetly.

Dean looked at Lavender before settling on Harry. "Nice practice today. I've never felt more ready for a game before."

Harry frowned slightly. "Thanks—that's what it's all about." The four of them once again stood in silence. It was eerie. There was so much between them even though the words had never been spoken. He couldn't describe the feeling.

Hermione cleared her throat. "Well, we should go, Harry."

"Yeah. We should go. See you two—later—" he said, following her upstairs.

"Later, for sure," Lavender said with another big smile. Harry didn't say a word to Hermione as they walked up the stairs. He was too afraid that Dean and Lavender were right behind them. Hermione didn't say anything. She gave the impression that she was wrapped in her own thoughts. He opened the door to his room. Ron and Ginny were sitting on his bed, and they seemed to be deep in conversation as well.

"I don't know what you want me to do, Ron. Just tell me whatever it is that you want," she said, turning away from him.

He shrugged and put his face in his hands. "I don't know. I'm sorry. I didn't think that it would be this hard."

Harry felt the eeriness again, so he cleared his throat. They both looked up but unlike Dean and Lavender, they didn't turn their grief around. It was obvious that something was wrong. "What's going on?" Hermione asked.

"Nothing," Ron and Ginny said together.

Harry and Hermione sat on his bed. He looked at his friend and his girlfriend. "What did we walk in on?"

"You didn't walk in on anything," Ron said.

"It didn't seem that way," Hermione said.

"It doesn't matter," Ginny said. "Honestly, we were just talking."

Hermione looked as if she wanted to say something else but Ron cut in. "What did I miss at the meeting? I know McGonagall must have asked where I was, right?"

She closed her eyes and exhaled. "Yes, she did. I told her that you weren't feeling well, again, but I doubt that she believed me. You have to start going, Ron. It's both of us on the line."

"Yeah, I'll go from now on. I was just really bloody tired and achy," he said.

She smiled faintly. "It's fine. We mostly talked about a new hall patrol system that she wants to try out for a couple of weeks."

"I'm already bored," he said.

Hermione threw up her hands. "Ronald Weasley, the fact that you can even--"

"Can you lecture him later?" Ginny cut in.

"Excuse me?" Hermione said, her eyes widening.

She rubbed her eyes. "I'm only saying that I'm sure Ron deserves whatever you're about to say but it's been a really long day and it's late. Can we just do something else? Can we do something fun, please?"

Ron eyed her. "Yeah, we can. Let's play cards or something. Hermione, is that okay with you?"

Hermione reddened. "Yes, that's fine. I'm sorry."

"It's fine. Really," Ginny said. She moved off the bed and sat on the floor.

Harry sat next to her. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said.

"Ginny, please, whatever it is, you can tell me," he said. He hated that he didn't know what she and Ron were talking about and that he couldn't help whatever it was.

"I know but it's nothing. I was talking things out with my brother. It's what you wanted, right?" she said.

Harry rolled his eyes. He knew that he wasn't going to get anywhere. "Yeah, I guess that's good."

Ron grabbed his cards and joined them on the floor with Hermione. He kissed her cheek. "I'm really sorry that I didn't go."

"It's fine, Ron," she said shortly.

Exploding Snaps was usually simple and exciting, but Harry could feel tension around the circle. "Shit," Ron said, as he gripped his card.

"What do you have?" Harry asked.

Ron opened his mouth and at the same time the door opened. Dean and Lavender came into the room. Lavender was giggling and Dean had the biggest smile on his face. "Oh, Dean, that can't be true!"

"It is, I swear it!" he said. He turned to them. "Hey lot." Harry didn't know what to say. He didn't know what to think. He turned to the group. Hermione, Ron, and Ginny were staring at them.

"Are you all okay?" Lavender asked, sitting on Dean's bed.

"Yes, we're fine," Hermione said. "Do you two need us to leave?"

Dean chuckled. "Why? We can all be in here at the same time. We just have some work to do."

"For charms. We didn't get our sheets done. Did you, Ronnie?" Lavender asked.

He rubbed his neck. "Um, almost."

"Don't procrastinate for too long," she said cheery.

Dean pulled out his work and sat close to Lavender on his bed. "We'll be quiet. Promise." He glimpsed at Ginny, and she quickly turned away from him. They talked and giggled as if the four of them weren't there.

Harry tried to get the game going again, but he couldn't think properly or concentrate. He felt terribly on edge. He turned his attention to Ginny. She was staring at Ron. Ron caught her eye. She frowned and slightly shook her head. He gripped her elbow for a second and gave her a quick grin. They looked away from each other and went back to their cards. The game didn't last for too much longer. Hermione stormed off and Ron chased after her. Harry was left in the room with Dean, Lavender, and Ginny.

Ginny sat quietly on the floor and helped to pick up the cards. Harry didn't know what to say. "So, do you think they're fighting again or snogging?"

"Dunno," she said. "I think I'm going to go to bed."

"Do you want to stay here tonight?" he asked.

She gave a quick glance to Dean and Lavender who were still giggling on his bed. "Sure, I need to get my stuff first. I'll be back." She moved over and kissed him softly on the lips.

"I love you," he said, hoping that it would ease the rigidity.

She gave a small smile. "I love you, too."

Harry held Ginny close that night as she slept against him. It felt so good. He loved how her small body fit against his. However, he wasn't tired. All he could think about was how much seeing Dean and Lavender got to them all. He also couldn't get

Ron and Ginny's expressions out of his head. They were hiding something, and he had a feeling that it had to do with the very people who had tried ruined his perfect day. He reluctantly pulled away from her and got out of bed. He pulled on his pajamas and slid into his slippers. He gave Ginny one more look before quietly leaving the room.

Harry walked downstairs. He needed a moment to himself to think. He didn't know what else to do, and there was no one that he could talk to about the feeling in his chest. When he made it downstairs, Hermione was on the couch, gazing deeply into the fire. He cleared his throat, and she pulled her eyes away. "Can't sleep?" she asked.

"Want some company?" he answered.

She nodded and patted the cushion next to her. He sat and they both looked into the fire. "Soâ€¦what a day."

"Yeah," he answered. The anxiousness was in his throat. "Did you get things work out with Ron?"

"Yes, we're fine. We had a bad fight but it's okay. It's wasn't a good day for us. We're both working really hard and it's irritating," she explained. He nodded. "And it doesn't help that he's keeping things from me."

He looked at her. "What do you mean?"

She sighed. "You were there, too. Whatever he and Ginny were talking about wasn't just anything. I don't know why he wouldn't tell me unless it has to do with me."

"It could be about me," Harry said. "Ginny wouldn't say anything."

"He says that I don't respect the fact that they're siblings and they need to talk to each other sometimes. That's ridiculous. I love that he and Ginny are close and can talk to each other," she said.

"I know. I'm the one who's been trying to get them to stop fighting," Harry added.

"Exactly. It's rude that they expect us to just forget something like that. It was intense," Hermione said.

Harry nodded, feeling his anger blending with hers. However, he had a feeling that it had less to do with Ron and Ginny and more to do with something else. He decided to go for it. "Was I the only one not okay with Dean and Lavender'sâ€¦thing."

Hermione turned from the fire and frowned. He knew that she didn't seem to understand. He was ready to tell her to forget what he said, but her eyes suddenly softened, and she let out a heavy breath. "Oh, Harry, I'm glad that you said something. I got this sick feeling in my stomach the moment I saw them in here and coming into the room was just horrible."

Harry wanted to hug her. He forgot how much they had in common sometimes. "Fucking hell, I know what you mean. Were they doing that on purpose?"

"I don't know. Lavender was all over Dean, and he was so happy. I've never seen anything like it," she said.

"It got to Ginny. She wouldn't say a word about it, but I know it did. I'm not sure what that means," he confessed.

"She was probably just shocked. She's never liked Lavender too much and seeing her giggly with Dean must have upset her," Hermione explained.

Harry smiled at her intellect. "I didn't think about it like that. I thoughtâ€¦"

She put a hand on his. "Don't. She wasn't jealous. It's just Lavender gets under everyone's skin. Well, everyone but Ron."

"Did he say anything?" he asked.

"Only that he's glad to see her moving on and happy, same with Dean. He's surprised to see them so close, but he doesn't see a thing wrong with it," she said with a frown. "I don't know if he's purposely trying to ignore what's going on if he honestly doesn't see it."

"What exactly is going on? I felt whatever it was, but what the hell are they doing?" he asked.

"I don't know. Harry, I'm so sorry that I didn't back you up before. I sincerely didn't think Lavender was up to anything but after tonight they have to do something. They have toâ€¦knowâ€¦something, anything," she said.

Harry rubbed his hands together nervously. "But what? And what can they possibly be doing? What do they know?"

"I'm not sure. I just feel so on edge about all of this. After all the planning we did, maybe we're just being paranoid. Maybe this is what their plan is, to drive us mental," she said.

"It's working. I mean it, Hermione. If Dean is trying to ruin things with Ginny and me I don't know what I'll do. We are finally in a good place. I just got her back," he said.

"Don't worry. Whatever Dean and Lavender are or aren't doing we'll be prepared for. You're not losing Ginny, and I'm certainly not losing Ron. Look, I have so much work to do tomorrow, but how about after the day after you and me think about what we can possibly do," she said.

Harry desperately wanted to. He was so anxious about Dean, and Hermione's understanding of his position was refreshing air to him. However, he wouldn't stand in the way of what Ron had

planned. "I have a practice session booked for that day but maybe the next."

She nodded. "Oh, that's right. Well, we need to talk about this soon. I feel completely out of my element here."

"Me too," he confessed.

The stairs creaked. They both looked up. Ron was at the base with large eyes. Harry instantly stood up. "You okay?"

He nodded and walked over. Hermione stood up as well. "Yes, are you okay, Ron?" she asked firmly.

He looked between them and chewed on his lip. "Um, Harry, can you give us a minute?"

"Yeah, go ahead. I'm going back to bed," he gave Ron's shoulder a reassuring pat. He didn't like that Ron was so insecure about them. Ron nodded but kept his eyes on Hermione. Harry walked to the staircase and started to climb, but he stopped and poked his head back out.

Ron took Hermione's hands. "What were you two doing down here?"

"Don't make it sound like that. We were just talking. You know, like you and Ginny were doing," Hermione said frostily though her eyes were soft.

"Please, don't get upset with me over that. It was nothing. I just-if you have a problem, then come to me. You don't have toâ€¦whatever with Harry," he said, his voice somewhat shaky.

"I'm not doing anything with him, Ron. He's my friend. We were talking about you and Ginny. That's all," she said, squeezing his hands.

"Okay, fine, but please, justâ€¦I'm sorry, alright? I'm really sorry about today and for yelling at you and whatever else," he said.

"It's okay. I'm sorry, too. I got so mad at you, and I shouldn't have. I'm really stressed out right now," she said, pulling her hands away.

Ron placed his hands on her waist. "So am I."

"I just want us to keep talking," she said.

"We will," he breathed, pulling her close.

She hugged him back. "I'm sorry, Ron. I love you."

"And I love you so much. So much, Mione," he said.

Harry smiled and walked back up the stairs. Ginny was sitting up in bed with her wand lit when he climbed back in. "Where were you?" she asked.



"I went downstairs. I'm not really tired," he said.

She nodded and pulled her hair out of its loose braid. "Neither am I."

He didn't know what to say to her. "Ginny," he began.

"I know what you're going to ask, about Dean right?" she said.

"If you don't mind," he mumbled.

She took a breath rubbed her forehead. "He's not the person that I thought he was."

"What?" he rushed.

"I made such a mistake dating him and I just want to let it go," she said. "I'm with you, and I always will be. Dean can do whatever he wants with whomever he wants. I'm not going to let it get to me," she said strongly.

"Ginny Iâ€¦" he trailed off. He didn't know where to begin. He was ready to go into yet another conversation about Dean and his feelings. He was ready to defend why seeing Dean and Lavender bothered him so much. He wasn't, however, ready to hear Ginny tell him that she had given up. "Does this mean that you don't want to be friends with him?"

"Not everything ends happily. I honestly thought that you, Dean, and me could have something after this but he told me that he doesn't give a shit by bringing Lavender in here. I'm not stupid. He's done and so am I. I'm done, Harry. I mean it this time," she said, taking his hand.

He squeezed it. "You have no idea how relieved I am to hear you say that," he said truthfully.

She smiled and he could see the sadness in her giant brown eyes. "Good. This is good for us. I can't be like Ron."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Nothing. He's just better than me at some things. I can't do it."

Harry wanted to press the matter but he was tired of talking, and he was actually very sleepy. He just wanted to be with Ginny and sleep peacefully. "Okay. That's okay."

She put her forehead against his and kissed him. "This is what matters."

"I'm always going to be here. Don't worry," he said, kissing her harder. She wrapped her arms around his neck and deepened the snog. It felt wonderful and some of the weight lifted off his shoulders.

He didn't know what was going on with Ron and Ginny. He didn't know what Dean and Lavender were up to. He wasn't even sure if Ron and Hermione were truly okay. There were so many questions and so many things on his mind, but he decided to let it go, just for one night. It was still a good day day.

And he was too tired to ruin it.

\*\*\*\* Yes! I'm so happy with how this came out. It's a very layered chapter and so full of "stuff" lol. Wow, I can't even explain anything without giving something else away. So much mystery! Anyway, I hope you lot liked this! Harry and Ginny are apart of this story and they're not going anywhere, so yeah! thanks for reading and REVIEW! "That's only if you want to know what's up with a certain "plan" that a certain ginger bloke has for a certain brunette...\* whistles and walks away\*

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 45

Thanks for the reviews! You all are brilliant! Sorry this took a while! I've been getting myself together for the New York premiere of Deathly Hallows!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"This is a waste of time," Draco said for perhaps the hundredth time under his breath. Hermione turned to him. He strutted with such purpose and stiffness, and his robes were pressed and still neatly assembled to his body. Everything about him screamed of arrogance and wealth. He might have been all right looking if his eyes weren't so cold, his lips weren't so pursed, and his hair wasn't so slicked back and perfect. He caught her eye. "What are you looking at, Granger?"

"Nothing," she said, turning back to the hallway in front of them. She sighed quietly as they walked on almost opposite sides of the floor.

"You really are losing it, aren't you? You're almost as daft as weasel is now," he shot as they turned the corner.

She wanted to roll her eyes, but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction. "Whatever you say, Draco." He continued to mumble and spit insults at her, but it was rather difficult to take him seriously. He was tall but very thin. He was thinner than Ron was and probably daintier than she was. Ron and Harry constantly chuckled and chatted about how clean his nails were and how many hours he possibly worked on his hair. Ron argued that Draco cared about his looks more than Lavender did. Hermione couldn't help but to agree.

"McGonagall must be off her broomstick for making us do this," Draco said.

"She's got justification. There's too much tension between Gryffindor and Slythern these days. She wants to help defuse it," Hermione explained.

"Like this is going to work. Just because I'm walking with you doesn't mean that I like you or that my team won't dominate yours," he said.

"It's not just about the game, Draco. There's always been animosity between our houses. There's nothing wrong with trying to ease it. So, why not start with this? Patrolling together is simple. Maybe if you'd stop whining, you'd realize that this isn't that bad," she said.

"Right. Integration is always a good idea," he said coldly.

She was so taken aback by his values. "We're in different houses, but it doesn't mean that we're different kinds of species. We all go here for the same reason."

Draco glared at her. "Don't begin to lecture me about anything. I certainly don't have to listen to people like you. I swear, when my father--"

"What? You're going to tell your dad on me? Honestly? Are all pure-bloods as brave and understanding as you?" she snapped. Her ears burned, and she felt anger grow. She had been around Ron for too long.

Draco glared at her again but didn't appear to have anything clever to say. "Don't say another word to me for the rest of the time that we have to do this."

"You don't have to order me to do that, Draco," she said. They looked at each other fiercely for a second before turning away and walking again in silence. Never in her life had she been more relieved to see the library. Ron and Pansy were standing by the door. He had his hands deep in his pockets and was moving his head around, as if he was looking for her. Pansy's face was crimson, and she was frowning at the floor as if Ron had just insulted her with something fowl. He most likely had.

As soon as Ron saw her, he seemed to relax. He rushed over to her. "Are you okay?" he asked, gripping her upper arms and giving her a once over.

"Ron, I'm fine," she said, pulling away. It warmed her heart that he was worried, and she did feel safer.

"Please, Weasley, I'd never touch that filth. She's all yours," Draco said.

Ron took a step toward him, but Hermione grabbed his arm. "Let's just go."

"I only need one reason, Malfoy. If Hermione tells me that you even breathed in her direction the wrong way, I'm coming after you," Ron said, not taking his eyes off Draco.

"You don't scare me, weasel. You're too stupid to be intimidating," Draco said.

Ron tried to take another step. "Ron, really, he has nothing," Hermione said, increasing her hold on him.

"Yes, Draco, let's go. I don't want to be around them anymore," Pansy said, pulling on his hand.

"Yeah, listen to your girlfriend," Ron said, "or are you the girl in the relationship?"

Draco snatched his hand away from Pansy. "You've got nerve to ask if I'm a girl. You're the one who prances to whatever tune Granger gives you. You even prance to Potter, but you two have been eating each other's arseholes for years now, yeah?"

Ron growled and jumped at him. Hermione had to clutch the sides of his waist. "No! Don't!"

Ron didn't listen. "For someone who hates Harry so much, you sure as bloody hell talk about him a lot. Are you jealous? Does it make your little blond hairs curl to know that you don't impress him? You're the one who acts like you want to take it up the arse for him!"

Draco laughed faintly. "Weasley, you and Potter could disappear forever and I wouldn't care. It would actually bring a smile to my face every morning. Besides, what's there to be jealous of? He's got one friend who's a freckly idiot, another friend who's a snot Muggle-born, and a girlfriend who's a ginger slag. It's nothing to--"

Somehow, Hermione lost her hold, and Ron leaped at Draco. He roared and slammed him against the wall. "Ronald, stop it!" she yelled, holding on to his arm and trying to pull him away.

Pansy pushed at Ron. "Control your goon, Granger!"

"Get the fuck off me!" Draco shot, shoving Ron's chest.

Ron breathed roughly and his face was beet red. He snatched his arm away from Hermione and glowered at Draco. "You fucking listen up and you better bloody hear me this time. You can say whatever you want to about me. I don't care, but don't you dare talk about Hermione or Ginny. You leave their names out of this. I bloody swear to Merlin that if you ever call my sister a slag again, I'll rip your fucking spine out. You got it? I will find a way into your dorm room and fucking claw it right out of you!"

"Ron, please," Hermione said, shaking. She had never seen him so furious and threatening before. It was frightening—and tremendously sexy.

She noticed that Draco's eyes were somewhat larger. She couldn't tell what emotion he had. "—I'd like to see you try."

"Draco, enough! Let's go back. I'm tired," Pansy said. Hermione noticed that she was blushing and staring at Ron. She almost laughed out loud. Her boyfriend's aggression even turned on Slytherin girls.

Ron backed up. "Once again, you should listen to your girlfriend."

Draco moved off the wall and straightened his robes. "What? Like you listen to yours? Do you follow Granger's orders when she tells you to lie down and wait while she's off shagging Potter?"

Ron's hostility seemed to instantly fade and his cheeks flushed. "Fuck you."

Draco smirked. "Touched a nerve, have I?" He then turned to Hermione. "What about you, mudblood? Do you listen to Weasley here when he tells you that nothing is going on between him and Brown? Kind of hard to believe when they're feeling each other up during Slughorn's class."

Hermione finally let her eye roll out, though something panged in her chest. "Draco, I suggest you walk away with Pansy before I let go of Ron's arm."

Pansy took Draco's hand and laughed. "You've got them there, babe. He's right, too. We sit right behind them, Granger, and we can see everything. If you don't believe us, then smell Ron's fingers after class some time. They won't smell like the inside of your knickers." Draco joined her in the laughter and the two walked off.

Hermione didn't know why she couldn't move. She let go of Ron's hand and looked at him. He was staring after them and his face was completely flushed. "Have I mentioned how much I hate them?" he asked, turning to her.

"Have I told you that I agree with you?" she answered.

He let out a hard breath. "Come on before I do go after them." He held out his hand she took it with a smile, already feeling better.

"I may not even stop you if you do," she said.

They began to walk and she examined him. It was a lot more exciting than studying Draco. Ron was the complete opposite of all her earlier observations. Ron's robes were always untidy. His fingernails were slightly chewed down, and his hair was a fluffy red mess. His large eyes were warm, his walk was casual and slow, and he always wore somewhat of a humorous smirk on his lush lips. However, right now there seemed to only be trouble on his freckly face. He suddenly stopped. "You do know that what they said about Lavender and me isn't true, right?"

"Of course, Ron, you don't need to say any more about it. It's Draco and Pansy. They'll say anything to get us upset. You do

know that they were lying about Harry and me, too, right?" she asked.

"Yeah, sure," he said, almost a little too quickly for her liking.

"Ron," she started.

"Can we just talk about something else? You have no idea what it was like patrolling with that pig," he said.

"I'll take her over Draco any day," she said.

"I would have gladly traded. I would've taken him to the nearest toilet and punched his face in. Are you sure that he didn't do anything to you?" he asked.

She patted his arm. "Sorry to disappoint you, love, but I'm fine. He was mean, but he always is."

"That twat," he said. "Anyway, we were moving on to something better and less rat-raced to talk about..." He pulled his arm around her back, and she leaned against his chest. It felt so good to be against his body.

"Right. So, how was your day? We haven't gotten a lot of chances to talk the last couple of nights," she said. They had both been busy, and she hated not truly being able to talk about their latest fight. Ron was paranoid about something, and she was eager to know what he and Ginny were keeping between each other.

"It was okay. Boring as always. I got my journal entries completed. What about you?" he asked, squeezing her side.

She squeaked. "That tickles."

"Good," he said, doing it again.

She giggled and moved away. "My day was fine. Busy as usual." Ron reached for her again, but she slapped his hand away. "No, you lost your privileges."

"I'm sorry. You can tickle me back," he said.

She gave him a look. "I didn't know that you were ticklish."

"Yeah, right here," he said, reaching down his trousers.

Hermione blushed and hit his arm. "Ronald Weasley, you're rude."

"What? I mean on my groin. Near the left side," he said with a chuckle. "You want to find out for yourself?"

She needed to tell him no. It was terribly inappropriate for where they were, but his eyes were so kind and his grin was playful. She hadn't really touched him in almost four days, and her body was in desperate need of a fix. She glimpsed around the hall to make sure it was empty. "Yes," she said softly.

Ron licked his lips and backed up against the wall. She moved in front of him and kept her eyes on his as she pulled his undershirt out of his trousers. She looked around again before sneaking her hand under his trousers. He jerked and gasped weakly as she felt around his steaming groin. He pushed himself up the wall. Hermione staggered, breathed and felt her entire body heat up. She brushed her fingers across the base of his hardness. "You're not laughing."

"Reckon I was wrong about the location," he panted.

She bit her lip and fought her urges to touch him more. She pulled her hand out. "Then we should keep going."

He took her hand between his. "We should." His eyes burned into her body, and she could hear his challenge.

She wouldn't give in this time. "Let's go." She moved completely away from him and started walking again.

They walked back to the Common Room and up the staircase. They stopped in front of his room. "Are you coming in?" he asked.

She wanted to. She wanted to feel Ron's firm body against hers and shiver as his fingertips ran up her back or legs. She wanted to rest her head against his chest and kiss all over his smooth, porcelain skin. There was a certain craving that she had for him, and more than ever it pulsed as things were constantly getting in the way of them being together. "I'd love toâ€¦"

"But?" he asked with a sigh.

"It's not like that, Ron. I have a lot of work to do, and I may be up for a few hours. I have to get it done tonight," she explained, feeling another pang in her chest.

He shook his head and ran a hand through his gorgeous, silky hair. "Fine. Get it done, but get some sleep, too."

"I will. I might sleep in tomorrow since you'll be at practice," Hermione said.

"I don't have practice tomorrow," he said.

She frowned. "Did Harry cancel it?"

Ron rubbed his neck. "No. I just don't have to go."

She didn't understand. "Why?"

He shrugged and looked away. "Bloody hell, Hermione, I don't know. I've been doing good work, and I reckon he thinks that I don't need to be there tomorrow. I didn't ask why, and I'm certainly not complaining."

"Fine, sorry, that's great. It must mean that you're well above where you should be," she said. He shrugged again. "I'll make sure to get enough sleep tonight."

"Yeah, do that. We can spend the day together, and we can start early," he said in a hopeful voice.

"That would be lovely," she said.

He took her hands and brought her close. "I love you."

Hearing him say those words always washed through her body and eased her muscles. "I love you, too, Ron." He pulled her into a hug, and she held him back as tightly as she could. She loved the feeling of his long, strong arms around her, and the powerful rhythm of his heart was soothing. He smelled so good and a contented moan escaped her. "There's no place that I'd rather be than right here with you. You have to know that."

He kissed the top of her head. "I do. I just wish that you didn't have to work so bloody hard all the time. I want you all to myself. You're mine," he whispered.

She shuddered at his words, and she pulled away a bit. "That sounds like ownership."

He tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. "Maybe it is."

"That's patronizing," she said; though she felt her body fusing with his will. She slowly got on her toes so she could be close to his lips.

His hands moved to her arse. He squeezed it and helped her balance. "It's not if I mean it in the best way possible. I don't think that I own you, but I certainly do feel a claim to your body."

She whimpered softly and stuck out her tongue a little. Ron tried to capture it between his lips but she pulled away. The atmosphere around them electrified and blazed the air. "Do you now? Does that mean that I have a claim over yours?"

He kissed her chin and dragged his tongue slowly across her bottom lip. It was so warm and wet. "Of course you do. You can do whatever you want to me whenever you want to do it."

She clutched his shoulders and suctioned her lips around his tongue. He moaned and clinched their bodies together. Her skin was sweaty, and she felt his heat. She could tell how immense his hunger was. It matched hers. "T-that can't be something you tell your friends," she mumbled against his mouth.

"They can piss off. I don't care. I'm proud to say that Hermione Granger is the boss of me. You're so bloody good at it. Tell me what to do," he said in fiery puffs of passion.

"Oh, Ron," she groaned. She knew that they were loud. His mates were probably on the other side laughing and making jokes, but



she didn't care. Their desire for each other was too great to ignore sometimes. They gazed at each other intensely and everything around her dimmed. She could almost see the bolt charge between them. "Kiss me."

They pounced on each other without warning. Ron tripped back but in a brilliant maneuver moved himself and hit the wall instead of the door. He wrapped his arms firmly around her waist, and she hugged his neck. His mouth and body were incredibly warm and simply melted against her parts. It was amazing and was just as powerful as any of their snogs had ever been, if not more so. For some reason this one was more heavy and zealous. She wasn't sure it was because of their previous fight, the stress of their schedules, or even Draco's words. All she knew was that Ron's taste was wonderful, his lips were lush, and his tongue was magic. Everything was as it was supposed to be. She moaned, wanting more. She wanted so much more, so she broke away.

She opened her eyes, out of breath. She felt lightheaded and tingling all over. She focused her eyes on Ron and saw that he seemed just as high as she was. "I should go to bed."

"Yeah," he said quietly, not taking his crystal eyes off her. His chest heaved roughly, and his face was a pleasant flushed color.

He was so attractive and protective of her. She couldn't ask for a better boyfriend. She wanted to feel him again. "One more?"

"One more," he said, detaching himself from the wall.

"Dry," she added as excitement rumbled in her stomach.

He rolled his eyes. "There's always a catch with you."

"Rules, sweetheart," she said before their lips met again. They sighed together and he held her securely once more. She wanted to make it deeper and harder, but she had to get to her course work. She reluctantly pulled her lips away but put her forehead against his. They panted and Ron laced their fingers together. She knew that he didn't want her to move away. She didn't either. Every inch of space between them seemed to hurt a little.

"Bedâ€¦right?" he asked in a quivering voice.

"Yes. Work. Bed. I have to," she said, convincing them both. He nodded and they parted slowly. She pulled out of Ron's grip, and he leaned against the wall. "I love you."

"I love you, too," he answered. "Tomorrow, get here as early as you can, please. I need you."

"I will. I promise. I need you, too," she said. She walked backwards and kept her eyes on him for as long as she could. She was completely in love with the bloke.

She was still rather dazed when she got back into her room. Parvati was on her bed reading. She looked up. "Are you sick, Hermione?"

"What?" Hermione asked.

Parvati looked her over. "Your face is really red, and are you sweating?"

"Oh, no, I'm fine," Hermione rushed, dabbing her damp brow. "Just said goodnight to Ron."

"Ah, I understand," Parvati said with a laugh. "Must have been some goodbye."

"It was, actually," she said with a proud smile, sitting on her bed and rummaging through her school bag.

"Blaise and I had a nice goodbye just a while ago," Parvati said.

Hermione pulled out her thick stack of notes and flipped to where she had left off. "How are you two doing?"

"Better. Lavender was right. We're talking more and things are getting easier for us. I really missed him. Breaking up was the last thing I wanted," she explained.

"That's great. I'm glad things are better." Hermione roamed her eyes around their room and couldn't ignore her curiosity any longer. Where is Lavender? She didn't really care, but she didn't want to find her hiding under her bed either.

"She's with Dean, I think," Parvati said.

She looked up from her parchment. "What? Again?"

"Yeah, they've been talking a lot and spending loads of time together," Parvati said.

Hermione nodded. "Do you know why that is? Do they fancy each other?"

"Honestly," Parvati said with a sigh, "I don't know. I asked if she did and she said that they're just friends, but they seem to be getting closer every day."

Nervousness plumped into her stomach. For some reason that sounded awful in her brain. "That's nice..."

Parvati gave her a look. "You don't really think that, do you?"

"I don't care if they're friends. They've both been lonely so maybe this is good. It's fine," Hermione rushed, going back to her work.

"Hermione," Parvati said.

"Parvati, it's not important. What they're doing isn't my business," she said, not believing it. In fact, she thought that it was entirely her business. She knew that they were up to something that involved her and Harry, and it was driving her

mental. She needed to speak with Harry and come up with things to do to prepare for whatever Lavender and Dean were planning. She couldn't get the way Lavender had giggled with Dean out of her mind, and Dean's whisperings to Lavender made her feel incredibly uneasy.

Parvati held up her hands in defeat. "That's fine. We can talk about something else. Like what I got for you."

"Excuse me?" Hermione asked.

She grinned and got out of her bed. She reached under it and pulled out a bag. She took out a skirt and tossed it to her. Hermione held it up. It was made of cotton and was a powdered blue color. The bottom was slightly laced and had a darker blue trim. It was very pretty. "Don't worry, it'll touch your knees."

"Parvati," Hermione started in awe, "you didn't have to buy this for me."

"Oh, yes, I did. You have no real color in your wardrobe, and you hardly have any skirts or dresses," Parvati said.

"I'm not really a dress and skirt type of girl," Hermione said.

She rolled her eyes. "I know you're not, but it's healthy to have a couple of feminine pieces. You need more estrogen in your life, and I'm sure that Ron will appreciate it. It's okay to be a little girly sometimes, honestly."

Hermione looked at the skirt again. It was lovely, and it felt soft on her skin. "I guess you're right. Thanks, Parvati. This is beautiful."

"No problem. One of these days you'll realize that I do want to be friends," Parvati said.

"We are friends. You've been a big help," she said sincerely with a smile. Parvati returned her smile and nodded. She went back to reading, and Hermione started on her course work.

"Excellent," Hermione whispered.

"What?" Ron asked.

She massaged her palm into his scalp and twisted some of his silky strands between her fingers. "The protagonist in my book is finally getting off the island."

"Brilliant. Well, the protagonists in my book have the record for the longest game in Quidditch history. It took them over seven months to win," he explained.

She moved her book to her side so she could see him. Ron's head was in her lap, and one of her legs rested on his chest. He had his Quidditch magazine propped against his legs. "That's fascinating."

He looked up at her with a grin. "You don't care."

"I do care. That's very impressive," she said, going back to her book and to his hair. She had worked all night as quickly as she could, and she showed up to his door early the next morning as he told her to. Surprisingly, he was awake and beaming when he answered. Now, she and Ron were simply lounging in his bed reading. There was no other way that she wanted to spend the beautiful Saturday. It was heaven at its best.

"Okay, that's enough," Ron said, breaking the tranquility. He moved away and sat in front of her.

She frowned a little. "What do you mean?"

"That's enough reading. Let's go outside," he said.

"What? I'm really enjoying this," she said in disappointment. "I thought we were going to relax today."

"We are but not like this. Let's go," he said again, trying to pull her book out of her hand.

She held on to it firmly and eyed the sentences that she very much wanted to read. "But-butâ€¦he's going back to Englandâ€¦"

Ron rolled his eyes. "What are you reading?"

"Robinson Crusoe," she said.

He stared vacantly at her. "Never heard of him."

"Of course you haven't. It's a Muggle novel, and a very important piece of English literature. My parents sent me some books to give me a break from all the magical readings that I do. I've been waiting on this one."

"That's unfortunate. You'll just have to wait a little longer, and Robert Crouton will just have to manage being back home on his own," he said, getting off the bed.

She sighed. Sometimes she wondered if Ron purposely said things to drive her mental. "His name is Robinson Crusoe, and I'm almost done. Just let me finish up and maybe get a few pages into Heart of Darkness, and then we can go outside."

His gaped at her. "Wah? Is that another book? Another important piece of English literature?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact. Joseph Conrad--"

"Don't care and don't want to start caring. If we don't leave right now, then I will have a heart of darkness and will have to live on an island, come on!" He pulled the book out of her hand, but she was able to snatch it back.

"Ron, stop acting like this. I'm almost finished, I promise. It will agitate me all day if I can't finish," she explained. She

couldn't understand why he wouldn't let her read. It wasn't as if they had anywhere to be.

He dropped to his knees. "Please?"

Hermione tried her best to ignore the spike of pleasure. "Don't do that."

"Is it not good enough?" he asked. He put his hands to the floor and slowly crawled closer to the bed, never taking his eyes off her. She held on to the sides of her skirt for support. He had to know what he was doing to her. She was still on fire from last night, and the blaze only grew. "How about now?"

She admired his lanky figure and the way he was positioned on the floor. She didn't know why it was so sexy or why it made her so hot. The only thing she did know was that the man was born to get on his knees and crawl. "N-no, get up."

He must have sensed her state because he didn't move, only smirked. "Why? Do you like this?"

"No, it's immature. You can stand up or sit next to me like a grownup. There's no need to act this way," she said as best as she could. Though his blue eyes burned right through her again, and his sturdy shoulders beckoned her to touch them.

He chuckled. "I think you like it. You don't want to say that you do, but you do. In fact, I reckon you love this. Do I belong here, down in front of you like this?"

She let out a shaky breath, and her body reacted without permission. She moved her legs off the bed and spread them in front of him. "Possibly," she whispered. He put his chin on her knee, and she ran her fingers through his hair again. He closed his eyes and laid his head on her thigh, practically inviting her to take control of him. "If you think that seducing me will make me forget about my books, then you're sadly mistaken." She tried her hardest to seem serious, but she was lying through her teeth. Little did he know that her willpower was almost gone. He was too sexy to turn down, and she wanted nothing more than to tackle him on the floor.

He kissed her bare knee. "I'm the seducer? What about you? You're the one wearing a skirt, like a normal skirt."

Parvati was right. Ron's eyes had bulged when he saw her in her new skirt. However, Hermione tapped his nose. "Leave me alone. Parvati bought this for me. Can you believe it? She says it's to bring more estrogen into my life."

"She's smart. She's really smart for that," Ron said as he kissed higher on her leg. Hermione wanted to tell him to stop, but only because anyone could walk in, but as his tongue grazed her skin, she forgot how to use verbal language. "Mmm, you're so damn soft," he breathed, gently sucking on her inner thigh.

She whimpered and pulled on his hair a little, as she opened her legs wider. She had missed his mouth. He nibbled higher and higher, until he had to pull up her skirt to touch new skin. Her legs shook and pressure began to travel to her lower stomach. She watched him. He was gentle yet powerful with his lips. "Oh, Ron," she sighed.

He stopped and moved his eyes to her. He lagged his tongue up her thigh, making her twitch. "Do you want me to?"

She did. She wanted him to slide her knickers down and take her against his mouth, but she wanted more than that. What she truly desired for scared her. Ron was the only guy she wanted or had ever really wanted, but now that she had him, she was more afraid of being completely intimate with him than ever before. The worst part was, she didn't know why. "We can't. We don't know when someone will come back," she said, feeling disappointment again.

He kept his eyes on her. "You mean that?" All she could do was nod. He kissed each thigh and stood. "Okay. It's all the more reason why we should go outside. Who knows when they'll be back, yeah?"

She searched his eyes, looking for anger or resentment, but she honestly couldn't see it. It made her feel better. "Is there something going on that I don't know about? Why do you want to leave so badly? Is something wrong?"

He rubbed his neck and groaned. "Bloody hell, Hermione, why can't you just do what I ask for once? Actually, it doesn't matter. I say we're going, so we're going."

"Excuse me?" she said sharply. "I don't know what your issue is, but you do not-AHH!" Before she could get another word out, Ron took her by the waist and lifted her over his shoulder. She yelped, as she was suddenly upside down and looking at the floor.

"Sorry, what was that?" he asked, holding an arm securely around her stomach so she wouldn't fall.

Hermione hit his back with her fists and felt a rush of excitement, terror, and danger. "Ronald Billius Weasley, put me down right now!"

"I told you that we were going outside. If you won't leave on your own, then I reckon I'll have to carry you," he said, walking toward the door.

She yelped again and kicked her legs. "Put me down! You're going to drop me!"

"No, I'm not. Didn't I promise you ages ago that I'd never let anything hurt you?" he asked. He suddenly got quiet.

"What? What's wrong? Do you have a cramp? Please, put me down if you're getting a cramp!" she demanded.

"It's not that," he said. "I just developed a new appreciation for your body. We should be in this position more often," he cheeked, smacking her arse.

She grumbled and blushed horribly. "Urgh! You're going to suffer greatly for that one! I mean it! I'll get you!"

"Blimey, did we come at a bad time?"

Hermione recognized the voice. "Oh, Harry, yes, please, help me! You have to-Ron turn me around!"

"Sorry," he said, turning her.

Her blush spread to her neck and chest as she was repositioned. Not only was Harry standing with a smirk, but Neville was as well. She knew that they weren't going to help. "Harry, tell Ron to put me down. This goes against school safety regulations. I'm sure of it!"

"If it does then Seamus has a lot to answer for," Neville said, chuckling.

"Yeah, I dunno, Hermione. This looks like some sort of weird foreplay that I really don't want to see or be apart of," Harry said. Ron joined in on the laughter and Hermione hung her head in defeat.

"Wait, shouldn't you be at practice?" she asked him.

He shrugged. "I just have to grab my gear. I forgot it."

"Like a tit," Ron said.

"Shut up before I change my mind and make you come today," Harry said, walking over to his trunk.

"Well, we'll leave you lot to it. Mione and I are going for a walk. Neville, can you grab her shoes for me?" Ron asked.

Hermione hit his back again. "No, he certainly cannot. Neville is going to help me down because he's not like the rest of you. He's-he's decent!"

Neville grinned. "Cheers." He then picked up her shoes and handed them to Ron. "There you go, mate."

"Urgh! You boys are so infuriating. I'll remember this! I mean it!" She growled as Ron readjusted her on his shoulder and led her out of the room. She didn't stop kicking and protesting. As soon as they were out of the room, he bent down and let her go. She punched him hard in the arm.

"Ow!" he said.

"You arse! I can't believe you did that and with Harry and Neville watching! What were you thinking? I should just leave you here! I should justâ€¦I should justâ€¦" She stopped talking as

Ron's expression captivated her. He was grinning at her so happily, and his eyes seemed to be fixated on her. It was commanding and lowered her temper. "What?"

He took her hand and held it firmly between his larger ones. "I'm glad that we get to spend time together today. I've missed you. That's all."

Whatever she felt before faded away. She melted against his hand, and the look of his face was too much to overcome. She smiled and squeezed his hand. "Where are we going?"

"Outside for a while. I want to walk with you," he said, handing her shoes over.

She nodded and slipped them on. "Okay." They began to walk down the staircase and Hermione punched his arm again.

"Ow! Bloody hell, I'm sorry," he whined, rubbing his arm.

"You better be, Ronald Weasley. That was completely childish and dangerous and-"

"You loved it?" he finished.

She tried her best to glare again, but it was useless. "Love it too strong of a word."

"How about thoroughly enjoyed?" he asked.

"Fine," she said. He chuckled and reached for her hand, but she pulled away. "You're in trouble, mister."

"Wah? For how long?" he asked.

She gave him a once over and could feel her body pulling toward his black Canons shirt and loose jeans. "Until we get outside. You have to be punished when you're bad."

He blushed. "I agree. Fine. I can live with that."

"Good," she said with a smirk. They shared a look that went deeper than humor and love before looking ahead and walking out of the castle.

Hermione had to admit that walking outside was even more heavenly than reading in his room. Ron snuck his hand into hers, and she allowed him to hold it. They wandered slowly around the property of the school and often glanced at each other, blushing and giggling. Things were still new and thrilling between them, and Ron was still able to make her nervous.

"It's beautiful out there," she after some time, loving the sun on her skin.

"You're beautiful out there," he answered quietly, grinning at her again.



She felt warmth on her cheeks. "Thank you. You're beautiful, too."

He crinkled his nose. "Beautiful? Not handsome or striking or dashing?"

She shifted a little closer to him and looked up into his face. "Well, you are all those things, but beautiful is the best word to describe you. Everything about you is. You're practically glowing out here, sweetheart."

He rubbed his neck and looked away. "I don't know about all that."

"I do." She stopped them and took both of his hands. "Ron, you make my heart skip beats sometimes. Your presence commands me that much." She was a little wavery as she spoke without boarders.

Ron's face went pink. She could feel his hands jittering in hers. "Well, um, I-I'm not good with words, but I have to remind myself to breathe all the time because when I look at you, nothing else has my attention."

She looked down shyly and gazed back up at him. He was eying her closely and everything disappeared once more. He was right in thinking that he had a claim over her. He did and always had. "I missed this, Ron, and I'm sorry about our fight."

"I'm sorry, too," he said, bending down. His lips connected to hers, and she kissed him back. They kept their hands held tightly together as they snogged. She loved how they parted and repositioned their heads in a perfect rhythm. Her lips were designed to touch his. He pulled away and sucked on his bottom lip. "See? There's that breathing problem again."

She chuckled and gave him another peck before pulling him along. "Let's keep walking, then. How's Ginny?"

He shrugged. "She's okay. Right now she's probably wanting to take her kit out for Harry because he's most likely torturing everyone with his flying drills."

She gently slapped his stomach. "Be nice."

"I'm not taking the piss. Ginny loves that Harry works us to a bloody nub. She's mental," he said.

"Or maybe she realizes that it's important for conditioning," she helped.

"Whatever," he breathed.

"So, she's really okay? She's happy with Harry?" she pressed. No matter how great things were for her, she had to take care of Harry.

Ron gave her a look. "Of course she's happy with Harry, but why are you asking me?"

"Well, it's just that--"

"Hermione, are we really going to go back to that discussion?" he asked, cutting in. "Ginny and I talked. It doesn't mean that she told that she hates Harry or anything. She's my sister. We've been talking to each other for as long as we've known how to."

"I know all that, but it felt like there was more going on. We heard you two. We just want to make sure that things are okay," she tried to explain.

He frowned. "I didn't know our conversation was for public record."

"Ron, please, I don't want to fight. I just want to make sure that we're all okay," she said.

He sighed. "Yes, we are all okay. If you really want to know, then it's Ginny and me who haven't been that great. We were talking things out."

"That's good, Ron. I'm not looking to get into your private matters with her. I just care, that's all." She wanted to believe him whole-heartedly, but she didn't. Something in her mind kept her from finding complete reassurance with his words, but she decided to let it go.

He eased a little and smiled. "I know you do. I love that about you. Ginny and I are working things out. It's important that we do. I'm responsible for her, and even though she's too damn cheeky, I love her."

"I know you do, Ron, and I know she feels the same way about you. Know that I'm here if either of you need me," she said.

He put his arm around her. "I always need you."

"And I'll always be here," she said, starting to walk away again. However, Ron didn't move. "What?"

He took her wrist and looked at her watch. "Let's go back inside."

"Already?" she asked.

"Yeah, I told you that I just wanted to walk for a little while," he said, pulling her back toward the castle.

"Oh, okay, can we get lunch? We haven't eaten anything all day," she said. He didn't answer her, only kept ahead. "Ron? Did you hear me?"

"Yes, I heard you," he said, still walking swiftly. Hermione let out a heavy sigh and let him practically drag her back in.

She was surprised when they didn't turn the corner for the Great Hall. "Ron, I thought we were eating."

"We are. I just need to get something from my room," he said.

"To eat?" she asked, pulling her arm away.

Ron rubbed his neck and groaned. "Hermione, please, just-just come with me. It'll be really fast and then we can eat. I promise. Please."

She didn't know why his voice sounded so desperate or why there was a bit of panic in his eyes, so she nodded. "Fine. Let's go."

"Fucking hell, thank you for listening to me," he said, taking her hand again and leading her to the Common Room. They got to his door and he stopped. He took a deep breath and jiggled the handle. There was no answer. "Good," he whispered.

"Ron, what is going on?" she asked, not liking all the secrecy.

He gave her a huge smile and wrapped his hand around the doorknob. "You'll see." He opened it and they walked in. She didn't know what she expected to see, but it certainly was not a huge blanket laid out on the floor in front of his bed. There was a large wooden picnic basket sitting in the center of it, along with various other items.

"Ron--"

He put a finger to her lips. "Don't say anything until I'm finished," he said gently. He took her hand and brought her over to the blanket. "Sit down." She sat without question. She had no idea what was happening. Ron sat across from her and took another deep breath. "Okay, so, it's good that you're hungry because I have food, but it's a little better than what's in the Great Hall." He opened the lids on the different containers, and she instantly recognized the smells. "Stuffed mushrooms, fried cheese, and chocolate banana mousse."

She was in shock. "How--"

"I said no talking, Hermione," he interrupted with a smile. She chuckled and put a hand over her mouth. "Anyway, I know what you're going to say. This is your favorite meal, right? When you took that holiday to Paris when you were thirteen, this was the last meal you had there with your parents. You haven't had it since but it's still your favorite. I know the story."

She nodded slowly. "Yes," she began but when she saw him place a finger to his mouth, she closed hers. Her stomach growled, and her mouth watered in delight. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. She didn't know how he had obtained the delicious meal.

"So, I've got your favorite drink as well, butterbeer." He touched the bottles near the food. Hermione dug her fingers into her sides and bit her lip hard to keep from talking. Ron couldn't be real. "Now," he said, pointing to the white folded napkins

that were on the sides of their plates, "before you get all excited, I still can't master the bloody spell but I practiced a bit, and I can do these little tits by hand now."

She wanted to tell him that he had done an excellent job with them by hand, but she kept her mouth closed. Ron picked up the vase that held a couple of yellow tulips and handed it to her. "Ron," she breathed. She couldn't help herself. As their hands connected, she realized how badly he was shaking.

He swallowed hard. "I picked tulips because it's your favorite flower and yellow because it's your favorite color." She put them up to her nose and smelled the sweet, earthly aroma of them. She moaned at the beauty. "Background music will be good." He opened her music box that was sitting near her. The soft, mellow music filled the space and added to her emotional state.

He smirked and looked over everything. "That about covers it. Well, expect for our special guest." He reached into the basket and pulled out a small bear. He handed it to her. "Meet the Weasley Bear." She laughed and at the small brown bear. He had on a maroon jumper that had an R on it. She hugged it and it actually smelled like him. "That's one of my old jumpers." Hermione looked up from the bear and at him. He was extremely pale and his eyes were wide. He picked at his nails and chewed on his lip. "Okay—now you can speak."

She wanted to say that she was gob smacked. She wanted to ask how he had done it all. She wanted to tell him that it was the most romantic and heartfelt thing that anyone had ever done for her. She needed to tell him that she was deeply in love in with him, and if he also had a wedding ring hiding in the basket then he didn't need to ask. Her answer was yes. However, none of it came out. "Ron, I can't believe this," she sobbed as tears poured out of her eyes.

Ron scooted over to her and touched her shoulder. "Did I get the flower wrong? No, it's the bear. It's stupid, isn't it? I knew it."

She wiped her eyes and shook her head. "What? No, tulips are my favorite, and I love the bear."

He raised an eyebrow. "Then what did I do wrong?"

"You didn't. You didn't do anything wrong," she said, wiping more tears away.

"But—you're crying—" he said slowly.

She sniffed and cleared her throat. "Yes, but not because I'm upset. I'm touched. This is beautiful and amazing. I'm just really happy. These are happy tears, Ron. Don't worry."

He let out a sigh of relief. "Oh, good, happy tears—makes sense."

She held her bear tightly and gave her flowers another smell. Her body surged with affection and awe. "How did you do all this? None of it was here earlier."

He sat back on his side and grinned. "Yeah, that's why I really needed you outside. Harry and Neville set all this up. Bloody hell, I didn't think that we'd pull it off at first. You never listen to me."

She swatted his arm as things came together for her. "And that's why you don't have practice today."

"Exactly. Harry gave me the day off for this," he said.

She shook her head and suddenly wanted to find Harry and hit him. He hadn't given her any hint at all. "How long have you been planning this?"

He let out a low whistle. "Weeks. It took a while to think of what to do. I had Harry and Ginny help me and especially Ginny. She's a girl so she knows a lot more about romantic and sensitive things than me. Once I had my plan, I had to get everything together and find a time when we both weren't busy."

"How did you get the food?" Hermione asked, eyeballing the fried cheese.

"Fleur. I wrote her and asked if she would make it for me. She did and sent it over. I had Fred and George go by Hogsmeade a couple of days ago and get the butterbeer for me. I put everything together in the basket and had it hiding in Ginny's room. I didn't want to take any chances with you," he explained with a smirk.

Ron amazed her with his determination. When he actually cared about something, he was quick and brilliant with plans and execution. "Did you also get Ginny to steal my music box?" she asked.

He looked away. "Um, actually, Lavender did. I asked her to get it for me."

Hearing her name and thinking about her having a part in their special day made Hermione feel a little uneasy, so she nodded and moved on. "I love the bear. He's my little Ron Weasley bear."

"Yeah, he's pretty stylish like me, too. How many bears have a hand knitted jumper like this?" he cheeked.

She chuckled and looked around at everything. "I can't believe you did all this. You remembered all my stories and put so much detail into it all."

"It's like I said, I always listen to you even if it doesn't seem like I do. You don't notice, but you always have my full attention," he said.

She felt her love for him travel throughout her body. "Why did you do all this for me?" She honestly wanted to know. She had put him through so much, and she was still worried that he resented her actions.

He shrugged. "Why wouldn't I? You've worked really hard this year fixing everyone and everything, and you always have. Not to mention, you're spending so much time making everything perfect for the seventh years without one complaint. It's time that someone worked hard for you and catered to you. You deserve it."

"But this is so much more than that," she said weakly. "You had to have gone through a lot of trouble."

"It's no trouble." He rubbed his palms against his thighs. "We've gone through a lot over the past five years and even more this year alone. I can't begin to tell you what you mean to me. I justâ€¦I love you so much. I love you more than anything else in my life, Hermione, and I would do anything for you. There's nothing I want more than to make you happy."

More tears watered her eyes, but she didn't bother wiping them away. She wanted to cry for Ron. Her tears were made of her love, devotion, and want for him. She fell deeper in love with him with every breath, and everything about herself opened up and made room for him. "Come here."

He moved over to her and put his forehead to hers. "Am I a good boy today?"

She touched his cheek with a trembling hand. "Yes, you're a very good boy today. You are the perfect and most beautiful boy in the entire world, and you're mine."

"That sounds like ownership," he teased.

"It is ownership. You're mine, Ron, and I'm yours. I'm yours," she sobbed.

"Oh, Mione," he whispered. She pressed her lips against his and felt every bit of him fill up the spaces that she made for him. They moaned together and Hermione felt the missing piece of her soul finally make its way home.

She pulled away and looked at his handsome face. "I love you. Thank you so much for all of this."

"You're welcome, but you don't have to thank me. I wanted this for you and for us." He moved away. "You hungry?"

It was a loaded question. Sure, she wanted to eat the food, but her yearning was deeper than that. She was hungry for Ron in a way she'd never been before. "Yes." She took her bottle of butterbeer. "For a lovely day."

He clinked his against hers. "For a lovely woman," he said with a wink. They took a drink and the two eyed each other and giggled again before eating.

They talked lightly as they ate. Everything tasted so good, and Ron made her laugh hysterically. With all the work they had to do daily, it seemed rare that they could carry on a real conversation and simply gaze at one another. It was wonderful. "How long is practice today? I'm sure Harry will be here soon," Hermione said, taking another delicious piece of mousse into her mouth.

Ron swiped away a glob of chocolate from the corner of his mouth and collected their plates. "He won't be coming back for awhile and neither will anyone else. I used a pass today."

"Really?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yeah, it's just you and me."

The idea thrilled her and made her a little nervous. "In that case, come back over." She kicked her shoes off, and Ron crawled to her and did the same. They leaned against his trunk, and Hermione smeared chocolate icing on her finger. She put it to his lips and he slowly sucked it off, watching her all the while.

He closed his eyes and moaned. "Mmm, it tastes even better this way."

"Is that a fact?" she asked, feeling pressure in her stomach.

He opened his eyes. "You want to try?" She nodded. He pulled her legs around his waist, and she sat in his lap. He slicked some on his finger and put it to her mouth. She licked it off his pointer finger before sliding her lips all the way down his skin. She could feel his entire body shuddering and his breathing was sharp.

She slowly pulled away. "You're right. It does taste better this way."

"Yeah—it does!" he said.

She gazed at him and every part of her body wanted him. He stared right back at her. The burning question was on her tongue, but she couldn't ask it. She was terrified of it. Instead, she put her cheek against his chest, and he wrapped his arms around her waist. He leaned back against the trunk and held on to her. She buried her face in his shirt and took in the faint hint of apples. She never wanted another smell under her nose. She held him back and closed her eyes. Nothing else existed. She kissed his chest. "You know what, Ron?"

"Yes, love?" he asked deeply against her ear.

She shivered. "You make everything in my life better. When I wake up in the morning, I always have worries and chores that I have to perform, and I feel really overwhelmed at times. Then, I see you. You hug me, kiss me, and tell me that you love me. It calms me, and I can truly start the day after that. You make me able to deal with all the stress so much easier. I don't know how I

survived for so long without getting my morning start with you. I don't ever want to have to again. I always want this."

He held on to her tighter. "I know how you feel. All the pain and frustration that I feel during practice doesn't bother me as much anymore, and when Snape is being an arsehole or Slughorn forgets my name, it doesn't matter so much. I think it's because I know that when everything is over, I can see you and we can do exactly what we're doing now. I never realized how unhappy I used to be. I know I had to be unhappy because now I truly feel good."

She looked up at him. "I honestly make you happy?"

He put his hands on her cheeks and gave her a fierce look. "Yes, more than anyone else. What about me? Do I make you happy? Do youâ€¦do you really want me?"

She licked her lips and felt the pressure burn all through her. "More than anything else in the whole world. I want you so badly, Ron." Her voice was heavy and drowned in passion. She couldn't help it.

He licked his lips as well and looked down at hers. "I want you, too." Their breathing seemed to stop as they slowly inched forward and pressed their lips against each other's. Ron slid his arms around her waist, and she felt as if they were the perfect size for her body. She slipped her arms around his neck and kissed him deeper, parting his lips with her tongue and exploring his mouth. Their tongues danced.

"Mmm..." Ron's hands traveled up her back, and he gradually began to get on his knees. Hermione got out of his lap as best as she could without breaking the snog. They moved back and they both pushed things out of the way without caution. Hermione broke part from him for only a second so she could make room for herself on the blanket. She lay back, and their mouths met again. Ron straddled her and she kissed him lovingly. He squeezed her sides and she broke out of the kiss.

"Ron," she giggled, "that tickles!"

"Sorry," he said. "I like hearing you like that." Hermione smiled and pushed up into him. Ron leaned down and kissed her again. She parted her lips and whimpered as she felt his tongue move in her mouth. She took it between her lips and sucked. Ron moaned and pushed into her. With her skirt on, she could easily feel his hardness against her.

He pulled away and kissed her cheek and down to her neck. He sucked gently and continued to push against her. She opened her legs and ran her fingers through his hair. She moaned as he bit her neck. She wanted him, and she wanted to feel him. Ron's hands were on her legs. He rubbed up and down her thighs and continued to suck on her neck. It felt amazing and too powerful to tell him to stop. "You always taste so bloody good," he mumbled against her skin.



"So do you. You drive me mad, Ron," she panted, pulling him up by the hair and kissing him deeply.

She moved her hands down to his arse, squeezing it gently and pressing him against her. She didn't know where the sudden bravery was coming from, but it felt good and she didn't want it to end. Ron groaned and pulled away from her mouth. He kissed her neck again. She let out a heavy sigh as his tongue licked her collarbone. She slid her hands up his shirt and rubbed his chest and stomach. His skin was soft and piping. Her hands seemed to melt against his skin. She wanted to feel his skin everywhere, and she wanted him to feel hers. She was scared, but she wanted it too much to keep holding back.

"Ron, I'm ready," she said abruptly.

"Ready for what?" he asked against her skin.

She rolled her eyes and tugged on his hair to interrupt his neck sucking. He looked at her in a daze. "Ron, I'm ready," she said again, hoping that he understood her.

He frowned and he seemed lost for a minute. However, he stopped all his movements and stared at her. His big blue eyes gazed at her in disbelief, and his mouth opened slightly. "You are?" His voice was incredibly faint.

She nodded and felt every heartbeat sting. She needed to be confident. "Yes, I am. Are-are you?"

He blushed. "Of course I am. I mean I am if you are. I-"

She put a finger to his lips. She didn't want him to talk or she would lose all nerve. "Okay. Soâ€¦okay." She didn't know what to say or what to do. She did want to have sex with him, but she didn't know why she was so afraid and apprehensive. "Do you have any potion?"

He got off her and cleared his throat. "Yeah, in my trunk."

"Then get it," she said with a tiny smile. Ron chuckled unsteadily and turned around. While he searched, Hermione rubbed her eyes and ran a hand through her hair. She moved things further off the blanket. She didn't think the floor would be comfortable, but her throat was too dry for her to ask him if they could move to the bed or if he could at least get a pillow for her.

Ron pulled out a tube of the clear liquid that they had made together. She hadn't been troubled then but looking at it now made her head hurt. She watched it wobble in his hand. "Got it," he said, almost out of breath. They were quiet again. The awkwardness grew by the second.

She looked at her hands. "Maybe you should drink it now."

"Oh, right, yeah," he said. He popped the top and quickly chugged it down. He gagged and stuck out his tongue. "Fucking hell, I'll never get used to this."

She could only nod. He dropped the tube, and they didn't take their eyes off each other. The potion was in his system. Now, they could have sex. Now, he could cum inside her all he wanted to, and she wouldn't get pregnant. The thought was overwhelming. It seemed so good, and she wanted it so badly. Lusted engulfed her and for a moment overpowered her fear. Ron must have felt it, too. His shoulders slumped, and he moved over to her. She sat up and they continued to look at each other. She loved him so much. She touched the side of his mouth, and it felt like an electric shock. The sensation brought something out of them, and they sprung on each other.

They snogged each other roughly, and it was amazing. All the bad feelings from moments ago were gone. All she could feel was Ron. The thought of her having Ron made her heart race and skin dampen. She pushed her tongue against his lips. He parted them and let her in. They snogged intensely and frantically like they had the first time they kissed. Ron's hand went to her arms, which he gripped. She stuck her tongue as deeply as she could into his mouth, groaning all the while. Her hand went to his thigh. She eased her hand up until it hit his crotch. She felt his hardness and squeezed it. Ron groaned and bit her lip. Hermione moaned, feeling every bit of blood in her body push against her aching middle.

Ron leaned forward and put his hand on her leg. She gasped and lost balance. She started to fall back against the blanket, but he grabbed her and eased her down. They kissed again, faster and harder, as they knew what they were about to do. A mix of nerves of uncertainty kept them both from going forward.

Ron finally pulled out of the kiss, as if reading her mind. Hermione looked at he and saw how flushed and out of breath he was. His dazzling eyes were large, and his lips were red and slicked with saliva. He was sexy. His fiery red hair, adorable freckles, and fair skin all worked together in perfect harmony. She could feel the heat and lust radiating off him. It was a heat and lust that had been there for year, lying dormant. Every time Lavender had offered it, he denied her. Hermione knew that Ron wanted her and had only wanted her. It made Hermione that much more intoxicated and frozen. She didn't want to disappoint him. She wanted what only he could give her. It was scary, but she needed it more than anything else at the moment.

Before Hermione could stop herself, she began to reach under her skirt and pull her knickers down. Ron slowly tugged on his zipper and unsnapped his jeans. She couldn't breathe, and every breath she did manage to produce came out as a shallow pant. He reached out and pulled on her knickers that were at her knees. She lifted her hips and let him take them off. She blushed. They were completely creamed. Ron pulled on his jeans, and her eyes focused on that. She watched his pale, quaking hands pull down his jeans and boxers, but she didn't keep her eyes there. If she did, then she would lose it. Instead, she moved her eyes to his face. He

stayed stationary in front of her. Hermione had to do something. The silence was horrible, so she nodded. She didn't know why she nodded or why she even needed to, but it was enough for Ron. He came down and kept his hands on either side of her. His breathing was quivering and he shook terribly.

Hermione knew what was about to happen. They were going to have sex, and she was terrified. She was more scared than she had ever been in her life. Every part of her body was on high alert, and she was sure that she was going to have a heart attack. All she felt was terror and Ron's hardness against her. Feeling it, she somehow found strength. She reached up and softly kissed him. There was no way that she could nod again or tell him to continue. He kissed her back, and she could feel his hand grip himself. She moved her tremulous thighs apart more and shut her eyes.

However, as soon as she felt him come into contact with her middle, she panicked. She broke out of the kiss. "Wait! Stop!" She pushed him away and sat up. She held her legs against her chest. Her heart was in her throat, and she felt stinging in her eyes. She didn't know what was wrong with her, but she couldn't look at him, and the sheer fright overtook her. They were quiet for a moment.

"Hermione, I'm-I'm sorry," Ron said after some time.

She hated how distressed his voice was. "Don't be."

"No. That was completely wrong of me. I didn't mean to push you. Fucking hell, I'm so sorry," he said.

She finally looked up at him. His eyes were humongous and his expression was terrible. She felt so guilty. "Ron, please, don't be sorry."

He pulled up his jeans and shook his head. "Hermione, I want you to know that I didn't do all this to get you to have sex with me. It's not what I was after. Please, know that. I didn't plan for this."

"I know! I'm sorry, please, stop apologizing," she demanded. She knew that he was sincere and seeing the disappointed on his face made her feel worse. She didn't understand why she was such a coward. She wanted him, but she didn't know what to do. She was lost.

"I need to apologize. I scared you, and I pushed this on you like a fucking horrible twat," he said, pulling at his hair a little before slapping his thigh.

"No, you didn't!" she said. "I was there, too. I pushed for it as well."

He rubbed his eyes and exhaled. "But why, if you're not ready? Is it to satisfy me? You don't have to worry. This isn't important right now."

She swallowed and could still taste Ron in her mouth and his hands all over her. "Well, it's important to me, and I think it is important to you. I'm justâ€¦scared. I'm a virgin, Ron. I don't know what to do and even if I did, I wouldn't know how to. I'm sorry. I don't know what I'm doing."

He gave her a look. "What? Hermione, maybe you forgot, but I'm a virgin, too."

"But it's different," she said softly. "You're so much better at all this than me. I don't know how to be good like you do."

He moved closer to her. "Love, I'm just as scared and confused as you are. Look at my hands." He held them in front of his face. "I haven't stopped shaking since we started. I always just want you to be comfortable so I put all my fears aside, but don't think that I'm so great. I'm not. I want you to feel safe with me, and I fucked it up. I don't know what I'm doing either."

She put a hand on his knee. She had to push through her fear and take what was hers. She had to let go. "Ron, I want to do this. I want us to have sex, and I've wanted to for a long time. Today is perfect, but everything happened so fast and-and I don't want it this way."

He put his hand on top of hers and held it. "I don't either. I'm really sorry."

"I'm sorry, too, and I want you. It's not about me being afraid of you. I'm afraid of sex in general." She hoped that she didn't sound like a mental. She honestly had no other words to convey how she wanted him intensely but didn't want to take another step at the same time.

"Then we can wait," he said.

"Ron, I'll always be afraid. It's something that I'll have to get over as it happens. I want it to happen. Do you, honestly?" she asked.

He smiled. "Yeah, I do."

"Good. So, where do we go from here?" she asked sincerely. She had no answers, so she hoped that Ron did.

"Well, if you honestly want to try again--"

"I do," she said quickly.

He blushed. "Then I'll do it the right way this time, I promise." He stood up and held out his hand to help her up. He led her to the bed. "I think this is the first right thing to do."

She squeezed his hand. "I agree."

He pulled his blanket and sheets back, and she slowly got in. He sat in front of her. "I want you to trust me."

"I do," she said softly.

He kissed her hand before pulling his shirt off. Already she felt a little better by seeing the creamy softness. She started to pull her shirt off, but he put a hand on hers. "I got it," he said with a smile.

She returned it. "Okay." She lifted her arms and Ron eased it off. She watched his eye roam her chest in a loving way that helped relax her even more. He leaned forward and tenderly kissed her collarbone. Hermione let out a sigh and gripped his shoulders as his warm tongue grazed her skin. She rested her cheek against the top of his head and took in the sweet scent of his hair. His tongue reached the curve of her breast, and she automatically reached behind her.

He touched her hand again. "Let me do it."

She felt heat on her chest. "Alright." He moved closer to her and reached his arms around her back. She shivered where his fingers touched her skin, and it gave her goose bumps. She felt him tugging on the clasp. She looked at him and saw a slight expression of annoyance. "Do you want me to do it?"

He rolled his eyes. "No, I can get it. The bloody notches are so bloody small. This is mad."

"It'll only take a second if I help," she said, hoping that he wasn't ripping her bra.

"Hermione, I said that I got it, so let me get it," he said shortly. He closed one eye and bit his lip hard. Finally, she felt the tightness of her bra loosen. "Ah! There. See, only a second."

"Good work," she teased. He slowly pulled down her straps, and she let him take off it off. She wanted to cover herself. Her breasts had never been completely exposed to him before.

Ron's eyes only grew. "You're so beautiful, Hermione," he said quietly, though for some reason she didn't think that he was talking to her. "Lay back."

She did and let out a shaky breath as her back hit the pillow. He straddled her and gave her a deep kiss before breaking off to her jaw. He left short, hot kisses that traveled from her face, to her neck, down to her chest. He kissed the space between her breasts while his thumbs rubbed her nipples. She whimpered and immediately jerked. She watched him drag his fiery tongue to her breast and lick the tip. "Ron," she moaned. He grinned and flicked his tongue over her repeatedly. Hermione cried out and shut her eyes. She couldn't believe how good it felt. Every shot of pleasure raced to her middle. He moved across and did the same to the other. She gasped and placed her hands on Ron's shoulder blades.

"Oh, Ron," Hermione panted. She dug her nails into his skin.

He finally pulled away. He looked just as flushed as she felt. "Did you like that?"

"Of course I did," she said, pushing up into him and feeling more at ease.

He smirked. "Good. I've got some more if you're interested."

"Don't hold back," she said in excitement.

He kissed each breast again before moving further down. His mouth kept kissing and nibbling until he reached her skirt. He flicked his eyes to hers. "Do you want me to?" he asked in a teasing way.

She knew what she wanted this time. "Yes, please," she said, lifting her hips. She was shaky and slightly anxious as he pulled her skirt down, but she tried to tell herself to stop worrying. She was with Ron, and she knew that he would take care of her. As soon as her skirt was off her ankles and he dropped it to the floor, she blushed furiously and her heart beat roughly. Ron was looking at everything she had to offer. She was completely naked in front of him. He seemed to survey her, and she couldn't stand the silence. "Ron?"

He finally looked at her. "You are so damn gorgeous, Hermione. I can't believe all of this is for me."

"It always will be. Only for you, Ron," she said, loving how his words were calming her and turning her on even more. She rubbed her foot against his thigh, letting him know that it was okay. He gave her one more smile before positioning himself lower. He licked his lips and spread her legs apart. Hermione's body shook as she felt his warm breath against her. She dug her fingers into the sheets and tried to prepare herself.

Ron licked her in one long, slow moment. He dragged his tongue up her folds, and she let out a strangled cry. His fingers were incredible, but even after one touch of his tongue; she knew that she liked this better. The shock of pleasure was so much more extreme. He kissed her folds and sucked on them. Hermione tried to breathe properly, but it felt too good to concentrate. "You taste so good everywhere, Hermione. Fucking hell, I can't believe how sweet you are," he whispered with a moan before kissing her folds again.

She didn't know what to say. Ron was so sensual, and it was incredible. "R-Ron," was all she was able to choke out. He squeezed her inner thighs and moved his tongue to her nerve. Hermione arched her back and screamed. She dug into the sheets tighter. Her heart began to race and the pressure traveled and pounded against her. She was so aroused and goose bumps pricked everywhere. Ron's mouth was talented, and he ravished her. "Oh, love, that feels so good."

"I want you to feel good. I always want to make you feel good," he mumbled against her. He moved his pointer finger to her center and pumped it repeatedly, all while sucking on her nerve.

Hermione groaned longingly. "Yes, please!"

Ron didn't stop. His mouth and finger moved in a perfect pace. Every part of her was on fire, and she couldn't hold it back anymore. Her skin stung, her middle pounded, and her mind evaporated. All she had was feeling. It didn't take long. She bucked and came. The powerful pressure released from her, and her legs shook violently. She held her legs against Ron's neck and pulled on his hair, as a light passed across her eyes. "Oh, oh, Ron!" she breathed. She stayed taut for a moment, and then finally dropped her legs. She flinched and moaned as the feeling overtook her and subsided. She released her fingers from his hair.

Ron raised his head and licked his mouth and finger. He was smirking, and his eyes were hazed. "You make the most incredible sounds."

"And you're just incredible," she said out of breath. She was tingly and moist and hot all over. Her body was relaxed, and she felt slightly lighter.

Ron sat up, and she looked over his freckly and flushed torso. She could see his obvious hardness pushing against his jeans, and she wanted to feel it. She wanted it inside of her. She loved Ron, and he had done so much for her to make her relax. She wanted to give him the best gift that she had. "Ron, I'm ready. For real this time."

"Honestly?" he asked. "You have to be sure. No matter what you want or don't want, it's okay with me."

"I know it is, but I really am ready. I want you inside of me. I want you to make love to me," she said. She loved the way it sounded coming out of her. It felt right, and it was truthful.

He moved closer to her and took her hand. "And I want to so much."

She kissed his cheek before lying back against the sheets. She was still so nervous, but she ready. "Then have me."

His eyes widened and he let out a shaky breath. He took off his jeans and boxers and once again settled on top of her. Both of their breaths hitched as their parts came into contact. Ron was firm and warm. "I'll go really slow," he said in a gentle voice.

She nodded and put her shaky hands on his shoulders. "Okay."

"I love you," he said.

"I love you, too," she answered. Ron kissed her softly and gripped himself. She felt his head brush against her a couple of times, so she moved down a little to help guide him.

"Thanks," he mumbled.

"We're a team," she said. He smiled before lowering his mouth over hers. Hermione kissed him back with everything she had. Ron rested his arms on either side of her, and slowly moved into her. She cried out in his mouth as extreme pain exploded through her. She didn't know what she had expected, but she wasn't sure if it was supposed to hurt like this. A terrible burn shot through her entire body.

"Hermione, I can stop. We don't have to do this," Ron said, parting from her mouth and stilling his movements.

She slowly opened her watery eyes. Ron was looking at her in such a concerned way. He wasn't even fully inside of her, but already it was painful. A part of her did want him to stop. She was scared and it hurt, but she thought about everything that they had been through and what she wanted. She couldn't stop now. "No, it's okay."

He shook his head and frowned. "But I'm hurting you. I don't want to."

"I know you don't, but it's supposed to hurt. I saved myself for you. You're the first person to feel me, just like I've always wanted you to be. I'll be fine." She hoped that she would be fine, but anything had to be better than what she was feeling now. She could see in his eyes that he didn't want to move, so she raised herself to some extent and kissed him.

She felt Ron kiss her back. "I'll be as gentle as I can be," he said.

"I trust you," she whispered. She clutched his shoulders again, and he slowly pushed deeper in. It was the most painful experience of her life. Ron's was so much more solid, thick, and steaming inside of her than in her hand or in her mouth. She felt something inside her being stretched and rendered. The fires of pain were burning inside her, and she didn't know how she was still able to breathe. She dug into his skin so deeply that she thought she would draw blood. Tears were freely flowing from her eyes.

"Hermione?" he asked with a moan. She could hear the passion in his voice.

"It's okay," she choked out.

He nodded and pushed further into her. She felt her whole middle hurting; he was stretching her more than she had ever been. He seemed to reach her barrier. He kissed her again. "I love you."

"I know. Go on," she mumbled. She was a second away from pushing him off her, but she held it in. She had to endure the pain.

He moved again, and then she felt a sharp pain deep in her vagina. He had gotten through and had broken her completely. He stopped and she opened her eyes. She was in severe pain, but she was okay. She was still alive. The revelation alone calmed her. "Oh, Hermione, oh my god." The strain in Ron's voice told her



that she was extremely tight and probably smothering him, but at the same time, it was husky and full of pleasure. She must have also felt good to him.

"Keep going," she panted, tightly shutting her eyes. He kissed her before slowly and gently thrusting. While it did hurt, she felt safe and she was able to keep herself under control.

Hermione cried softly and gasped every time Ron pushed into her. He kissed her neck and jaw constantly. "You feel so good, Hermione," he panted. She couldn't speak. All she could do was wince at the somewhat beautiful pain that she was experiencing. She smelled their sweaty and spicy skins rubbing against each other, and his bed rocked and added a thud to his moans and her cries. Everything about them seemed to melt together into one body, and Hermione couldn't tell where Ron ended and where she began.

Ron panted and moaned as he made love to her. He put his forehead against hers and kept his eyes shut. Hermione watched him. She wanted to see the face that connected to the sounds. Her body moved up with every thrust Ron gave and her body was completely at his will, but it was okay. She was used to being the strong one in situations and being the one doing all the work, but finally she was the one being taken. She liked Ron taking some of the control from her and simply letting her feel. She licked his lower lip and their tongues met and flicked each other. Hermione still kept his eyes open. She wanted to watch the beauty of her boyfriend and best friend.

Suddenly, Ron opened his eyes. She blushed and gasped at the pain of his thrust. He swallowed hard and tried to steady his breathing. "Are you okay?" He was hoarse and terribly out of breath.

Hermione felt her heart flutter and for the first time since he started, she didn't feel any pain, at least for a second. She couldn't believe that Ron would ask such a thing. With everything that was going on and what they were doing and feeling, Ron still wanted to know if she was okay. He was perfect for many reasons, but his loyalty and need to protect the people that he loved was still number one. Hermione loved him so much. She nodded and tried to form words. "Yes, I'm-I'm okay."

Ron nodded and pressed his mouth against her. Hermione kissed him back. She parted her lips and let Ron snog her passionately. He made a deep stroke and Hermione pulled out of the kiss and bit on his shoulder. "Hermione?"

"Y-yes?" she asked, adjusting to the latest throb. There was something wrong with the way he was looking at her. "What's the matter?"

Ron already flushed face went crimson. "I don't think that I can hold on any longer. I'm sorry."

Hermione put a hand on his face. She felt as if they had been making love for hours, but Ron's words made her realize how

little time had actually passed since they started. It was unreal. "Then don't. Don't hold back."

Something changed in Ron. His eyes widened, and he kissed her with a feverish need that took her breath away. He groaned longingly into her mouth, and Hermione actually felt his cock jerk and explode. It electrified her insides, and she dug into his shoulders. He moaned loudly and his entire body shook and spasm. He came inside of her, and she felt his seed fill her up. For a second everything stopped. Every inch of her being was fused to Ron's, and they blended and mixed themselves together. She had never felt so close to him before.

He pulled out of the kiss. "Hermione, Hermione!" Her name had never sounded so amazing, and she sobbed in a mixture of pain and passion. Ron jerked until his orgasm faded then his arms gave out. He lay against her chest.

His body was soaked, scorching, and heavy. He breathed shallowly in her ear, and Hermione was also finding it hard to breathe and focus. Her entire body tremored, and she felt a great moistness between her legs. She could not believe that it had actually happened and that it was now over. Ron pulled away from her, and she hissed as his length left her body. She felt horribly hollowed out and torn. Her middle throbbed, and there was an ache deep inside her. However, a powerful and uplifting sensation took over her. The stress and worry was over. She had survived it all.

He shifted to her side and they stared at each other, panting. Her body was on fire for many different reasons, and her mind was slowly trying to catch up. Ron wiped the sweat off his brow and smiled slightly. "I'm so glad that we waited for each other." Everything finally hit her. All the emotion from the day and the past several days crept on her and overpowered her. She couldn't hold it in. She began to cry. He moved closer to her. "Hey, what's wrong? Are you hurting that badly? What can I do?"

"No, that's not it. I'm glad that we waited for each other, too. I can't imagine going through all that with anyone else. Ron, I love you so much, and I'm thankful that I got to experience this with you. It has to be you and me." She couldn't talk anymore. She continued to cry, as she felt increasingly overwhelmed.

He put an arm around her and brought her face to his chest. His skin had a heightened scent of zest to it, and it was invigorating. "What did I tell you when we first started dating? What have I always told you? I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying right here with you, always. Trust me, it's always going to be you and me. We're made for each other, Mione."

Ron moved hair out of her face and kissed her forehead. He rubbed her back, and Hermione buried her face in his neck and let out all of her feelings. She breathed into him all the things that she felt but didn't have the strength to say. She hoped that he understood and part of her thought that he did. Her lids drooped as the exhaustion became too hard to fight. She fell asleep to Ron's deep breathing and the strong rhythm of his heart.

Hermione opened her eyes and automatically winced. Her middle was aching and her legs hurt. However, the vision at the foot of the bed took her mind off it. Ron was curled up in only his boxers, reading Robinson Crusoe. She sat up and pulled the sheet over her chest. "Important piece of English literature?"

He looked at her and chuckled. "Not in the slightest. This is so bloody boring. Too bad he can't just Apparate to the island or use a spell to reinforce the wood. These boats are useless." He handed her knickers and bra to her. "Don't worry, I didn't leave them on the floor, and I cleaned everything up."

"Thanks," she said. She snapped her bra back on and as she slipped her knickers on, she noticed the bit of blood that was between her legs. She looked up at Ron who was looking at her with a pained expression.

He rubbed his neck. "Um, hold on." He reached under his bed and handed her a few tissues.

"Thank you," she whispered, feeling embarrassed. Ron turned away as she quickly wiped the blood away and pulled her knickers back on. "Okay," she said awkwardly. They were quiet.

"So, are you feeling all right?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm fine," she rushed. Actually, she was in pain and rather mortified, but she tried not to show it. "How are you?"

"Hungry. Can't wait till dinner," he said. He stretched his arms. "Worked up an appetite." He suddenly blushed. "Oh, shit, I'm sorry."

She laughed. Ron could be so adorably innocent sometimes, and it made her feel better. "It's fine. I'm really hungry, too. Come here."

He sat next to her and smirked. His skin was radiating, and his was more attractive than ever. He leaned forward and kissed her. She sighed and kissed him back deeply. She wasn't sure if it was just the after affects of sex, but it tasted a little different and the feeling was more powerful. He pulled away. "Are you really okay?"

"Really, I'm fine. I had a beautiful day with you," she said, tracing his mouth. She could still feel him inside her.

"I'm glad. It's all I wanted. I love you," he said, touching her knee.

"I love you, too," she answered. They snogged again and she moaned heavily.

"Ron?" someone said on the other side of his curtain. It sounded like Seamus.

He broke away from her mouth and groaned. "I didn't know they were all back," she said, looking around for her shirt.

"Don't worry, they can't hear us but I couldn't hold the room anymore. We were asleep for awhile," he answered. He opened the curtain a little and poked his head out. "What do you want?"

"Is Hermione decent in there?" Seamus asked.

"Why in the bloody hell does it matter to you?" he asked. Hermione chuckled and ran her finger down Ron's freckly back. He shivered.

"Well, we need help with McGonagall's course work, and she is the bloody best in the class," Seamus said.

"I'm not loaning you lot my girlfriend. We're having private time," Ron said.

"Oh, come on. You've had her all day!" Seamus said.

"Yeah, and I'm gonna have her all night, too," Ron said. She blushed and bit her lip. She wanted to kiss him.

"Fucking hell, Ron! Hermione, are you in there? Will you help me? Help us?" Seamus asked.

"Seamus," Ron began.

Hermione put a hand on his arm. "I don't mind."

He stuck his head back in. "No, you don't have to. They'll manage."

She rolled her eyes. "Ron, it's not a big deal. If they need help, then I'll help them. The work was pretty challenging."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes, I just need my clothes," she said.

"Here." He handed her his maroon pajamas and his black Canons shirt.

"Thanks," she said. She slipped them on and noticed for the first time that Ron had a round, red mark on his shoulder. She didn't remember doing it. "Oh, I'm so sorry for that."

He shrugged and touched it. "Ah, I think it's brilliant. Just a love bite."

She licked her lips and got close to his face. She felt every part of his skin fused to hers again, and the air around them sparked. "It may not be the last."

"I won't stop you," he said, touching her waist.

"Hermione!" Seamus said.

Ron groaned. "Seamus, your bollocks are mine!"

"Calm down, Ron," Hermione said, stepping out of his bed. Dean and Neville were both sitting next to Seamus' bed. They all had to know. They looked up at her and smiled. She was ready to hear the teasing.

"I don't have nearly as many questions as Seamus does," Neville said.

"Yeah, it will only be a minute or two. Sorry," Dean added.

"It's okay. The book work has a lot of steps," she said in shock. She turned back to Ron. "You're welcome to join us."

"I'll worry about it later. Besides, got important pieces to read," he said, holding up her book.

She smiled and joined Seamus on his bed. She respected the fact that they weren't saying anything. She was still a bit overwhelmed. She looked up to Ron. He was on his stomach and watching her with a smile. There was no need to speak. They knew what each other were thinking. He put her bear on top of the book and bounced it around, making her laugh.

"What could possibly be funny about this?" Seamus asked.

"Nothing, sorry," she quickly said. She shook her head at Ron and he smirked. He winked at her and went back to reading her book.

She melted and simply gazed at him. "Hermione? Hermione?" someone asked. She couldn't concentrate. Ron occupied her eyes, focus, body, mind, and spirit. He caught her gaze and the two stared at each other again.

It took much effort on her part to turn away from him and focus on the coursework.

\*\*\*\* There's so much that I can say but in summary: First, I hope everyone liked his little picnic date with her. I find it very sweet and very Ron. He had no idea how touched that made Hermione. Second, the first time is always scary, short, and painful. They're nervous/randy teenagers and things go wrong, lol. No getting around it. It's beautiful in its own way. Hermione's reaction to the whole thing I reckon works for her, she thinks too much and what she doesn't know scares her. Ron had to take the lead, like he should. He can take care of her, too. Third, lol, I just love Ron's temper. Malfoy better watch himselfâ€¦that's all I will say. Fourth, and probably most important, R/Hr always and forever. Thanks for reading and review!

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 46

Thanks for the reviews! Sorry this took ages. I took a little holiday to Surrey. I won't be spending Christmas there this year so I enjoyed the time with my mates and family. However, I ended

up staying a lot more days that I originally planned/should have, lol. Anyway, I'm back in New York now and I'm back on schedule!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Hermione laughed harder as Ron and Harry went on about how horrible it was turning into Crabbe and Goyle. They made the most vacant faces that they could and added slow and dull accents to their voices. She never got tired of hearing the story or seeing them acting it out together. Ron and Harry were her men, and they had grown up and changed so much over the years. However, they were still the same in the ways that mattered.

"Well," she said breathlessly, "it still doesn't quite match to being a cat. My opinion is never going to change."

Harry sat back down in front of her on the grass. "That's true. At least I was familiar with all my parts—mostly anyway." Ron snorted and put his head back on her shoulder.

She raised her shoulder to move his head away. "Do you have something to add?"

He shrugged and grinned at her. "No. I'm just thinking about you with the whiskers and the tail. It was wicked."

She gasped and hit his arm. "I can't believe how insensitive you still are about it! You're terrible."

"What? I'd never seen anything like it before. It was extraordinary, and you were so cute as a little Hermione kitten," he said, patting her head.

She glared at him. "You're going to regret saying that."

He interlocked their fingers. "Is that a threat?"

She could hear the hint of humor in his voice, but she didn't mind. It was difficult to be when she could still feel his hardness burning her beautifully and his heavy voice telling her how much he loved her. She put her forehead against his. "Do you want it to be? I can make sure that you never get this close to me again."

He pecked her lips. "Don't do that. I wasn't taking the piss. Your pussy was incredible, and I'm taking about you as a cat—of course."

She blushed and yanked her hand away. "Ronald Weasley, you're vulgar and terrible!"

He chuckled. "And that's exactly why you're in love with me." She was embarrassed, and she couldn't think of anything to respond with. He was right. She simply hit his arm again.

Harry loudly cleared his throat, and they turned to him. He was frowning horribly. "That was disgustingly graphic. If I wake up pregnant tomorrow, I won't even be surprised."

Hermione put a hand over her face and groaned. Mortification increased as she remembered that they weren't alone. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Harry!"

"I'm not. The boy has to learn some way or another," Ron said.

"Ron, that's enough!" she snapped, not even wanting to look at Harry again. She knew his look of smug would take her over the edge.

"Fine, keep your knickers on." He pulled her hands away from her face. "I'm sorry."

"Apologize to Harry," she said.

He rolled his eyes. "Are youâ€¦!" He trailed off as she shook her head. He sighed and turned to Harry, who was looking at him smugly.

"Do you have something to say, mate?" Harry asked.

Hermione could tell that Ron wanted to spit something mean and possibly appalling to him, but he merely mumbled, "Sorry."

"That's quite all right," Harry answered. "I reckon I may not have nightmares tonight. Thanks for making your boyfriend apologize, Hermione. It was powerful and sensitive."

She laughed. "You're very welcome, Harry."

Ron looked between them and glowered. "Both of you can shut it. You make me sick!" Hermione and Harry only laughed and the hardness in Ron's face melted. He actually smiled and chuckled a bit himself. Her watch beeped, signifying the new hour, and he groaned.

"Is it time?" Hermione asked.

He took her wrist and looked at her watch. "Bleeding bollocks, yes, I have to go."

"How long is the meeting?" Harry asked.

Ron sprawled out on the grass and put his forearm over his eyes. Hermione gazed at her long, lanky lover and admired every inch of him. There was a time when all she could do was admire, but now she knew what it all looked like and felt like. She was so lucky. "I dunno. Who could ever know what McGonagall wants, yeah? She's probably going to chain me up and make me look at pictures of unicorns shagging or something."

"Ronald Weasley, you are a Prefect. Professor McGonagall is meeting with all of us. She's just going to go over your assignments and probably lecture you about falling asleep in her class. Nothing out of the ordinary," Hermione explained.

"Maybe I can just--"

"Don't even think about missing it, and you better not say that you're going but you end hide in the Prefects' bathroom until it's over. I'll check," she cut in.

"Wow, you're good, Hermione," Harry said.

Ron groaned and kicked his legs. He removed his arm and looked at her. "That's because she's always in my mind! Legilimency, I reckon."

"It's not that difficult to determine your escape routs. Now, you should go. You don't want to be late." She rubbed his thigh and gently grinned at him. "Come on, you can do it."

Something in his face changed. He got the distant look in his eyes again, but she knew what was there now. It was love. "Come here." She wanted to but she could feel Harry's presence on her back.

"Ah, I think I see a baby hippogriff over there. I'm gonna go check it out. Have fun at your meeting, Ron." Harry quickly got up and shook his head at them before walking off.

Hermione beamed at Harry in appreciation and felt a strong urge to run up to him and hug him. He'd never understand what he meant to her or how much she loved him. He would always be the brother she never had. "Hermione?" Ron said softly. She turned back to him and saw the bit of worry on his face.

She mentally sighed. "I'm on my way." She slowly crawled over to him and propped herself on her elbow. She ran her finger down his nose, and she loved how he slightly shivered. Even the littlest things that he did made her love him more. She couldn't believe that he was still anxious about her relationship with Harry. It began to frustrate her, but she didn't want it to.

Her face must have changed because Ron raised an eyebrow. "Herm-

She cut him off with a kiss. She planted her lips firmly against his and Ron kissed her back with enthusiasm. He touched her hip, and Hermione moved on top of him. He laid his head back and placed his palms right on the small of her back. She deepened the kiss with her tongue and rested her forearms against the grass so she could grip his hair. The snog was powerful and all on her command. She sighed deeply, adoring the taste of Ron and the feeling of him under her.

She was surprised when Ron moved his face away. His cheeks were lightly stained with red, and his blue eyes were large. "Fucking hell, what's this?"

Hermione gave the area a once over to make sure they weren't being watched. "A snog. Haven't you ever had one of these before?"

He tucked hair behind her ear. "Not like this, cheeky woman."



She could see every feature of his face so clearly, and his strong body was warm against her. "What? You aren't enjoying yourself?"

Ron smirked and gave his hips a thrust. "You're the brain. I'll let you figure it out."

She squeaked and tangled her fingers in his hair. "I love you. You know that, don't you?"

"Of course I do," he said, "I love you, too." He raised his head and kissed her. She melted against his lips and moaned. He did as well. His hands moved up her back and closer to her chest. They reached around and his fingertips brushed over her breasts.

Her body jerked and burned. Layers of clothing meant nothing when Ron was involved. The passion on his skin merely went through the material. It didn't help that they were now sexually active. Even after one time his body was so much more attractive and tempting. She groaned and tugged on his bottom lip. He cupped her breasts and pushed his hips forward. She was hot and the sun only made her sweatier. Her brain cleared and she realized that they were outside.

"Ron," she mumbled. She broke out of the kiss and got off him. She sat against the tree and tried to catch her breath.

He sat up as well and wiped under his bottom lip. "Sorry."

"It's okay," she said. "I forgot where we were for a second."

"Yeah," he breathed. "Wellâ€¦I should probably go. I reckon McGonagall is hoping that I'm late, so I can do more for her and she can lecture me some more."

"I doubt that completely," she said. "She doesn't enjoy lecturing you every single day. You really need to mind authority, Ronald. The teachers are in charge for a reason."

He gave her a look and chuckled. "See? This is exactly what I mean. Women must get off on nagging me."

She slapped his thigh. "Are you trying to make a statement about me?"

"It would explain a lot," he said with a shrug.

"It only explains that you constantly defy the rules just toâ€¦" She stopped as Ron gave her his lopsided grin.

"No, continue your lecture," he teased. "All it does is validate my point."

"Oh, you're infuriating!" she said.

"And right," he added.

She pecked his lips. "Well, even if you are right, and you're not, McGonagall will just have to keep her urges to herself."

"Aww, don't worry, Mione. You're the only woman whose knickers I'll help untwist," he cheeked.

She pinched him. "Get away from me."

He laughed and kissed her cheek before getting up. "See you later."

"Bye," she said, giving him a little wave. She watched him walk away with his usual casualness and his hands deep in his pockets. She stared off toward the lake and couldn't get the smile off her face. Ron made her incredibly happy. A few minutes went by and she heard a familiar throat clearing. Her smile only grew. "It's safe, Harry." She turned her head and saw him peeking over the tree.

"Sorry, I ran out of things to pretend to chase around the grounds," he said.

"Shut it and come sit," she ordered. He took a seat next to her and leaned against the tree as well. She gave him a once over. The gloom and heaviness in his features was gone, but he still looked a bit sad to her. Then again, she figured that Harry would always be a bit sad. There was too much darkness in his life for him to ever truly heal. "How are you?"

"I'm fine," he said, rubbing his hands together and looking ahead. "Probably not as great as you are."

She groaned. "I'm really sorry about that. We forget sometimes."

"I'm having a laugh," he said. "It's okay, honestly. Ginny and I get that way sometimes."

"So, you two are doing all right?" she asked.

"Yeah. It's been great." He smiled at her and patted her arm. "Hermione, you don't have to worry so much. We're all happy. Enjoy it a little."

"I am but I have to be sure. I need to make sure you're okay," she said sincerely.

His smile faded and he nodded. "I know you do. I am doing better. I'd tell you if I wasn't or if Ginny and I weren't getting on, but we are. I think things may finally be going our way. I never thought that we'd get to this point."

"Neither did I," she said softly. "That's why I'm still apprehensive. Ron and I had the mostly amazing time the other day. I don't want to lose that. I don't want to lose him." Her anxiousness spilled over and ran through her body. She remembered the days when they weren't together, and worse, the time when they weren't really even friends. She never wanted to go back to

that. It hurt her and scared her. Hermione let out a shaky breath.

Harry squeezed her shoulder. "It's all right, Hermione. You really need to stop stressing yourself out. We've gotten through bad before, and if it comes again we'll be ready. You have Ron, and he's not going anywhere. If he didn't go on and on about you before, then he certainly does now. You've created a monster."

She felt heat on her cheeks, and his words washed away some of the dread. "Leave Ron alone. I think he's really sweet these days."

"Eh, you say sweet. I say annoying as all bloody hell," he said.

She gently elbowed him and stood up. "It's getting late. I have a pile of coursework waiting for me. I've put it off for too long."

"How long is that? An hour or two?" he asked.

She placed a hand on her hip. "Either your best friend has been influencing you or your girlfriend has."

"Probably both," he mumbled. "Speaking of incredible women, I think Ginny may be done with her studying with Luna. They're in the library."

She wanted to snort. She respected her best friend, but he wasn't very smooth when it came to sweet-talking. She would never tell either of them, but Harry needed to take lessons from Ron. "Very slick, Mr. Potter, but the library is a good idea. I think I may go there as well."

He raised an eyebrow. "I'm going there to rescue her, not join her. Merlin, who do you think I am?"

She rolled her eyes and pushed past him. "Whatever."

Hermione went to the loo to wash her face and direct her thoughts to get into her study mode. She opened the door, and Ginny was at the sink rubbing her eyes. "How's the studying?"

Ginny jumped a little. "Shit, you scared me."

"Sorry," Hermione said, joining her. "Are you okay?"

"I'm absolutely knackered," she said, tying her long hair into a braid. "I had to get out of the library before I set my books on fire."

"Hmm, that great?" Hermione asked, cupping cold water in her hands.

She groaned. "Studying is really kicking my arse. I can think of at least fourteen things that I can be doing instead and one very important person that I'd like to be doing it all with."

"Wouldn't happen to be Harry, would it?" Hermione asked with a grin. "You miss him?"

She rolled her eyes. "He's not that great. Actually, he is but don't tell him I said that. He gets it enough from all his little groupies around here, but yeah I do."

"I doubt Harry notices or cares about his fan club. Anyhow, he misses you, too. He's actually on his way to the library to rescue you," Hermione said.

Some of the tiredness on her face disappeared, and a wide smile came across her mouth. "Excellent. Harry always bloody finds me when I need him. He's been on my mind all afternoon. I wish we were in the same year like you and Ron. Then we could be together whenever we wanted, and we could shag like mad whenever we wanted instead of having to schedule ourselves."

Hermione straightened her already neat clothes and pointed her chin a little. "We do not shag like mad."

"Not yet, anyway," she mumbled. Hermione looked at her and considered the question that had been bubbling in her mind for days. She figured it was wise to ask. She bent and checked the stalls for feet. When she saw none, she flicked her wand toward the door to lock it. "Am I in trouble?"

"No, I want to talk to you, and I'd like for us not to be interrupted," Hermione began. Ginny gestured her hand and nodded, signaling for her to go on. She looked under the stall doors once more before continuing. "Did it really hurt the first time you had sex?"

"Definitely. It hurt terribly," Ginny said grimly. "Dean felt awful about it, too. Gods, it was so awkward!" She trailed off and gave her a look. "Wait. Did you and Ron?"

Hermione couldn't help but to smile. It was silly but she felt proud to say that she had finally had her first time, and it was with the best man in the world. "Yes."

Ginny gasped. "That's great, Hermione. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I don't know. I haven't told anyone but my mum," she said.

"Was it during your date with him?" she asked. Hermione nodded. "I knew it! The pair of you has been extra giggly and nauseating since then."

Her blush increased. "We're not that bad, I'm sure, and we don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. I know it's a weird subject."

Ginny waved a hand. "It's fine. Unlike my brother, I don't mind talking about things like this. All of his maturity must have come straight to me when I was born. Just spare me all the details."

Hermione tried to block out all the magnificent images, sounds, scents, and feelings of Ron's sex to stay completely objective. "I'll try."

"So, is that why you asked? Did it hurt a lot for you?" Ginny asked.

"Absolutely," she said with a heavy breath, "Ron felt bad about it as well. I know the first time is the worst. I just want to know if it's something I should expect for a while, the pain. I read some books, but it's always better to get a live opinion."

"I'm sure your books told you that it's different for everyone. I agree. For a friend of mine it didn't stop hurting until her third or fourth time. Another mate, it stung when it first went in, but didn't hurt at all after a minute or so. For me, the first time with was almost unbearable, but it never hurt again after that," Ginny explained.

Hermione clicked her teeth. Being a woman was too complicated at times. "That doesn't help me much."

"I know. I'm sorry. It's just something that you'll have to experience and find out. Even if it does hurt the second time or the third time, it will never be as bad as your first time. Unless, Ron didn't break you," Ginny said in a self-assured and knowledgeable way.

Hermione couldn't help but wonder if sexual proficiency and confidence was something that all the Weasleys' possessed. It made sense. They were a very passionate group of people. "Oh, he did. It was physically and visibly clear that he did." She still felt a little uneasy thinking about the blood between her legs.

"Ah, sorry about that, too. Well, you have nothing to worry about. It'll be fine, and it will get better. You have to stop worrying and analyzing everything. You can't do that when it comes to shagging. It's something that you simply feel and experience, and sex can be pretty bloody amazing when you're with the right person," Ginny said, suddenly turning away.

Hermione touched her arm. "Ginny?"

She shook her head. "Sorry."

"You don't have to apologize. What's on your mind?" Hermione asked.

"It's just," she began, "I never thought that I'd have sex with Dean when we first started dating. When we did get serious, I was so sure about it. I honestly don't know why anymore. I keep telling myself that it was because I truly loved him, which I did."

"I think you did, too, Ginny. I could see it in your eyes," Hermione helped. However, she suddenly realized that it wasn't what Ginny wanted to hear. There was a distance in her eyes, but unlike Ron's, she couldn't read it.

"Dean and I used to be great. Nothing like we are now. When we had sex, he was always sweet and loving." Ginny grinned for only a second before growing more serious. "I can barely think about it now without getting upset with myself. Being with Harry has made me regret so many things. It's what I feared ever since I decided not to wait on him anymore."

Hermione couldn't help but feel a little guilty. She had told Ginny to move on. "You don't have to regret it. You're still with Harry and like you said, you loved Dean. He was good for you."

She rolled her eyes. "Yeah, and Harry is perfect for me. He should have been my first. I know it and what's worse is that Harry knows it, too."

"Ginny," Hermione stared. She didn't know what to say. What Ginny was going through was once one of her greatest fears. She couldn't imagine what she would have done, had she given up on Ron and had sex with someone else. One thought of Cormac's hand on her thigh made her skin go cold.

Ginny didn't seem to be listening to her. "I've never been one for traditions about how women are supposed to be or what they're supposed to do, but I really let myself down, Hermione, and I feel like I let Harry down. Being his girlfriend has showed me that everything I have, I'm supposed to give to him. Sex doesn't have to be a big deal for every girl, but it is for me. It's so much more important that I thought it was."

"I understand how you feel. That's why I'm so analytical about it, I guess. I want to treat it with care," Hermione explained.

Ginny smiled at her. "It's good that you do. I'm really glad that you're with my brother, Hermione, and I'm glad that you got to have your first time with the person of your dreams. I know Ron got to. You two are really lucky, and as thick as it sounds, I look up to your relationship."

Hermione felt pride and warmth take over her body. "That means a lot to me, Ginny. I don't think it's thick. I look up to you and Harry as well. I've never met two stronger people or two people more in love. He loves you, and you're with him now. That's all that matters in the end. If I have to stop worrying, then you have to stop holding on to your mistakes."

"Yeah, I know you're right. It's just hard sometimes," she said.

"I know it is," Hermione said, giving her elbow a tight squeeze. The door handle jiggled and someone banged on the door.

A second later it opened and a girl walked in. "You can't keep the toilet to yourself, yeah?"

"Sorry, must have gotten stuck," Hermione said, pulling on Ginny's arm to keep her from saying anything back.

They walked out of the loo and Ginny let out a deep breath and smiled. "Thanks for what you said about Dean and me. Somehow, you always know how to put things."

"That's not true at all. I just care about my friends, and I want to help as much as I can. Although, I don't think you need any help. Harry tells me that your both doing great," Hermione said.

"We are and he's just incredible," Ginny said.

Hermione couldn't help herself. She let out what was on her mind before she could bite her lip to stop. "And you and Ron? All the arguing is over?"

Ginny turned away. "We're always going to argue, Hermione. It's what we do." She didn't move her eyes from the floor, and Hermione had the feeling that she was hiding something. "But yeah, we're fine."

"That's a good thing, Ginny. Know that I'm here if you ever need to talk. I'm not just his girlfriend," Hermione said.

Ginny finally looked up at her and smirked. "Trust me, we all know that. I'll see you later, all right? I'm going to find Harry."

"I'll be headed there in a bit myself. If you see Ron anytime soon, tell him I'm there," she said. "And thank you for talking to me. Iâ€¦umâ€¦well, you know."

Ginny chuckled. "It's okay. You are human, you know." She gave her a warm smile and walked in the opposite direction.

Later that evening Hermione finally made it to the library. She dipped her quill again and wrote furiously. She planned to completely dominate her essay on physical transformations for amputees. She planned to get entirely back in McGonagall's good graces. She planned to get everything back for herself. Too much chaos and drama had plagued her year. She wouldn't let it happen again.

"I knew you'd be here. I could smell the burning parchment from outside," Ron said, walking up to her table.

She grinned but didn't look up from her work. "McGonagall is going to get a fresh perspective on an old topic. I'm making sure of it."

"I reckon you didn't make sure to at least bring a sandwich in here with you, right?" he asked, sitting next to her.

She finally looked up. His tie was loose and his hair was almost on end but other than that, he seemed all right. "How as the meeting?"

He stretched and placed his interlocked fingers behind his head. "It was okay. She asked about my health. She said that she would

hate for me to get sick again and miss another meeting. It could signal that I need a break from Quidditch."

"She must be on to you," Hermione said, giving his knee a squeeze.

"Don't I bloody know it? So, what have you been up to?" he asked, raising his leg and placing it in her lap. He bit his lip and rubbed his shoe against her blouse.

She tapped the tip of his shoe. "Stop that! Your shoes are dirty. Rude boy." She pushed his foot off and shook her head at him. He laughed and raised an eyebrow. "Anyway, I've been fine. I'm pleased with what I've written so far. I'm just about finished."

"So, you're done for the night?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, I think I am."

He stood up and started packing up her books. "Good. We're going to dinner."

"Oh, welll, Ron, just because I'm finished with-"

"I don't care, and I won't start caring. You need to eat and so do I. Now, come on," he said, stuffing her papers and quills into her bag. He pulled it over his shoulder.

She sighed. "Ron, I want to get it over with and if need be help you with your essay."

He moved right in front of her and bent down. "I'm not asking for your permission. I'm telling you that we're going." He kissed her ear before moving away.

Hermione couldn't help but twitch a grin. "Is that an order, Mr. Weasley?"

"Yeah and you're not the only one who can be severe with punishments. I don't hold back," he said with a wink. He took her hand and led her out of the library. All through dinner Hermione and Ron argued about writing their essays. It wasn't until he had his second slice of pie that they both finally gave up and called it a truce.

They walked back to the Common Room flustered and tense. "I may not help you if you ask me later," she said as they made it through the portrait hole.

"That's fine with me. I am capable of doing things myself," he said sharply.

"I know you are, Ronald," she shot.

"Good," he mumbled as they walked up the staircase.



Hermione gave him a once over and tried to calm down. It was probably best to change the subject. "Where do you think Harry and Ginny are? I thought that we would see them at dinner."

"I don't want to think about it. Really, let's just forget about them for now," he said with a shiver.

She chuckled and rolled her eyes. "Your maturity level astounds me every time."

"Yeah, I'm the real deal," he said, grinning a little. When they opened the door to his room, it felt like déjà vu. Once again, Lavender and Dean were on Dean's bed talking. They looked up and smiled.

"Hey," Dean said.

"Hi," Ron said casually, going over to his bed.

Hermione mentally sighed again. "Hello. Getting the homework done again?"

"Yes, McGonagall is mental these days. I really need to pull my grade up," Lavender said, looking at Ron. "Did you start yours, Ronnie?"

He flopped on his bed. "No. I'm saving it for a better night."

She giggled. "You mean the night before?"

"Shut it," he answered with a chuckle.

She continued to giggle and look at him. "I understand how you feel. I hate writing essays."

"You and me both," he breathed.

Hermione cleared her throat and walked over to Ron's bed. She sat down next to him. His eyes were closed, and he twisted his wand in his hand. She bent down and kissed him. He moaned softly and kissed her back. Hermione pulled away and smiled. She outlined his lips. "Thanks for making me eat."

"That's what I'm here for. Come on in," he said, moving over to give her more room.

Hermione snuggled next to him and tried not to look at Lavender and Dean who were doing more talking than working. She turned back to Ron and noticed that he was looking at them, too. The distance in his eyes was back, but she couldn't read it. He hardly blinked and he looked to be in a trance. "Are you okay?"

He pulled his eyes away from them. "Yeah, I'm fine. Why?"

She didn't know how to explain what she was feeling. Things were perfect and she didn't want to ruin it by over thinking everything. "No reason." She rested her head on his chest and

closed her eyes. She took in his smell and listened to the strong rhythm of his heart.

He chuckled. "You're really mental sometimes, but that's okay. I love you," he whispered, kissing the top of her head. His lips seemed to melt and drip through her hair and scalp. It felt so good and she wanted more.

She sat up. "Why don't you show me some of that love?"

He glanced over to Dean and Lavender for a moment. "You mean it?" There was excitement in his voice and his cheeks flushed slightly.

"If you're supplied," she whispered.

"Plenty. More than enough," he said giddy. "But, um," he nudged to Dean and Lavender.

"Are you a wizard or not? We've got spells for that," she said quietly. She turned to pull the curtains around them, and she saw Lavender sneaking a peek at them. Their eyes connected for only a second. Lavender glared at her and Hermione grinned before scarlet curtains blocked her face.

The next morning Hermione reluctantly slipped out of Ron's warm embrace. She watched his naked body stir, but he didn't wake. She quickly slipped on her bra and knickers. Ginny had been right. It hurt a little, but it was nothing compared to the first time. She pulled on her orange Canons shirt, her school skirt, picked up the rest of her things, and slowly moved out of the bed. She kissed Ron's forehead before completely leaving him.

She opened the door to her room and only Lavender was inside. She was brushing her hair and yanking things out of her wardrobe at the same time. Hermione tried to make as little noise as possible. She was obviously in a state. However, the moment she closed the door, Lavender turned around. "Patty, haveâ€¦oh, it's you."

"Good morning to you, too," Hermione said, noticing that the sweetness in Lavender's voice was now gone.

"Actually, it's not. I've got cramps, and I can't find my bigger skirt to wear," Lavender whined while throwing clothes all over the floor.

"You could always widen another skirt with your wand. You know, magic," Hermione offered.

"Oh, right, magic. Is that why I'm here? To learn magic? Is that what that piece of wood on my bed is for?" Lavender asked sarcastically and not turning around.

Hermione shook her head and picked up her toothbrush and shampoo. "Whatever you say, Lavender. I'm just trying to help."

"Well, I don't need your bloody help. I'm not stupid. I'm well aware that I can use a stretching spell, but I have that skirt specifically for times like these. I don't want to mess up my organization!" she snapped. Hermione wanted to tell her that throwing clothes all over the floor probably didn't help in the matter, but she held it in. It wasn't worth it. "And by the way, you didn't have to do that with Ron last night."

"Do what?" Hermione asked, just as she was about to take her morning bag to the shower.

Lavender whipped around and placed her hands on her hips. "Act the way you did. I was just trying to talk to him and be friendly. You didn't have to jump all over him."

"What are you talking about?" she asked patiently. "I didn't jump on him."

"Please, you couldn't get your hands on him fast enough. I made him laugh, and you couldn't stand it! Is that really how things are going to be between us?" Lavender asked.

"Between us? Lavender, there's nothing between us," Hermione said. "We barely talk to each other and when we do, it's fine. I wasn't doing anything last night that was any different from what I usually do. Ron's my boyfriend. If I kiss him or get close to him, then trust that it has nothing to do with you."

Lavender moved closer to her. "Bollocks, but you're right about one thing. You are no different from how you've always been. I guess it doesn't matter if you're dating Ron or if I am. No one is allowed anywhere near him."

"Lavender, please, I'm nothing like that. I'm nothing like you," Hermione said as she felt her anger build. She tried her hardest to stay calm.

Lavender shook her head. "No, you're not. You're worse. I am who I am Hermione. I don't pretend to be someone else."

"Oh, that's rubbish and you know it! You put on a happy face every time Harry or Ron is around, but when it's just you and me this is what I get. All your smiling and secrets with Dean won't work. I'm on to you." Hermione knew right away that she had said too much.

Lavender's eyes widened. "Excuse me? What do you know about Dean and me?"

"Nothing at all but I'm not stupid. All of a sudden you're best friends with him? It's all a little too familiar, Lavender. Why can't you just leave Ron and I alone? We're happy. He loves me, and I love him. Let us be happy," Hermione said, almost pleading.

"I am leaving you alone. I'm doing my best here, but you won't even let me talk to him without acting like a bitch!" Lavender yelled.

Hermione couldn't believe what she was hearing. It was too much to simply ignore. "Oh, like someone I used to know! When you dated Ron I couldn't get anywhere near him without your lips finding his! Don't go there with me. Not when you did the same things you're accusing me of doing now!" She took a breath. "Lavender, what is this really about? What is your problem?"

Lavender glared and flipped her hair. "You are my problem, Hermione. You act like little miss perfect all the time, but I see you for who you really are. I'm the one with the secrets? Dean and me? What about you and Harry? What about the fact that you two are always whispering? It's been that way all year."

"Don't begin to analyze my friendship with Harry. You know nothing. You know absolutely nothing about anything," Hermione snapped.

"I know a lot more than you think I do. Dean and I are friends, you're right, and we do talk. We have a lot more in common than I could ever imagine. I'm trying to be there for him like he's being here for me. Don't tell me about my friendships, either," Lavender warned.

"Fine. I'll stay out of your life if you stay out of mine. I was completely fine with the way we were. Let's just not talk to each other unless we have to. It's obvious that you're not mature enough to let things go," Hermione said.

Lavender gaped at her. "I'm not mature? Hermione, last night you were the one that snogged him silly because he was staring at me."

A pang hit her heart. "That's not true."

She smiled and flipped her hair again. "Oh, I think it is and you know it as well. Now, I have to know one thing. The shag, was that just for good measure? You know, make sure that the last thing on his mind was you? I thought it was rather bold of you to fuck him with me across the room."

Something snapped in her. Hermione's hand itched to connect to Lavender's face. She had to use every ounce of her decency not to jump on her. "I didn't shag Ron so he wouldn't think about you. You must have me mixed up with yourself. I know that you constantly had to remind him of how big your breasts were, or how many different ways you could suck the skin of his neck so he would keep my face out of his head. Never worked though, did it? Just face it, Lavender; it's never been about you. That's why you can't let this go."

All the color in Lavender's face faded. Her eyes watered a little and her chest heaved. Hermione knew that she had her, but she didn't feel good about it. Lavender roughly pushed past her and yanked the door open. "You know what, Hermione, for someone so smart you're incredibly blind. You couldn't begin to figure me out or what I'm capable of."

"Are you threatening me?" Hermione asked.

"I don't make threats," Lavender said before slamming the door behind her.

Hermione couldn't concentrate all morning. All her focus was on her argument with Lavender. She so tired of it all. Fighting about boys and sex was something that she never thought she'd have to do. Fighting about Ron's loyalty was something that she thought she'd never have to do either. Lavender had no idea what she was talking about. By the end of the day, she was beyond distracted and frustrated. Ron kept asking what was wrong with her, but she shook it off. She wasn't sure herself. Lavender's words were no worse than usual, but the way she said them hit her in a different way. What was worse was that there might have been some truth to them.

"Hermione, are you okay?" Ron asked during dinner that night.

She looked up from her chicken. "Yes, I'm fine. Just a little tired."

He rubbed her back and frowned. "It's more than that. What's wrong? I won't stop asking until you tell me."

Before she could even begin to think of something to say, McGonagall walked over to their table. "Ms. Granger, Mr. Weasley, I need you to gather all the Gryffindors, fifth through seventh year, and have them meet in the Common Room, now."

Hermione's eyes widened as the sternness in her voice worried her. "Is something wrong?"

McGonagall gave her a firm expression. "I will address everyone together." She walked off without another word.

Hermione looked to Ron, and he shook his head. "I have no idea."

"Whatever it is, she's obviously furious about it," Ginny said quietly.

"Great. A furious McGonagall is all we need," Harry added.

Hermione felt a pit in her stomach grow. She nudged Ron. "Come on." He sighed deeply and got up. They went down their table and directed the attention of the students. They led them out of the hall and to their Common Room. McGonagall was already inside near the fire. Hermione noticed Lavender and Dean already in the room. They stood near the back. "Professor, we got all the students that we could find," Hermione said.

"Thank you, Ms. Granger. Prefects, please come to the front. All the other students, make room and keep quiet," Professor McGonagall ordered. Hermione saw Ron give Harry a look before joining her with the other Prefects. She pressed her hands together. She had no idea what to expect.

McGonagall raised her hands to signal for them to get quiet. The noise cut off straight away. "I'll get right to it. One, not

everyone in this room is guilty of this act, but I think that as the upperclassmen everyone in this room needs to hear this. Two, I want to make the rule clearer than it has apparently been in the past," McGonagall took a second to catch her breath. "Now, it has come to my attention that there has been co-ed sleeping arrangements in the Gryffindor house. Many female students have been leaving their rooms at night to join the males in their rooms." Hermione tried to look shocked. She tried to seem hardhearted. She hoped her face wasn't blushing.

A student raised her hand. "But Professor McGonagall, we're allowed to talk to the boys in their rooms, right?"

"Yes, Ms. Bunton. Female students are allowed to visit the rooms of their fellow male classmates but under no circumstance are they allowed to sleep in the same room and worse, in the same bed as their male classmates. You all are at an age where I don't need to explain why this is against policy. It's not only a health violation, but a safety violation as well." McGonagall seemed to eye every single one of them.

The seventh year boy that Hermione and Ron always caught with his girlfriend raised his hand. "Professor, who told and what does that mean now?"

"Mr. Grant, it is not the concern of you to know who told. The issue was brought to my attention as an anonymous tip. What happens now is that it ends tonight. There will be no more co-ed sleeping. There will be no more sneaking around at night. The women of this house will return to their dormitories at a decent hour, and there will certainly not be any other students from other houses joining our quarters just as you are not to leave yours," McGonagall ordered. Hermione noticed Neville's shoulders deflate a little, and Seamus rolled his eyes.

"Furthermore, because this is an extreme offense that directly breaks Hogwarts code of conduct, any student found disobeying this policy will be severely punished and if need be, expelled. This school will not tolerate this kind of behavior, and I will certainly not tolerate it in my own house," McGonagall said. She then looked toward the Prefects. "As Prefects it is your duty to make sure these situations are accounted for. It is your job to bring these acts to my attention and to help regulate misbehavior." She then addressed the students again. "If an activity is brought to my attention again or I simply feel as if my message was not clear, then I will have the sixth and seventh year Prefects conduct room checks. I'd like to think that you could be treated as adults at this stage in your life. I know there are more important things that we could all be doing. You're dismissed."

Hermione didn't want to move as the students grumbled and slowly made their way back to the Great Hall and to their rooms. McGonagall stayed near the front. She looked at them again. "I'd like to think that members of our Hogwarts Elite were not involved, but if any of you are, stop the behavior immediately. You're supposed to set an example. If I catch any of you, your badge will immediately be taken."

She started to walk away and Hermione's legs finally unfroze. She gasped and caught up to her. "Professor McGonagall."

She turned around, still looking stern. "Yes, Ms. Granger?"

Hermione didn't like the tone in her voice. She didn't like the look of disappointment in her eyes either. "I'm so sorry that this has been happening. I can assure you that I'll stay on top of it. It won't happen again."

McGonagall didn't give her usual small smile. "I hope you will, Hermione. I also hope that you are not engaging in this behavior with Mr. Weasley. You've always been someone I thought could lead the other students."

Her eyes burned a little. "I-I can lead the other students."

"I hope so, Ms. Granger. I really do," McGonagall said before turning away and walking out of the hole. Hermione stood and looked after her. She knew that McGonagall didn't believe her. Once again, she had disappointed her. She bit her lip and swallowed her grief.

Ron, Harry, and Ginny came over to her. "What was that about?" Harry asked.

She shook her head. "Nothing. I just asked her if anyone in particular was in trouble. She doesn't have any names."

"I want to know who was the wanker that told," Ginny said with a glare, folding her arms over her chest. Hermione looked at them but couldn't find anything to say. Ron gave her a concerned look. Their eyes connected and she tried to convey her unknown feelings.

He must have understood. "Hey, why don't you two see what you can find out from Seamus? He usually knows everything. Hermione and I will ask some of the other Prefects, yeah?"

"Okay, see you back in the room," Harry said.

"If Hermione and I are even allowed there," Ginny breathed.

When they were out of sight Hermione finally let her breath out. "Thank you."

"Yeah, come sit," he said, pulling her to the love seat. "Did McGonagall yell at you?"

"No, but she's really disappointed in me. I can tell," Hermione said.

He rubbed her arm. "No, she's not. Besides, it's on all of us. Not just you. Fucking hell, that was some meeting, yeah?"

"Yes, it was." She looked at him and saw the humor in his expression. For once she didn't like it. "What could possibly be funny?"

"Well, it's not that it's funny. It's just thatâ€¦well; it will be a bit rich for us to tell anyone that they can't sleep in another room," he said.

Hermione looked around as if McGonagall had an extended ear in the room. "Exactly. I thought that we would get in trouble or that our friends would. This is a mess." She ran her fingers through her hair and tried not to feel angry and overwhelmed at everything that was happening. Ron's hand moved to her back. He kneaded his fingertips up her spine and moved them back down again. It felt good but it didn't relieve her. She moved away from his touch. "Maybe you shouldn't do that."

"Why?" he asked, looking a bit put out.

She stared at him incredulously. "Did you forget what just happened?"

He rolled his eyes. "She didn't say that we couldn't touch each other. You won't get expelled because I massaged your back."

"I'm aware of that, Ron, but I really don't want to test her," she said.

"But she's not even here," he said.

"It doesn't matter! She knows, Ron. She has to know that we let people sleep together, and she probably knows that you and I do it as well," she urged.

"But how would she know? There's no proof that she knows anything," he said.

"Are you mad? We just had a meeting, Ron," Hermione said.

"That's my point. Why did she bring this up now? In all the years we've been here, we've never had a meeting about this, but it's always happened. Even this year and with the number of times it has happened, there's been no word," he explained. "I wonder why now is the time to lecture us? How did she catch on? It makes me think that maybe she's just pulling things out her arse to scare us. Everyone has been couply lately with the end of term drawing near."

Hermione saw the logic in his statement, but she didn't believe it. "I think it's more than that. Someone must have said something to her. That's why she picked now. Sure, she's probably had an idea but now she has proof."

"What proof?" he asked. "How does she know anything?"

She couldn't keep her words back. It was eating away at her. "Because someone told her that students are sleeping together."



He shook his head. "But that's where it doesn't make sense. Who would ever want to tell? Almost everyone sneaks around to be with their boyfriend or girlfriend. It's not something that even people like Percy cared about reporting. He did it, too, so who cares?" Ron asked.

Once again, the words were at her lips, and she tried to find a way to say them nicely. "Oh, I don't know. Maybe it's someone who would have something to gain from keeping boyfriend and girlfriends apart. Someone who doesn't want people to be happy," Hermione said dryly.

He raised an eyebrow. "Does that mean that you have someone in mind?"

She kept her eyes on him and chose her words carefully. "I got into an argument with Lavender this morning."

"Hermione," he began.

"We exchanged some words and I know that I really made her angry," she continued.

"So what?" he said.

"Soâ€¦maybe she told," Hermione said.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Just because you two argued doesn't mean anything."

"It was more than just a small argument. It was pretty nasty. She said some things and so did I," she explained.

His touched her knee. "Are you okay? Did she really upset you?"

"No," Hermione lied, "but I think I really upset her. I might haveâ€¦made her cry."

He rubbed his neck. "Really? Um, that's too bad."

"We were arguing about you," Hermione said softly.

He shut his eyes tightly and sighed. "Of course."

Hermione didn't know why she felt so ashamed of herself. "She wasn't happy with the things I said about you and me being together, and I didn't take her usual raid of false beliefs. The entire thing was about you, and it was horrible."

He blushed. "Why are you telling me this? I know thatâ€¦weâ€¦I'm a subject for you two."

"You're the only subject between Lavender and I, Ron. Can't you see where I'm going with this?" she asked.

He shook his head and shrugged. "Not really."

She sighed. "Don't you think it's suspicious that Lavender and I had a fight about you, and then tonight McGonagall brings up boys and girls sharing a bed? Ron, I sleep with you all the time."

"So," he said dully, "that doesn't mean anything."

"Sweetheart, open your eyes. It's just like last time. Every year we've sat next to each other in McGonagall's class and we flirted and talked. This year, the moment you and I start dating, she comes over and says that someone told her that we're a disturbance."

"It's all suspicion," he urged.

"Ron," she pressed, "Lavender knows that we had sex in your bed last night."

His entire face and neck turned a horrible red. "How-how, I mean, were weâ€¦!"

"No, she didn't hear or see anything but she knew. It was rather obvious, I think," Hermione added.

He rubbed his eyes roughly and groaned. "Why? Why are we even talking about this? Why does it matter if she knew?"

"Because, Ron, this morning we argued about it. She got really jealous; I know she did. Next thing I know, McGonagall wants us to start checking rooms? That directly affects you and me, again. Something always seems to directly affect us after Lavender gets upset." She thought that her case was solid, but the expression on Ron's face made her heart sink. He didn't agree with her.

"Hermione, I can understand why you think this but it all seems a bit much. You really think that Lavender told McGonagall you're sleeping in my room? Why wouldn't she just come straight to you and me if she knew?" he asked.

"Well, she obviously didn't say our names. Lavender may act dim, but she's not completely. She probably made a general statement to cover her tracks," Hermione explained.

He frowned. "I-I don't think so."

"Why not? Why is it so hard to believe? Do you honestly think that much of Lavender? You don't think she's capable of doing this? When did she become so great to you?" Hermione asked. She was gob smacked. It was almost as if he was taking Lavender's side.

"It's not like that, Hermione. I dated her remember? I know exactly what she's like. So, maybe she is capable of doing this, but it doesn't make sense for her to. I'm not saying that she's not barmy, but...she and I are sort of friends. More now than we were when we dated. I just don't see her doing that to me," Ron said.

"Well, if it makes you feel any better, I don't think she's doing it to you. It's her only way of getting at me," she said. "I bet she and Dean thought of this and executed it together."

His eyes grew. "Oh, so now it's Lavender and Dean. Hermione, please, Lavender didn't tell McGonagall that we're sleeping together and neither did Dean. I'm sorry."

She didn't know what to say. She didn't expect this sort of reaction from him. "I can't believe this. So suddenly Lavender is a saint?"

"No. In fact, I reckon you could be right about her telling McGonagall about us in class. I agree with that, but she wouldn't tell her about us sleeping together. There's no way she and Dean would," he said.

"Why? How are you so sure?" Hermione asked.

"Because I don't think she's mad at you enough to spoil it for everyone, and I don't think Dean is mad at Harry enough. Parvati sneaks out to see Blaise, and Hannah comes to our room as well," he said. "I don't see her or him telling just to get you or Harry in trouble. If Lavender told, then she would have to risk getting her best mate in trouble, and if Dean told, he'd risk getting Seamus caught. It's just like in chess. It would be impasse for either of them."

Hermione didn't know what to say. She was annoyed because she thought her theory was correct, but Ron's tactical skill and judgment rode against her. She knew she was right, but Ron made her feel stupid about it. "Well maybe"

Ron took her wrists and brought her close. "Hermione, if you honestly want to find out who told, then I'm more than willing to help you find the sod. However, jumping straight to Lavender just because you two fought isn't the best idea. You want everything to go back to Lavender so badly. It's really starting to get to you. I can see it."

"It's not getting to me, Ron. I know what I see and-and I can't help it if you choose not to," she said.

His let go of her hands. "So, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to talk to her and see what's going on?"

"I don't need you to fight my battles for me, Ron," she said. "You don't have to talk to her."

"Then what the hell do you want?" he asked sharply.

"Why are you getting upset with me? I'm telling you how I feel and what I know," she said.

"And so am I. I'm telling you that I don't think it's Lavender, and you're making me feel like a dick because of it," he said.

"Well, you're making me feel pretty awful as well. She makes me uneasy, Ron. I'm sorry if it interrupts the relationship that you're trying to form between the three of us. I'm trying but I can't ignore my feelings," she said.

"Hermione, I know she upsets you. I'm not a knob, and it gets to me, too. I hate that she makes you this anxious, and but what can we do? What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said honestly. "I justâ€¦I want you to be on my side."

"I am on your side," he said softly. "You always forget that. You forget everything."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well, I'd like to think that we had a pretty amazing time last night," he said with a small smile.

She smiled a bit herself. "Yes, we did."

"And our date? It was incredible," he added.

"I know. I haven't forgotten," she said.

His smile vanished. "It seems like you have. Sometimes, it's like everything great about us you just forget."

"What would make you think that?" she asked in shock. "I don't forget anything. It's our times together that I hold on to the tightest. It's why I'm fighting this whole thing, Ron. To protect what we have."

"If you enjoy what we have, then why can't it be enough for you to let things go?" he asked.

"Ron, you know how I am. I can't just block out everything," she said, feeling inadequate.

"I'm not asking you to block out everything, but you forget what's important the moment something unimportant gets in the way," he said.

"I-I don't understand," she said quietly.

He sat back against the cushion. "You don't think I'm on your side because of this one disagreement, and you have no idea how that makes me feel. Hermione, we're happy together. It's taken us years to get to this point."

"I know it has, Ron. I'm in this relationship, too," she said.

"Then why can't you just live in that and the fact that I love you more than anything else?" he asked. "Why can't you think about us spending the day together or me making love to you when you get worked up like this? I do it all the time. Whenever I feel like shit or I'm upset about something, I think about you

and it makes me better. It helps me forget all the other bullshit."

Her eyes glistened a little. She was touched and torn at the same time. "I do think about all that, Ron. You can't say these things to me. I care, you know I do."

He shook his head. "You always want to put so much on your shoulders. I know you have a million thoughts going on in that head of yours and you need to process every bit of it, but why, for once, can't you just take a break? It's like you can't be satisfied with us being happy. Every single little thing has to be perfect or you can't function. Why can't I be enough to make you want to enjoy yourself, even for a little while?"

"Ron," she said in a shaky voice, "you are enough. You're everything to me. That's not what this is about. Where is this coming from?"

He looked away toward the fire and rubbed his hands into his knees. "I'll talk to her, okay?"

"Ron, I don't want you to talk to her. I want you to answer me," she said.

He turned back to her. He stared at her in a commanding and tragic way that she had never seen before. She forgot how to breathe. He leaned forward and pressed his lips softly against hers. There was something strong and new about the kiss that made her heart race. She kissed his back and swallowed the lump in her throat. They held there for days it seemed. Ron placed his hand on the back of her neck and pressed his mouth to hers harder. Hermione slightly parted her lips and the moment their breaths and moistures connected, she gave a strangled whimper and he moaned. Every part of her was on fire, and her entire body tingled. She slowly moved her tongue and it linked to his.

She faintly gave a choked cry, and he stagger breathed as their tongues slowly licked each other's and slid up and below one another. Her hand found its way to his thigh and she gripped it. The kiss was so powerful that it was almost overwhelming. It scared her a little because she didn't know what it meant. He slowly pulled away and kissed her upper lip before fully parting from her. It wasn't until she opened her eyes and saw how flushed and out of breath he was, that she noticed her own back was slightly damp and her chest heaved.

He put his forehead to hers and traced her mouth. "Why can't I be enough for you, Mione?"

She didn't know what to say. "I-I'm sorry."

"I think I'm just gonna go to bed," he said. All she could do was nod. He gave her knee a squeeze before getting up and walking away. She couldn't even look after him. She was too confused.

Later that night, Hermione tried her hardest to get to sleep but all she could think about was her kiss with Ron and everything

that came with it. She got up, slipped on her robe, and walked downstairs. Interestingly enough, Harry was already on the couch. She cleared her throat.

He looked up at her and smiled. "Can't sleep?" She sighed and sat next to him. They both stared into the fire and silence. It felt just like old times. Hermione knew that they both had things on their mind that they were too afraid to say.

She decided not to be. "Lavender and I had a fight about Ron. I sort of bragged about sleeping with him, and she was furious. She threatened me, saying that I didn't know what she was capable of. Next thing I know, McGonagall has the meeting."

"You think she's her anonymous tip?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," she said strongly, ready to defend herself again.

"I wouldn't be surprised. She and Dean were already in the room when we had the meeting, and they were the first ones to sneak away," he said lowly.

She looked at him. He looked right back at her plainly, as if he believed every word of what he just said. "You...you agree me?"

"Of course I do," he said with a shrug. "She and Dean have been spending all their time together lately. I've had a feeling that they'd do something. I just didn't know it would be this. Why? Are you having doubts?"

"No, I agree with what you said. Ron doesn't. He thinks that I'm overreacting. He thinks that Lavender and Dean couldn't possibly be behind it. It would be an impasse for them." The more she talked, the larger the clog in her throat became. "He thinksâ€¦that I focus too much on all the bad things that go on, and I don't care about us and the good that we have."

"Hermione, you know Ron. He doesn't want this to get any more complicated than it already is. You're his girlfriend, and Lavender is his ex. He's in a complicated place. He's probably really does believe you, but doesn't want to show it. He shifts the focus off him when he's confused or worried. It doesn't mean anything," Harry explained.

She basked in his smile, and she let out a shaky breath. "Oh, Harry, you have no idea what hearing that means to me! I justâ€¦I just want to know that I'm not out of my mind about this. This whole thing with Lavender is just horrible." Her tears spilled down her cheeks and she sniffed.

Harry pulled his arms around her. "Hey, I know how you feel. It's why I always get so mental over Dean. It's them. It has to be. Something is going on but it has nothing to do with Ron or your feelings for him."

She buried her face against his chest. "But something is going on with him, Harry. I know it. He's keeping something from me."

Something isn't right, and I don't know why it all has to happen now."

"It's not happening now. Nothing is happening. I promise. We're going to end whatever it is," he said.

She pulled away and wiped her eyes. "How?"

"I don't know but I'm not going to let it ruin what you and Ron have, and I'm definitely not going to let it take Ginny from me. We'll be fine, I swear to you." He gripped her shoulders and looked her fiercely in the eye. There was strength and faith in his green eyes that she couldn't fight against or disbelieve. It was the same look that he had given her year after year when things got rough. It was his Harry Potter expression, and she trusted it.

"I know you do. I swear it, too. I want this to be over," she said.

"It will be." He swiped away a tear that she had missed with his knuckle. "No offense, but you look awful."

She sniffed again and laughed a little. "Thanks. Anxiety makes me somewhat of an insomniac."

"You should try getting some sleep. We'll work it out, Hermione. Keep reminding yourself of that," he said.

Hermione tried to remember his words as she climbed back into the bed. She tried to clear her mind and tell herself that things were changing. She was finally able to get to sleep, but it wasn't peaceful. The next morning she woke up earlier than usual and quickly left her room a little. She went to Ron's room and knocked. She had to talk to him and clear the air about their talk.

Dean answered. "Hermione."

"Ron dressed?" she asked. She didn't have time for pleasantries with him.

"Yeah, but he left a few minutes ago. I think he might be downstairs." There was something in his eyes that she couldn't understand.

"Okay, thanks," she said slowly. She turned away and walked down the staircase. She saw Ron and Ginny on the couch, close and deep in conversation. She wanted to turn away, but her legs wouldn't move.

"I don't think I can keep this up anymore. I really thought that I could make it work, but I don't think I can," he said.

Ginny shook her head. "You can't force it, Ron. I know what that's like."

"It's justâ€¦last night when we talked, I just wanted to shout at her and make her stop," he said.

She rubbed his arm. "What did she say?"

He rolled his eyes. "What she always does. It's her fault. She makes her uncomfortable. She's not as nice as she claims to be. I'm so fucking tired of hearing it."

"I know you are, but we talked about this, Ron. You had to be prepared for this," Ginny said.

"I thought I was, but I think I fucked everything up last night. I did something really stupid," he said slowly.

"You didn't," Ginny's said softly. "It was one mistake. One lapse of judgment."

He shrugged and looked down. "I-"

"Ron, there you are," Hermione said, almost stumbling down the rest of the stairs. Ron and Ginny looked at her curiously.

"Hey," he said softly. Hermione tried her best to smile as she looked at the two Weasleys. She had never felt sicker being around them.

"Well," Ginny said slowly. She smiled at Ron. "I'll talk to you later." She kissed his cheek sweetly and ruffled his hair. "Morning Hermione."

"Good morning," she answered. She didn't want to resent her in any way. She didn't want to be mad at her friend for obviously hiding something from her.

"Are you just going to stand there?" Ron asked, smirking slightly.

She didn't know what to do. Too many thoughts ran in her mind as she thought about his conversation with Ginny. She didn't understand how he could be so casual when obviously he was upset with her, and was tired of her. Nevertheless, she took Ginny's place on the couch. "I'm surprised you're up this early."

"Yeah, me too. I couldn't really stay asleep. I was going to get a first breakfast, but Ginny was down here studying," he explained. Hermione nodded and didn't meet his eyes. "So, you were looking for me?"

"Yes. I just wanted to make sure you were okay and we were all right," she said. "You know, after last night."

"Yeah, I know. I'm okay," he mumbled, rubbing his neck. She held her breath and waited for him to divulge what he was going to tell Ginny about the night before and the lapse of judgment. "So, you want to get some food?"



Her jaw dropped a little. She didn't know rather to yell at him or walk away. She wouldn't jump to conclusions. She would trust that Ron would tell her. She had no reason to believe otherwise. "Um, sure. We can eat and talk if you want to."

"Good," he said, getting up.

"I just need to go to my room first. I'll be right back." She didn't wait for him to answer. She walked away from him and started up the stairs again. The hurt in her stomach grew with every step. She had no idea what was going on. Right as she touched the doorknob, it opened.

Lavender was on the other side. She smiled at her widely. "Hermione, I was hoping to run into you."

"Not now," Hermione said.

Lavender touched her shoulder for a second. "Wait. I don't want to fight. I want to apologize."

"You do?" Hermione asked, raising an eyebrow. "About what?" She wanted to ask if she felt guilty about telling McGonagall about her sleeping with Ron, but she wasn't ready to resort herself to such low standards yet.

Lavender chuckled a little. "What you do think? About our little drabble."

"It was hardly a drabble, Lavender. You threatened me," Hermione said.

"No, I didn't!" she said sharply. For a moment the fury in her eyes returned, but she flipped her hair and smiled again. "Anyway, I'm sorry about our fight and about what I said. I was out of line. I talked to Ron last night, and he really cleared up a lot for me."

"Wait, you talked to Ron last night?" Hermione asked. A terrible pang hit her heart.

"Yeah, I did. I guess he somehow ran into Parvati and she told me that he had wanted to speak to me. It was pretty late—anyway, we got a lot out and he made me realize what I was doing. You know Ronnie." Lavender twisted a piece of hair behind her ear and bit her lip. She even shivered.

"Lavender," Hermione said, trying to snap her back.

"Oh, right, sorry. So, I'll tell you what I told him. I thought me giving him the music box for your date would be enough to signal that I want to be friends. I could have easily said that I didn't know where it was, but I gave it to him. He's a sweetheart, but I guess it wasn't enough to make up for my other behavior. So, I'm really sorry Hermione. I'm happy for you and for Ron." She touched her arm again and bit her lip.

Hermione wanted to pull her arm away. It burned to feel her touch. "Well, thank you. I'm sorry, too."

"Oh, it's fine! I understand. I used to date Ron. I know how you feel. Well, see you later." Lavender smiled once more and opened the door for her. She patted her shoulder and walked down the staircase.

Hermione only stood and stared at the doorknob. She no longer needed to go in. She walked back to the Common Room. Ron was still on the couch staring off. "You ready?"

He smiled a little as he stood. "Yeah, starving." He held his hand out and she took it. He kissed her palm and winked like he always did. She tried to find comfort in it.

"So, you went straight to bed after we talked last night?" she asked. She just needed to confirm that Lavender had not been lying.

He rubbed his neck. "Yeah, I was really tired. I went right to sleep," he mumbled, not looking at her.

Hermione almost stopped walking. She watched him as they walked and his grip in her hand tightened. She didn't know what to think. Either Lavender was lying or Ron was. However, that wasn't her biggest concern. If Ron had seen Lavender, then maybe his lapse of judgment had to deal with her.

\*\*\* Oh my, my the mystery! What is everyone up to? What is wrong with Ron? What does Ginny know, and who bloody blabbed to McGonagall! All this and more will be relieved later! Haha. Thanks for reading and REVIEW if you want the next bit.

CHEERS!

CHAPTER 47

Thanks for the reviews! I hope everyone has a fun and safe holiday!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"I don't know how to answer this," Harry said, throwing down his quill. "Hey, did you get it?"

"Which one?" Ron asked.

Harry looked down his list of questions that Professor Trelawney had assigned them. "The one about seeing different colors when reading tea leaves."

"Oh right," Ron said slowly. "I put something about how it had to deal with the emotional state of the person reading the leaves. It could point to suicidal tendencies or homicidal tendencies or some sort of tendency that's cidal. I dunno. You know that if it's long and depressing, then she'll go for it."

"That's very true. Cheers," he said. After completing his answer, he put his work down to rest his eyes and hands. Ron was sitting on his bed, not doing his coursework. Instead, he was buffing the pieces of his glass chess set with a rag. Harry watched Ron handle each piece as if it was a precious stone. "Are you finished with everything?"

"Yeah. I just went down the line writing bollocks. Her class is the last worry on my list," Ron said.

Harry grinned. "You have a worry list now?"

He rolled his eyes. "Don't start. You know what I mean."

Harry eyed him and saw the bit of tiredness in his eyes and anxiousness in his expression. He had been acting strangely over the past few days, but he wouldn't say why. However, Harry had a good idea what his troubles were over. "How are you and Hermione doing?" It seemed so rare that he got to speak to Ron alone, and he needed to make sure that his mate was okay.

He picked up a knight and squeezed it in his hands. "We're fine," he answered, not looking at him.

Harry knew it wasn't that simple. The shit with McGonagall and Lavender was causing them major grief. Hermione had been much more foretelling about it. "Really? It doesn't seem that way."

Ron carefully put the piece back. "So, you know more about my relationship than I do?"

"No. I just know you and Hermione. Ron, I want to help. You two have been different these past few days and you especially. I just need to make sure you're all right," Harry said.

He sighed. "I know. I'm sorry." He got up from the bed and sat next to him. "I honestly don't know how we are, and it doesn't make sense. We were fine. We were perfect but nowâ€¦who knows."

"You have to keep talking to her," Harry said.

"I do talk to her. It's all I've been trying to do. It's just not the easiest thing to do sometimes. The situation with McGonagall has really shaken her up, and she's sort of in a state. She's so worried and upset with herself. Anytime McGonagall frowns Hermione takes it as a personal challenge," Ron explained.

"Of course she does. You know how she feels about her," Harry said.

"Yeah, I do, and it drives me mad. Hermione wants to impress her and make her so fucking proud and happy all the time, even if it takes all the energy out of her." He suddenly grinned and glanced back at his chess set. "Hermione has no idea that she's absolutely perfect just the way she is, and if McGonagall can't see it then she should piss off. No, Hermione has made it her mission to please her and McGonagall knows it. It's like she's purposely trying to stress her out."

"I don't think McGonagall has a vendetta. She cares about Hermione a lot, and I think that's why she treats her the way that she does. She pushes her the most because she believes in her the most. I understand that," Harry said.

"Well, I don't like the idea of anyone taking advantage of Hermione and her kindness." He rubbed his eyes and sighed. "She was gutted after that meeting, Harry. McGonagall really made her feel like rubbish, and she had no right. It's really mucked with her mind, and that look on Mione's face. She was so disappointed in herself. She still is. It tears me up to see her like that." He pressed his palms into his thighs and rubbed them up and down.

Harry knew that Ron didn't want to admit how hurt and angry he probably really was. He was protective of Hermione in every way, and he took her anguish personally. "It's probably a little more than just McGonagall that's making her like this, Ron," Harry said. Ron looked back at him, but Harry didn't say anything. He didn't have to. Sometimes he and Ron could speak with just their eyes.

He nodded. "I know what you mean. I reckon she told you her theory about Lavender?"

"Is that all you think it is?" Harry said. "Do you honestly not believe her?"

Ron rubbed his neck. "You make it sound so bad, just like Hermione did. It's not that simple, Harry. None of this is."

"I understand," Harry said.

"Do you really because I don't. I-I didn't think it would be this hard," he said quietly.

For some reason hearing him say that made a pang hit his chest. It was just like the night he and Hermione overheard Ron talking to Ginny. He had said the exact same thing in almost the exact same way. "What's hard, Ron?"

He shook his head. "This whole thing with Hermione and Lavender and my feelings."

Another pang hit him. "Your feelings for who?"

"Both of them," Ron mumbled.

Harry didn't know what to say. He couldn't understand what Ron was trying to tell him. "Ronâ€¦did something happen?"

He turned away from him again. He focused his attention on his shoes and nodded. "Yeah."

The confession was faint, but it impacted him greatly. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Not from Ron. "With Lavender?" Ron nodded again but still didn't look up. "Ron, look at me. What did you do?"

Ron finally met his eyes. "It's not what you think, Harry. It's nothing like what you're thinking."

"Then tell me. I'll listen, I promise," Harry said. There was a knock at door, and Ron immediately shot up and answered it.

Hermione came through. "Free period is over, boys. Get your stuff."

"How was class?" Ron asked, instantly looking a little better.

She exhaled lightly. "It was fine. How was your break?"

"Okay," he said. They smiled at each other, and Ron took her hand and held it tightly. "Do I get a kiss?"

"Did you do your work?" she asked.

"Yes," he said with a chuckle.

"Then I guess you do." She stood on her toes and gently kissed him. Harry was in awe. He could feel the barrier between his two best friends and he knew that they both had things that they were holding back, but even through it all, he could tell how much they loved each other. It inspired him and broke his heart at the same time. He got up and cleared his throat as he packed up his books. Hermione removed herself from Ron. "How was your time off, Harry?"

"Brilliant. I love to do coursework in my spare hour," he said with a grin. The three of them headed out and Harry gave Ron a look signaling that their conversation was far from over. However, Harry didn't get anymore out of him the entire day. Ron brushed it off and promised that he would tell him later. It was no easier talking to Hermione. She was quiet and more tuned to her work than ever before. He hated feeling so useless, but he didn't know what else to do. The only bright spot of his day was Ginny. Directly after the school day was over, he found her and his spirits lifted.

After dinner he and Ginny took a walk around the castle. He tried to enjoy it completely and not think about whatever it was that was going on with Ron. "You okay?" she asked.

Harry took his attention off the floor and looked at her. He smiled as her beauty helped to erase his worry. "Yeah, I'm fine. Long day."

"Urgh, I don't even want to talk about the school day. It's all doing my head in," she said. "Everything is running together these days."

He chuckled and wrapped his arm around her waist. He took in the fruity smell of her hair and the feeling of her warm body against him. He relaxed even more. "It won't be too much longer. Just remember that you'll never have to go through something like this again. Well, until NEWTs."

"Thanks, babe, you really know how to make a girl feel better," she said, stopping them and pulling away.

"There's no point in lying to you. I'll have to go through it next year," he said, putting his hands on her sides.

She sighed and frowned a little. "Yeah, then when I'm a seventh year who will rescue me from the library?"

"Hey, I can always use the cloak to sneak back here and rescue you. Don't worry." He put a hand to her cheek and rubbed it with his thumb. He didn't want to think about leaving Ginny behind at Hogwarts until he absolutely had to.

She shrugged. "I reckon Romilda Vane might be more broken up about it than me."

"Please, I'm sure she'll have someone new by then," Harry said.

Ginny placed a hand on her hip. "Right, because it's not like she wants her mouth permanently jinxed to your cock. You saw the way she ogled at you during dinner, and lunch, and breakfast, and anytime you're around."

He snorted. "Not really. I don't pay attention to her. She's barmy."

"She's also after you and president of your fan club. I'd watch out if I were you," she warned, pointing out her chin a little. She seemed entirely serious, and it surprised him.

"Hold on, do you feel threatened by her?" he asked. It was odd to see any sort of anxiousness or worry out of Ginny when it came other girls.

She blushed and hit his arm. "Of course I'm not. I'm not threatened by that tart."

"Oh, love, I'm flattered and touched. It's so sweet that you're bothered," he teased.

"Bothered by what? She's nothing," Ginny said. She hit him again. "Oh! You're a prat!"

He laughed and held her closely. "I'm just taking the piss. You know that I don't think about Romilda any more than you think about Colin. Don't worry."

"I'm not worried. It's justâ€¦you're you so I have to stay on top of your groupies. The girls need to remember their place," she said, resting her head against his chest.

He kissed the top of her head. "Hmm, and where is that?"

"As far away from you as possible," she muttered. "But most of them know that. They know I've got you."

He grinned against her hair. "That's right. I've got what I want right here. Right here." He held on to her as tightly as he could until he felt every part of her almost fuse to him.

She pulled away and shoved him a little. "You're still a prat."

He took her hand and laced their fingers. "I know. I really do think it's sweet though."

She gazed at him. "Well, I really think you're sweet." He smirked and ran a few fingers through her hair. He looked at her mouth, and the moment he saw her tongue lick her lips he leaned down a little and kissed her. She pressed her lips against his firmly and placed her hands on his shoulders. He pulled her around her waist and held her tightly again. The tips of her hair brushed against his knuckles and it felt good. Her mouth was warm and tasted sweet and wonderful.

He moaned and walked her forward until her back hit the wall. She wrapped her arms around his neck, and they snogged harder and faster. Every bad feeling that he had drained from him, and all he could feel was Ginny and everything amazing about her. Somehow she always managed to make him better. He broke away to catch his breath. "I love you," he said against her lips.

"I love you, too. I love you so much," she breathed as her tongue slipped back into his mouth. Harry took her hands and held them against the wall. He pushed into her and she groaned. "Harry," she gasped.

"Yeah?" he asked, kissing across her jaw.

"We're not exactly in private," she said.

"I know," he said, though he didn't honestly care. He kissed the soft, freckly skin on her neck and let go of her hands.

She moaned and pulled on his hair a little. "Anyone can walk by. Romilda might be right down the corridor."

He stopping nibbling on her and looked into her gorgeous brown eyes. "You want to give her something to ogle over?"

Her eyes widened and more color stained her fair cheeks. "Yes. What do you have in mind?"

He kissed her neck again and worked his way back up to her face. He kissed her jaw, her ear, and made it to her mouth once more. He licked her bottom lip before taking it between his. Ginny whimpered and squeezed his arse. He pressed himself against her and pushed up. He groaned and gripped her sides. His skin was on fire and pulses of pleasure coursed through him. Time slowed and eventually disappeared as they wrapped themselves in each other

She panted his name between kisses and pulled on his hair. She bit his upper lip as he pushed into her particularly hard. He loved her roughness, and he couldn't contain himself any longer. He wanted her too badly. He removed his right hand from her waist

put it down lower until he was under her skirt, and his hand was on her bare, steaming thigh. He clutched her leg and hoped that she understood. She nodded, kissing him deeper. He didn't bother looking around. He needed to touch her. Harry moved his hand higher until he reached the fabric of her knickers. The heat and dampness of her made him dizzy.

"Ginny," he muttered against her mouth.

"Yes," she hissed. He knew what she wanted, and he wasted no time giving it to her.

He pulled the cotton down and reached his hand in. Her warmth and wetness greeted him kindly, and he instantly moaned into her mouth. "You're amazing," he said as she slicked his fingers.

She bucked and hugged his neck as he rubbed. "Oh, oh god, Harry. Fucking love it when you touch me. Fucking love it," she whimpered against his ear. He put his mouth right at her earlobe and sucked on it as his fingers worked her firmly. He touched her everywhere and outlined her parts, juicing all of his fingers and using his fingertips to massage her flesh. It felt incredible.

Harry felt his heart beat out of his chest as she spread her legs and gave a muffled cry. She was trying her best to be quiet, and it turned him on even more. He rubbed her faster and harder. He felt her legs wobble, and the pounding of her heart vibrate against his chest. "Am I still a prat?" he asked with a smirk. His fingers were creamed, and he knew that she was moment away.

She opened her hazy eyes and sucked in air. She banged her head against the wall. "No, no, Harry, you're fucking incredible. Oh, I'm cum-oh, oh, y-yes!" She gave a choked cry as she tensed and came against his hand. She rocked her hips and dug her fingernails into his arms as she lost it. Harry watched her, almost in a trance, as she let go. Her skin flushed and glistened with sweat, and she bit on her lush bottom lip hard enough to draw blood. He didn't know how one person could be so fiery, and he didn't stop rubbing her until her body was limp and she whined at his every touch. He removed his hand and put his fingers to his lips. Ginny was out of breath and beautiful.

She twitched and crossed her legs. "You're bad."

"You started it," he said, licking her sex off him.

She gave him a once over and groaned. "Yeah, I'm going to finish it, too." She yanked him away, and Harry followed her in excitement to the Prefects' bathroom.

"After it's passed to you, you'd most likely kick it like this to get it in the net." Harry lightly kicked the quaffle over to Ginny.

She followed the quaffle and stopped it with the side of her foot. "And I can stop it however I want?"



"Basically," he said, finding her expression of perplexity both humorous and adorable.

"Hmm, I think I get it. Sounds like fun..." she said.

"Yeah, well, it's the most popular sport in the world. Almost everyone loves football," he explained. "It's a lot more exciting than how I'm explaining it."

Ginny shrugged and picked up the quaffle. "I hope so. Well, I think I'll stick to my broom for now."

"I figured you'd say something like that. Just like Ron. Come on, we better straighten up," Harry said. He and Ginny walked back to the practice tent and began to put away the equipment. It was supposed to be a one-on-one session with him and Katie Bell, but she was unable to get away from her studies. Harry didn't mind. Any extra time he got to spend with Ginny he savored. He glanced at her just as she kneeled to open the trunk. She caught his eye and smiled at him. He returned it. He could still feel her small, perfect body moving against his, and he could hear her faint whisperings of his name in his ear. It was magic. It was love. It was all he ever wanted. He wished that he had the words to tell her how much he cared for her but he didn't. It didn't matter. He would spend his entire life finding the right words if he had to.

"Can I ask you something?" she said as she closed the lid and sat on it.

"Sure," he answered.

Her face grew more serious, and she rubbed her palm over her knee. "Has Ron said anything to you lately about how he's doing?"

He was a little taken aback by her question. "Um, in regards to what?" He wasn't sure if she knew about whatever it was that had happened with Lavender, and he didn't want to betray Ron's trust again.

She shook her head and looked down. "Nothing I guess." It was one small gesture, but one that he knew very well. He had seen her do it before and had seen Ron do it many times.

"Ginny, you know something don't you? Do you know about whatever it is that's going on with him and Lavender and Hermione?" he asked. He hoped that he hadn't said too much, but when she simply shrugged and kept her eyes on the floor, he knew that she had information. Harry sat on the bench. "Come over here." She moved in silence and sat next to her. He tucked a long red strand behind her ear. "What's going on?"

"I don't know, Harry. He's got a lot on his mind, and he's worried about Hermione. When she's stressed out, it tends to stress him out," she said.

She had to know that it wasn't what he meant, so he decided to push it more. "And Hermione is worried about Ron and whatever secrets he's keeping from her."

Ginny raised an eyebrow. "Did she say that?"

"She doesn't have to. She's my best friend, and I know her. Although, we did have a conversation about what's going on or at least what she thinks is going on. She just wants to know where his head is and so do I. Yesterday, I think he was going to tell me about what happened, but he didn't get the chance. I reckon he told you about it, didn't he?" he said.

She looked at him for a while before nodding. "Yes, he did."

"Ginny--"

"Harry, whatever Ron tells me I keep to myself because he's trusts me. He's my brother, and we're going through a lot of the same things right now. I'm helping him through it, but it's not my place to tell. You don't have to worry. He didn't murder anyone," she said.

"You know that's not what I think. I'm just concerned. I don't want him and Hermione having problems because of something stupid Lavender has done or because of this thing with McGonagall," he said.

"Trust me, I don't either. I comforted Ron but I also told him not to be an idiot. He has to talk to Hermione and tell her what's going on, and I told him that he couldn't ignore whatever it is that's going on with Lavender. The girl is obviously up to something. I just don't want him in the same position that I'm in. It doesn't have to be that way." She massaged her brow.

Harry rubbed her back and tried not to feel irritated. He hated being in the dark about everything. He also hated that no matter what, the conversation somehow made its way back to Dean. "What about you? What do you think about all this?"

She groaned. "I think we all need a night off." She smiled and took his hand. "I'm also I'm glad that you and me are okay."

"Me too," he said softly. He put his forehead to hers, and she kissed him tenderly. He laced his other hand in hers and kissed her with everything that he had. As they snogged, he reminded himself that no matter what, he had Ginny to help him through it.

They walked back into the castle and to the Common Room not too much later. Ron and Hermione were playing chess in front of the fireplace. While Hermione was rigid and looked deep in concentration, Ron wore a smirk and rested back on his hands. "Your move, love."

"I know. Give me a minute," she said sharply, squinting at the pieces.

"I don't know why you're bothering. Ron never loses," Ginny said, flopping on the couch.

"Hush, I've almost got it," Hermione breathed. Harry sat next to Ginny and felt a little better. Whatever was going on between Ron and Hermione wasn't keeping them from each other. Nonetheless, he couldn't help but feel a little uneasy as well. Whatever Ron was hiding, he hid it well.

Almost like Ron could read his mind, he looked up at him. "What are you doing back so early? Shouldn't you be training Katie?"

"She couldn't make it. NEWTs are taking up a lot of her day. I spent the time trying to teach Ginny how to play football," he said.

He crinkled his nose. "I'll never understand it. Dean talked about this match he went to over the summer. I didn't get why he was so excited."

"It's probably because you're a pure-blooded wizard who knows absolutely nothing about Muggle life," Hermione said, finally making her move.

Ron rolled his eyes and grinned. "That's not true. I know all about guns and toasters." He moved his bishop. "Check."

Hermione groaned. "This is impossible!"

"I told you, no point," Ginny mumbled.

"It's okay, Hermione. Maybe someday I'll teach you my tricks," he said, tapping her knee with his foot and biting his lip.

Her body seemed to relax a little, and she even smiled. "You think it can be today?" She licked her lips and moved her hand up his calf.

"Err-I think you might have left something in my room, Ginny," Harry said, quickly getting up.

"Yeah, better go," she answered, getting up as well. "Bloody hell, get a room," she said as they passed by them.

They reached his door and Ginny laughed. "What?" he asked.

"It's mad really. No matter what's going on with them, it's like they still always want to snog each other or worse." She shivered.

"I told you. It's all a part of their system. Sometimes they're never more all over each other than when they're in a state," he explained with a shrug.

"That's...completely mental," she said.

"It's Ron and Hermione, so I reckon it works." He opened the door and was greeted by the sound of Lavender's giggle. She was sitting on Dean's bed, and he sat closely next to her. Harry didn't even mind. The two were always together now. They didn't turn to them or say hello like they usually did, but he certainly

didn't mind that either. He tugged on Ginny's finger, and they sat on his bed. He watched her expression and it hardened somewhat, but she didn't look at them. He knew that she was trying, and it was all he wanted. "You okay?" he asked quietly.

"Yeah, I'm fine," she rushed. "I'm just thinking about the work that I have to do. I promised Luna that I'd meet her in the library to study. I reckon I might head over there."

"Honestly?" he asked.

She gave him a look. "Honestly. I'm fine, Harry. I just hate studying."

"Okay, I understand," he said.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

Harry thought about it and glanced at Dean and Lavender. They were simply talking, and they both seemed to be in a good mood. He decided that it would be a nice opportunity to ease at least a fraction of the tension between him and Dean before the next match. They hadn't really talked at all lately, and he needed to know how his form was coming along. "I reckon I might take Dean to the tent. I still have it booked. What do you think?"

She snuck a glance at him. "Sounds great. Let me know how it goes."

"Yeah," he breathed. He stood and cleared his throat. "Dean?"

He stopped talking to Lavender and looked at him. "Yes?"

Harry didn't like how every word he said had to be premeditated. "Well, I was thinking since neither of us are that busy we should train today."

Dean shrugged. "Isn't it Katie's day?"

"Yes, but she couldn't get away from studying, so I'm going to reschedule her for your day and you can take her spot now," he explained.

Dean looked down as if he was considering it but shook his head. "Naw, I'm okay. I'll keep my day." Lavender giggled loudly but quickly put a hand over her mouth.

Harry counted in his head before speaking again. "No, seriously, you're taking her spot. I need to get everyone in, and it's not like you're doing anything important."

"Who are you to tell me when I am or am not doing something important? It's not my day," he said.

"That fact doesn't really matter anymore now, does it? I'm the captain, and if I say we're practicing then we are. Maybe you've forgotten who's in charge here," Harry said, feeling hot pressure pound in his head. He was trying extremely hard not to get upset,

but Dean was shredding through his patience. Harry didn't know what he was playing at, but he wouldn't take it.

Dean stood and walked closer to him. "Oh, I could never forget who's in charge. I know that you're the captain, and you get to make all the rules. I also know that you don't mind bending the rules to give people the day off. You let Ron miss a practice. So, why are you making me practice when I'm not even scheduled? It's not fair to play favorites, believe it or not."

"Dean, come on. You don't have to be an arse. You should respect Harry as the leader of our team," Ginny said, getting up as well.

"Ginny, I can handle this," Harry said. The last thing he needed was her temper mixing with his own.

"Yeah, Ginny, Harry was just about to explain to me why it's okay for Ron to skive and why it's okay for Katie to be reschedule, but apparently the whole world will come to an end if I go on my scheduled day instead of whatever day Harry pulls out of a hat," Dean said.

"You sound really childish right now. I wish you would listen to yourself," Ginny said.

"I am listening to myself. For the first time I'm doing and saying whatever I want to, just like you two do all the time. I'm sorry, Harry. You're a great coach and I'll come when I'm scheduled, but I'm not going to jump whenever you tell me to like everyone does." He looked at Ginny. "And I'd appreciated it if you didn't try to tell me what to do. I don't owe you a damn thing."

"Don't ever talk to her that way. She's just trying to help. Whatever your problem is, you can take it up with me," Harry said, moving closer as well. The wall that was keeping his anger back slowly crumbled, and all he could feel was the raw emotion that he had carried on his back all year.

"I don't have a problem. You're obviously the one who can't take someone saying no to you. Just get out of my face," Dean said.

His cheeks heated up, and his mind drained of intelligent things to say. "If you think that I'm just going to brush off your disrespect and continue to—"

"What? Are you really going to kick me off the team? Is that the best you can do?" Dean asked, almost like he was challenging him. He took another step closer, and Harry mimicked his movement.

"Guys, stop it! This is stupid. Why are we even arguing right now?" Ginny asked.

"We aren't doing anything, Ginny. Harry and I are talking here," Dean said.

"Bollocks. You're acting like a prick. That's what's going on," Harry said.

"Dean," Lavender said quietly, taking his hand. He pulled it away and kept his eyes on Harry. Harry stared right back at him. He wasn't going to back down, not this time.

"Harry, get away from me, okay? You both just need to leave me alone," Dean said.

"Us? What about you leaving us alone?" Harry asked.

Dean rolled his eyes. "Fuck off, Harry. You don't know what you're talking about."

"Why do you want me to fuck off, Dean? Doesn't feel too good, does it? Does it get under your skin when it feels like there's someone who just won't let you be fucking happy, huh?" he asked. He didn't know where his filter was. Everything was on his sleeves, and he spoke without boarders. All the self-control and tolerance he had built over the years seemed so far away from him.

"Harry, let's just go. Dean can sit out the game against Slytherin if he wants to," Ginny said in his ear. "Please," she said softer. Against Harry's better judgment, he turned away from Dean and looked at her. He nodded.

Dean snorted. "Sorted. Glad to know everyone is in their proper place again." The final brick that held his wall together fell to the ground. Harry lunged himself at Dean.

"Harry, no!" Ginny said, yanking his arm back and standing in between him and Dean. "Stop it!" She put her hands against his chest, and Dean glared right at him, motionless.

"Fuck you, Dean. I'm fucking done with trying to be nice and trying to forget all your shit!" Harry said.

"Oh, really? This whole time you were being nice? Wow, I'd hate to see what you're like when you're a backstabbing wanker," Dean said.

Harry growled and opened his mouth, but suddenly strong hands gripped his arms and pulled him back. He yanked away and turned around. Ron was behind him with his eyebrows raised. Hermione stood near his bed with wide eyes, and Lavender was at the door with a hand over his mouth.

"What in the bloody hell is going on here?" Ron asked.

Ginny moved away from Dean. "Nothing."

"That's bullshit," Ron said.

"Ron, this isn't our business," Hermione said softly.

"Bleeding yes it is. Ginny, Harry, what's going on?" he asked again.

"What? You're not going to ask me?" Dean asked.

Ron looked at him and crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't know if I want to hear what you have to say."

"Everyone, please, can we please not don't this! I'm sure that whatever is going on can be handled civilly," Hermione said. She clutched Harry's bedpost as if it was the only thing keeping her standing. "We don't have to fight all the time. The six of us can be decent to each other."

Harry stared at Hermione and saw the fear and anxiety in her expression. There was so much weight and fire between all of them. All year secrets and unspoken feelings had plagued them, and he felt an overwhelming sense of guilt. It angered him. No matter how hard he tried to defeat it, guilt was also close by. He tried his best to shake off the fury. "What is this really about, Dean? It's a practice." He strained his voice so extremely to sound calm that it quivered a bit.

"No, it's not," Dean said. His voice wasn't loud, but Harry could hear the vehemence behind it. "It's not even about Quidditch. It's about you once again needing to prove how great you are. How you can get people to do whatever you say, whenever you want."

"That's not true! You weren't doing anything. I asked for that exact reason," Harry said.

"Yes, I was doing something! I was sitting here with Lavender having a good time. If Ron had been here with Hermione you wouldn't have bothered him, and if anyone else on the team would have been with someone you wouldn't have asked." He stopped talking and let out a shaky breath. "But because it's me you think you can step in and tell me what to do. You have stand up and prove to Ginny that your dick is evidently bigger than mine."

"Dean!" Ginny yelled.

Harry could hear Ron make a move behind him, but he got there first. "That's shit! I have nothing to prove and no need to." The only person who was going to fight his battles for him was himself. He and Dean locked eyes and everything else disappeared. Finally, Harry knew that they were going to be honest with each other.

"Really? Doesn't seem that way," Dean spat. "It's like being a traitor wasn't good enough for you. You have to rub it in my face every chance you get."

"Traitor? I'm a traitor? How the fuck did I betray you?" Harry asked.

"You're not seriously asking that are you?" Dean asked, his eyes darting to Ginny.

She caught his look. "Dean, you have to stop it. I'm sorry. I'm really fucking sorry. What else do you want from me?"

Hearing her apologize to Dean scorched his blood. It wasn't right. "You don't have to apologize to him, Ginny."

"Harry," she said softly.

"No, he's right," Dean said. "Merlin knows that he doesn't give a shit. You shouldn't either." He shook his head at Harry. "Some friend. You're the fakest person I've ever met, Harry. You charm people with your rubbish, but this is who you really are. You're a fucking prick. Chosen one my arse."

"All right you tosser, you better bloody take that back," Ron said, stepping toward him.

Hermione grabbed his arm. "Ron, stop it!" Ginny moved over and helped in the maneuver. There was too much going on. The hot pressure pounded against Harry's skull. He could hear his heart racing, and the echo thumped against his eardrums. He had taken Dean's insults, interruptions, and even his punches but there was no way that he could let him mock his life and everything that he questioned about himself. He glared at Dean, and hatred like he never felt before took over him.

"You know what, Dean?" he practically bellowed. "There was no betrayal. There never had to be. It was always going to be Ginny and me. Even over holiday it was Ginny and me. Don't you get it? She was never going to get back together with you. I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you that. I wasn't a traitor. You lost even before you started!" Ron stopped struggling and Hermione and Ginny let him go. Harry trembled with rage, and he kept his focus on Dean.

Dean's nostrils flared, and he bawled his fist. "What the fuck do you mean by that? You fucking liar!" He roared and pounced on him, but Harry was ready for him. He grabbed him by the shoulders as Dean attempted to punch his face.

"Harry!" Hermione cried.

"Oi, that's enough! Get off!" Ron said through gritted teeth. He firmly circled his hand around Harry's upper arm and yanked him away while pushing Dean back.

Harry was out of breath, and he kept pushing. "Let me go!"

"Just STOP IT!" Ginny screamed. Everyone turned to her. Her face was red, and her eyes were gigantic. "I've had enough of this!" She looked at Dean.

He shook his head. "What the hell is he talking about?" he asked, panting.

She let out an unsteady breath and looked around at everyone for a moment. Harry knew what she was going to say. Suddenly, his anger wasn't as apparent. "Ginny, don't."

"No, he should know. He should already know," she said, her voice breaking.



"Gin?" Dean asked gently, almost looking fearful. He touched her hand, but she slowly pulled it away and took a step back.

"Dean, he's right. I knew what my real feelings for Harry were and what I wanted when we broke up. Even before then I did." She let out another unstable breath. "I'm so sorry that I never told you, butâ€¦Harry and Iâ€¦we had sex over holiday."

Harry's heart dropped as she let the words out. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Hermione put a hand over her face. He wouldn't look behind him. He could feel Ron's stare on his back.

Dean's body seemed to wilt. His eyes softened, and he shook his head repeatedly. "You-you don't mean that. You can't be serious."

"I'm really sorry. I should have just told you, but I didn't want to hurt you anymore. I never wanted any of this to happen this way." She took a step toward him, but he backed up.

"No. You...that's not right." He swiftly looked at Harry. "You didn't." The bewilderment in his broken brown eyes was overpowering.

"I'm sorry," Harry said sincerely. Dean opened his mouth several times as if he was trying to say something, but all he got out was a sharp, heavy breath. He bit his lip and walked toward the door.

"Dean," Ginny whispered. He didn't stop. He walked right past her and out the door.

"Wow," Lavender said quietly. Harry glanced at her, remembering that she was there. She clicked her teeth at him before walking out as well. "Dean!" she called.

Harry didn't know what he was supposed to do. His eyes pulled toward Ginny. She was staring at the door. "Ginny," he said lightly.

She turned to him. Her eyes were slightly glossy, and all the color in her face was gone. Harry could feel every ounce of her pain. He wanted to hold her and comfort her, but he his feet wouldn't budge. She moved her eyes from him and looked at Hermione then Ron. She quickly put her head down. "I'm sorry," she said to no one in particular. She wiped her eyes and ran from the room. When her body moved, his found sensation and he and moved as well. He went after her, but Ron grabbed his arm.

"Don't!" he said, snatching it away. He finally looked at him. He couldn't tell if Ron was more shocked or infuriated. Either way, it didn't matter. All that mattered was getting to Ginny. "Not now, okay. I need to find Ginny." Harry looked at him in an almost pleading way. Whatever was between them wasn't bigger than what was happening to her. Ron must have understood. He set his jaw and took a step back.

Harry ran out of the room and down the stairs. He had no idea where she was, and he let his body guide him. It didn't take long. As soon as he left the Common Room and practically jumped the staircase, he saw her mass of red hair flowing behind her as she paced down a corridor. "Ginny!" He ran faster and caught up to her. He touched her shoulder and she stopped. He turned her around and saw how wet and crinkled her face was. "I'm so sorry."

She sniffed loudly and rubbed her cheeks. "It just couldn't be stopped. It couldn't be left alone."

"Ginny," he started. He wasn't sure what he wanted to say. He had acted on impulse, and now his better judgment had finally caught up to him. He had no idea where to begin.

"I didn't want him to find out like that, Harry. Fucking hell, everyone was in the room, but I didn't know what else to do. I had to say something," she said. She backed up against the wall.

Harry leaned next to her. He couldn't believe that just the night before they had been in a similar position, happy and steamed with passion. "I know. I didn't mean to put you on the spot. I just lost it. I couldn't take it anymore."

"I know and now everyone knows. Dean, Ron, and bloody Lavender Brown knows what we did," Ginny said, her eyes growing a little more with every word.

He tried not to think about what Ron was saying and possibly planning back in their room. "Yeah, I know butâ€¦but Dean had to find out sooner or later. He was still holding to you Ginny, no matter what he said. Maybe this will finally be what he needs to move on." He knew that the words were shit, but he had to try to make the situation better. It helped that he actually thought there was some truth in his statement.

"You make it sound so easy, Harry," she said sharply. "You have no idea."

"I'm not saying that it's easy, and I think I do have an idea. I have to deal with this, too," he said. He couldn't believe that he still had to explain it to her. They were supposed to be on the same side. They were supposed to be over this conversation.

Her jaw dropped a little. "Oh, like you dealt with it a few minutes ago? Just yelling and saying the first things that came to your mind?"

"Look, I already apologized. I know that what I said wasn't fair to you, and I was wrong. I'm not saying what I did was right but- but it needed to be said. It was obvious that you weren't going to do it," he said. He didn't know what was wrong with him, or why she was upset with him. He was angry again, but it had nothing to do with Dean. It was because of Ginny.

"Maybe it's because I haven't figured out the right way to tell him, Harry. Sorry that I don't want to make things worse. Sorry that I don't want to cause anyone any more pain," she said.

He gawked at her, unsure of whom was standing in front of him. "Yeah, because it's all I apparently want to do, right? Ginny, I have done nothing but try to keep my mouth shut and let you deal with this. I wanted you to do this when you were ready, but it's more complicated than that. I'm just as much in this as you are. Why do you keep forgetting that?"

"I'm not forgetting anything!" she said in a raised voice. "I bloody know that you're apart of this. I see what it does to you and I feel terrible, but all I ask is that you keep yourself together so things like what happened upstairs don't occur. You couldn't do that."

He held up a hand and backed away from her a little. "Wait, are you saying that what happened is my fault?"

She rubbed her forehead. "I don't know. I don't know what I'm saying. No, maybe, I don't know."

"Ginny, how the hell is this my fault? I tried to be respectful. I asked him for a practice, and I tried to drop it but he kept pushing. He kept pushing me. Don't you remember that?" Harry was lost for words. Once again, everything was supposed to be up to him. He was supposed to have all the answers and have model behavior. Once again, he was supposed to be more than human.

She stomped her foot. "Of course I remember. I also remember you pushing and you yelling and you-"

"I don't believe this! It's not my fault that Dean is in love with you and can't let it go. It's not my responsibility to keep everything perfect between him and me. Fucking hell, Ginny, why do you always put it all on my shoulders? Why is it never his fault?" he asked.

"Harry, don't make it sound like that," she said breathlessly. "It is his fault. He acted like an asshole. I know. I'm not blaming you, but I expect you to understand and have some compassion."

A large gust of air disappeared from his lungs. Her words pierced him, but he couldn't back down. "Ginny, I have done nothing but understood and been compassionate. I've ignored his remarks and tried my best to be friendly. I've done everything you've asked me to do, even though I didn't always agree with it. I've tried to be the good one, and I've been bloody catering to Dean this whole time, even though it kills me."

"I don't ask you to cater to Dean," she said, shaking her head.

The truth grew in his throat, and he couldn't keep his lips together. He didn't even want to. "Yes, you do. Ever since we started dating we've treated him like another part of our relationship. Even when we said we wouldn't anymore we did. I pulled myself back so you could figure out what you needed."

"Then fucking hell, Harry! If it was so terrible, then why did you do it? Why didn't you say anything?" She ran her fingers through her hair and pulled at the strands a bit. "You make it sound like I put you through hell. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I love you, and I want to keep us together!" he practically shouted. "I want to make you happy, so it's bloody worth it. Don't you get it? I'll do anything that needs to be done no matter what I feel. I want us to work."

"You know that I want this to work, too," she said, looking straight into his eyes.

His body pulled towards her. A commanding energy radiated off her, and he wanted nothing more than to reach out for her. Ginny's power matched his, and he knew that she was the only girl who would ever match him. It made the current distance between them that much more painful. "Then why are you still doing this? Why are you still trying to win Dean back?"

Her bottom lip trembled. "I'm not trying to win Dean back. I'm with you, and I want to be with you. I just need to do the right thing for once. I really hurt him, and it matters to me. Don't make me feel bad for caring about him."

"I'm not trying to. I'm just trying to understand why we keep going in circles. I want to know why there obviously can't ever be a true relationship between you and me unless Dean is okay with everything." It felt incredible to say what he had been thinking for months. He was tired of feeling guilty.

"Harry, that's not fair. You know he really meant something to me," she said.

"Yeah, I do. I know he was your boyfriend. I know he was your first. I know he was there for you when I wasn't, but I'm here now. Doesn't it matter that I'm here now?" he asked. He honestly wanted to know. He needed to know if they were ever going to be able to move on, or if he would have to feel at fault his entire life because he wasn't always completely sure of what he wanted.

Ginny sniffed and held her stomach. "Yes, it matters. Of course it matters."

His breaths stung and his muscles felt as if they would deflate. "Then why can't we get past this? What is in our way, Ginny? I understand that this is hard for you. I don't want to hurt Dean either and I wish things could be different, but they simply can't. I think I can accept it and we can try to work through it together, but it won't amount to anything if you don't want to either."

"What are you saying?" she asked.

"I'm saying that I need to know what you want. What do you really want, and what do you need to happen? What it is, Ginny?" he asked. He gazed at her with his heart in his throat. He hoped she would say that she truly wanted him, and that all she

needed was for them to be okay for the rest to seem not so bad. He hoped that she would say that she loved him more than anything, and that she wasn't still hanging on to her feelings for Dean. However, Ginny didn't say anything. In fact, all she did was looked away. The gesture made his chest cave in. He knew what it meant. Obviously, their feelings weren't the same. They didn't match.

He ignored the horrible chill that froze his spine, and he swallowed the wad of disappointment. "Well, um, until you knowâ€¦maybe-maybe we shouldn't do this."

She shot her head up. "What?"

His hands shook terribly, so he put them in his pockets. He wasn't sure what he was saying, but something had to change. He couldn't put himself through it, and he couldn't make Ginny feel things that weren't there anymore. "I just mean thatâ€¦we can't keep doing this if we're both not totally sure of what we want. If you're notâ€¦sure."

She gasped and her eyes swelled with tears. "Areâ€¦are you breaking up with me?" Harry hated the sound of it. He didn't know what he was doing. He didn't want to break up with Ginny. Breaking up with her meant that he wouldn't have her. It meant that he would never feel completely whole. His relationship with her would only be another happiness that he would never be allowed to have. Leaving her was never something he thought he'd do. However, in a way, maybe he was. He wasn't sure of anything.

"I don't know. All I know is that we can't do this anymore. I love you so much and I'm ready to go through it all with you and for you, but-but if you're not then what we are we supposed to do? I can't force you to feel anything. I don't want to." The words cut him open. He felt guilty and selfish, but he simply couldn't take it anymore. He knew that he wasn't perfect, but at least he knew what he wanted. He didn't think that Ginny could say the same.

"Harry," she choked out.

He backed up more. He felt woozy and if he didn't leave now, then he would lose all nerve. He had to do something to help fix them and he would. Even if it shattered everything inside him, he would walk away from her to get her back to him. "I need to be alone right now."

"Harry," she sobbed, moving forward a little.

"I love you, and I'm sorry," he whispered before turning around and walking in the opposite direction. Part of him wished that she would catch up to him, and part of him didn't want her to. He looked back and he could see her figure hunched against the wall. He knew that she wasn't going to catch up to him.

So, Harry kept walking.

\*\*\*\* When I wrote this, I wrote it from a familiar place. The whole Harry/Ginny/Dean relationship is something very real and very alive. I just want to say that I love Harry, and I really feel for the bloke. I know that it's hard for him to do what's right for himself sometimes without feeling like it's wrong. I feel for Dean and Ginny as well. Nothing is ever cut completely clean, not when real relationships are complicated if real feelings are involved. And I want to end with saying that if this story has shown anything, it's that nothing is what it seemsâ€¦!

Oh! I want to give a shout out to a reader who was very adamant about me adding Romilda in somehow. That part was for you mate. ;) Thanks for reading and review for the next bit! What are Ron and Hermione doing upstairsâ€¦!.hmmâ€¦!.

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 48

Thank you all so much for the reviews!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Checkmate," Ron said.

Hermione's eyes roamed the chessboard. "What? Really? Where?" She had no idea that things had turned for her so quickly. She wondered where she'd been when he made all the necessary moves.

"Right here," he answered, pointing to her captured king.

"Ohâ€¦right." She put a fingertip to her temple and slowly rotated it. She wasn't usually so horrible at chess, but there was too much on her mind to give it her full attention. Then again, she was playing against Ron, and the bloke was a chess juggernaut. "Wow, this is incredible."

He chuckled and started to clear the set. "It's okay, Hermione. You lasted longer this time. It was a good match."

"No, not that. What's incredible is how expert you are at this game. You're a prodigy," she said in true admiration.

He shrugged. "Not really. I've just been playing almost all my life. I've learned a lot over the years."

"You don't have to be modest, sweetheart. I think it's wonderful. You're really smart, Ron," she said with a smile.

"I don't think being good at chess makes me really smart," he mumbled as his ears glowed pink.

"Chess doesn't make you smart, but it showcases your intelligence. It takes a lot of skill and patience and focus to play the way you do. You have it in you." Hermione knew that Ron didn't think very highly of his intellect, and it showed with his lack of effort with his academics. However, she didn't know why. It was obvious that he had so much more to give.

Ron gave her a sheepish expression. "Well, maybe, but I'll leave the brainy stuff to you. That's your thing. I'll stick to this."

"It's your choice, and I don't mind you sticking to this so much. How you are when you play chess is brilliant and inspiring in a way. Not to mention, it's completely attractive." She touched his leg again and rubbed his calf.

He shook his head as he moved closer to her. "I reckon you're the only girl in this entire castle who thinks chess players are sexy."

Hermione walked her fingers up Ron arm. "I'm also the only girl in this entire castle who gets to play against the sexiest and most talented chess player on a regular bases."

"Is that so?" he asked quietly, taking her hand right as it touched his shoulder. "Can I meet this talented and sexy female chess player that you're referring to? We might have a lot in common."

She hit his arm. "Ronald Weasley, that's vile!"

He looked at her in mock innocence and put his forehead against hers. "What? Oh, you weren't talking about some girl?"

"Don't make me hurt you. I'm not going to indulge you in your wicked little fantasy. You blokes all think the same thing. Well, let me tell you. That's one dream that will always only stay a dream, sorry." She pecked his lips and pulled away before he could kiss her back.

"Blimey. I reckon I'll have to find a new goal, but that's okay. I'm flattered that it was me you were talking about," he said, lacing their fingers together. "It's about time to show you some of my moves, if you still want to learn."

Hermione put a hand to his cheek and looked into his dazzling blue eyes. She could easily see the love in them, but she knew there was something else there as well. It was something that she couldn't understand because he was trying to hide it. Every moment she was with him, she wanted to ask about what was going on but decided against it. She didn't truly have proof that anything was going on, and she didn't want to make things worse if she was wrong. All she knew was that she wouldn't lose Ron again. "I do," she said.

He licked his lips. "First, there's this trick that I use." He gently pressed his lips to her jaw.

She instantly put her hands on his shoulders and closed her eyes. "Mmm, I think I get it."

"Then this," he said, moving down to her neck.

She gripped his shoulders as his warm breath and soft lips gave her goose bumps. She was completely stressed and devastated over

McGonagall's disappointment in her and everything with Ron and Lavender knotted her insides, but for a moment none of it existed. Feeling his mouth on her skin stopped time, and it felt so good. She would do anything to protect that mouth and the man connected to it. His hand went to her leg. He dragged his nails up and down her knee and tenderly kissed her neck. He did everything so lovingly, and she knew that he loved her. There was no reason to ever believe that he wasn't where he wanted to be. She was the only girl he thought about.

"This is what you want, isn't it?" Hermione suddenly asked. She hadn't meant to speak. The question was a faint whisper that had slithered to the back of her mind the day Lavender told her that she had talked to Ron. She knew it was irrational and brought on by stress, jealousy, and confusion. However, it had come out, and she actually did want to know. She knew the answer, but she needed to hear it at the same time.

He pulled away and opened his eyes. He gave her the same commanding and tragic expression. "Of course this is what I want. Why would you ever need to ask me?"

She needed to ask because he was evidently lying to her about something involving Lavender. She needed to ask because he was going to Ginny with all of his issues instead of her. She needed to ask because he had apparently done something stupid that mucked up everything. It hurt her to be unsure of his commitment, and it scared her even more. "Hermione," Ron said softly yet powerfully, "why are you asking me?"

She heard the bit of anger in his voice, but she had some of her own as well. If he was mad at her in any way for asking, then he needed to remember that in fact he was keeping secrets from her. She needed to get it off her chest. It was suffocating her. "Ron."

"Ronnie, I think you better come upstairs," Lavender said from behind her. Hermione turned to her. Lavender was a little flushed, and she stared at Ron as if she didn't even notice her there.

Ron gave Hermione a look before turning his attention to her. "Why?"

"It's Harry and Dean. They're arguing," she said, still not acknowledging her presence.

He slightly sighed and rolled his eyes. "They're always arguing, Lavender."

She bent down and put a hand on his shoulder. "This is different. They're really fighting. I think they might actually hit each other, and Ginny is in the room." Ron's expression changed and Lavender nodded. "That's right."

Hermione studied them and hated how her stomach churned. She couldn't even focus on the fact that Harry was in an awful situation. All she could think about was the fact that Lavender



was completely focused on Ron, with her hand on his shoulder. He didn't seem bothered by it at all. It was just like when they dated. Hermione had to watch while Lavender and Ron had a moment. "If you just came from there, then maybe you should go back and try to calm Dean down and bring him out of the room." She had to say something to break up the fog in her mind.

Lavender finally looked at her, and Ron moved his shoulder away. "I'm sorry, what?" she asked politely.

Hermione tried to control the troll in her stomach that desperately wanted out and contact with Lavender. She was so upset and for no clear reason. "I just don't see how Ron going upstairs will help. It might make things worse. Harry and Dean need to work through their issues without feeling like they have an audience. It will only add to the tension."

"Actually, if Ginny is up there, then I should go see what's going on. She may need me and if Harry and Dean are fighting, then I should break it up," Ron said, looking at Hermione almost uneasily.

"I completely agree, Ronnie," Lavender said, giving him a smile.

He didn't return it. He cleared his throat. "Come with me," he said, getting up.

"Don't worry, I am," Lavender answered, getting up as well. Hermione's heart panged and her stomach flipped again. She didn't know where she was.

Ron's cheeks stained red and his eyes widened. "Um, no, I was talking to Hermione."

"Ohâ€¦right," Lavender said, looking down.

"I'll come, Ron," Hermione said as she got up and headed toward the staircase. She should have figured that Ron was talking to her. There was no reason why he would need Lavender there and not her.

"Fucking hell, I really hope that they're not fighting. Ginny doesn't need this," Ron said as they made their way up the staircase. Hermione could hear Lavender's footsteps behind them, and she tried not to care.

"Harry also doesn't need this. Things have been great for him," Hermione said. She knew that Ron only had eyes for Ginny in situations like this, but Harry was his best friend and he needed him as well.

"Well, things haven't been that great for Dean, but he doesn't deserve this," Lavender said.

Hermione and Ron both looked back at her. "He's the last person on my mind right now," he said.

Lavender put a hand on her hip. "That's not very nice, Ron."

He moved down a step so that they were on the same level. "Who cares? If he's fucking with Ginny and Harry's relationship, then he's gonna answer to me and his feelings will be the last thing that I handle with respect. I shouldn't have to explain this to you. You know how I feel about my sister and my best mate, yeah?"

Lavender didn't seem bothered by his rudeness. In fact, her eyes softened and she twisted a strand of hair around her finger. "Yes, I do. I know how much you care." Her voice was airy and she grinned a little. Ron immediately looked away and dug his hands in his pockets. Hermione knew the face and gesture. He usually did it when he felt guilty about something. It terrified her so horribly that her knees started to shake. She didn't know what to do, and she was overcome with panic. She threw her arms around Ron and snogged him roughly. He tripped back and hit the stone wall. He groaned and she quickly pulled away.

"What was that for?" he asked in shock and a bit of amusement.

She opened her mouth but realized that she didn't know why. She felt embarrassment blotch her face and neck. She had acted childish and insecurely. She had kissed Ron for all the reasons Lavender had accused her of days before. Hermione peaked at her and saw her vague headshake. "No-no reason," she whispered. She was appalled with herself. She wasn't like the other girls. She couldn't be because she was smarter and had more dignity. She rushed up the rest of the stairs and opened the door to Ron's room.

"Fuck you, Dean. I'm fucking done with trying to be nice and trying to forget all your shit!" Harry said with a completely flushed face. He was pushing against Ginny's hands that were pressed to his chest.

"Oh, really? This whole time you were being nice? Wow, I'd hate to see what you're like when you're a backstabbing wanker," Dean said, looking equally livid. He was behind Ginny's back with his fists balled. Ginny looked devastated and almost frightened between them.

Harry growled and looked as if he was going to push against Ginny's hands even more, but Ron speedily ran over to them and pulled Harry away. Hermione stood near Harry's bed and tried to take in what she was seeing. She never actually believed that Harry and Dean would fight and especially in front of Ginny. Things had simply become too heavy for them. Harry snatched his arms away and turned to them. The three were so entangled in their own troubles that they obviously didn't realize that they came in.

"What in the bloody hell is going on here?" Ron demanded.

Ginny's shoulders slumped. She moved away from Dean and kept her eyes down. "Nothing." Her voice was so grave that Hermione was surprised that she was still standing.

Ron gave her a look. "That's bullshit."

Hermione glanced back at Lavender who was standing near the door before turning back to them. "Ron, this isn't our business," she said softly. Lavender didn't need to be in the room with them, and she knew that Harry and Ginny would never be able to work anything out with Ron there. He unknowingly added more pressure to them.

"Bleeding yes it is," Ron shot. "Ginny, Harry, what's going on?"

"What? You're not going to ask me?" Dean asked. There wasn't a hint of sarcasm in his voice. He honestly seemed a bit put out.

She wished that he hadn't had asked. Ron practically glared at him and crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't know if I want to hear what you have to say." She couldn't take Ron and Dean quarreling as well. Everyone was seconds away from fighting, and things would get worse and harder. Things would stack on top of all of them, and all the arguing and betrayal would crush them. She couldn't let it happen.

"Everyone, please, can we please not do this! I'm sure that whatever is going on can be handled civilly," she said, wanting to believe her words. She gazed between the six of them. It was eerie that they were all together. All year they had paired off in different ways. The six of them had so much history, and she could feel everyone's hidden words mix and cloud the room. It was overwhelming. She gripped the post on Harry's bed. All six of their lies and strong emotions were finally catching up to them. "We don't have to fight all the time. The six of us can be decent to each other."

She wanted it to be true. She wanted to believe that they all could get over their pains and frustrations. Each one of them had something that ate at his or her heart, and she couldn't help but feel as if it was all her fault. Her game with Harry had started it all, but she didn't know how to end it.

"What is this really about, Dean? It's a practice," Harry said in a shaky voice. Hermione could tell that he was trying to be civil, and she appreciated it. Things had to be so incredibly hard for him.

"No, it's not," Dean almost hissed. "It's not even about Quidditch. It's about you once again needing to prove how great you are. How you can get people to do whatever you say, whenever you want."

Harry gaped at him. "That's not true! You weren't doing anything. I asked for that exact reason." She had no idea what they were talking about, and she wasn't sure whom to believe. Both Dean and Harry seemed confident in their side. She should have been with them and not letting herself get caught up in silly nothings like unfaithfulness.

"Yes, I was doing something! I was sitting here with Lavender having a good time. If Ron had been here with Hermione you wouldn't have bothered him, and if anyone else on the team would

have been with someone you wouldn't have asked." Dean paused for a moment. "But because it's me you think you can step in and tell me what to do. You have stand up and prove to Ginny that your dick is evidently bigger than mine." Hermione clutched the bedpost harder and heard Lavender make a noise from behind her.

"Dean!" Ginny yelled. Her skin slowly paled more than it was naturally, and with each word she seemed to grow smaller. Hermione wanted to do something for her, but she was stuck. She saw Ron look fiercely at Dean as if he wanted to make possible move, but Harry stepped closer to him first. There was something small and hot in his eyes, and it worried her. For the most part Harry showed inspirational patience, but she had also seem the times when it was all too much, even for him.

"That's shit!" Harry shouted. "I have nothing to prove and no need to." Hermione looked to Ron. He was staring at Harry and Dean and seemed just as helpless as she felt. They were both on the outside looking in, and for the first time they were really seeing what was between Harry and Dean. She felt guilty for not doing more. She knew it was bad, but she never got a plain picture like she was now.

"Really? Doesn't seem that way," Dean spat. "It's like being a traitor wasn't good enough for you. You have to rub it in my face every chance you get."

"Traitor? I'm a traitor? How the fuck did I betray you?" Harry asked. Hermione thought it was unmistakable, and Dean seemed to as well.

He peeked at Ginny. "You're not seriously asking that are you?"

"Dean, you have to stop it. I'm sorry. I'm really fucking sorry. What else do you want from me?" she asked almost desperately. It hurt Hermione to hear and see her in such a state. It made her think about the night Ron had kissed her differently. The desperation and tragedy in his features was now in Ginny's. Thinking about it made her look at Ron. He was gazing at his sister, almost as if he felt everything she did.

"You don't have to apologize to him, Ginny." It was obvious that Harry was moved in a different way. His fury was easy to read.

"Harry," Ginny said softly.

"No, he's right," Dean quickly added. "Merlin knows that he doesn't give a shit. You shouldn't either." He shook his head at Harry. "Some friend. You're the fakest person I've ever met, Harry. You charm people with your rubbish, but this is who you really are. You're a fucking prick. Chosen one my arse." Hermione felt some of her own irritation grow. Dean knew how much the name affected Harry, and it was apparent that he was actively trying to make things worse.

Whatever restraint Ron had managed to find was lost. He started stepping toward Dean. "All right you tosser, you better bloody take that back."

Hermione found the energy to move. "Ron, stop it!" She couldn't let Ron hit Dean. She couldn't let another layer fold on them. Ginny rushed over and helped her to control him. Things were out of control.

"You know what, Dean?" Harry blasted so loudly that she jumped. The small, hot thing in Harry had grown into something bigger and blistering. She had never seen Harry so unlike himself before. It was almost like he was being possessed again. "There was no betrayal. There never had to be. It was always going to be Ginny and me. Even over holiday it was Ginny and me. Don't you get it? She was never going to get back together with you. I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you that. I wasn't a traitor. You lost even before you started!"

Ron stopped struggling, and Hermione felt it was safe to let him go. Harry shook in his rage, and she pleaded with her eyes for him not to go any further. He couldn't let it out. Not now.

Dean bawled his fist. "What the fuck do you mean by that? You fucking liar!" He growled and threw himself at Harry. Harry didn't seem at all surprised. He took him by the shoulder right as Dean swung his fist at his face.

Hermione had to do something. If they fought, then it would all be over. Things had to go back to how they were. They had to stop hurting each other. "Harry!" she cried. She didn't know what to do, but she had to do something.

She turned to Ron for help but saw that it wasn't necessary. "Oi, that's enough! Get off!" He wrenched Harry away and pushed Dean away at the same time. He put himself in between them and used his might to keep them from getting at each other. Hermione was so thankful that he was there. He was all her strength at the moment.

Harry tried to get away from Ron's grasp. "Let me go!"

"Just STOP IT!" Ginny cried. Her voice echoed around the room and got all of their attention. Her large brown eyes almost took over her entire face, and she was beet red. "I've had enough of this!" She focused her attention on Dean.

He looked right back at her and slightly shook his head. "What the hell is he talking about?" She let out an unsteady breath and looked around at everyone for a moment. The moment Ginny's eyes connected to hers, she knew exactly what she was going to say next. It couldn't happen. Not with all of them there. It was the one thing that was buried and needed to stay buried.

"Ginny, don't," Harry said a little weakly. He understood the impact more than anyone.

"No, he should know. He should already know," Ginny said, her voice breaking.

"Gin?" Dean asked. There was something passionate and frightful in his tone that moved Hermione. Dean loved Ginny no matter what else happened. It made everything so much more difficult. He touched her hand.

It didn't seem to be enough for Ginny. She backed up. "Dean, he's right. I knew what my real feelings for Harry were and what I wanted when we broke up. Even before then I did." Hermione pleaded with her heart for Ginny to stop but she didn't. Though she was so small and pale, there was determination and force behind her. "I'm so sorry that I never told you, butâ€¦Harry and Iâ€¦we had sex over holiday."

Hermione put a hand over her face. She couldn't watch Ron or Dean as they finally learned the truth. For months it had been something known but kept tamed between her, Harry, and Ginny. Now, it was out. Lavender made a voice from behind her, and it made her feel nauseous. There was no telling what would happen now that she knew.

"You-you don't mean that. You can't be serious," Dean said out of breath.

"I'm really sorry. I should have just told you, but I didn't want to hurt you anymore. I never wanted any of this to happen this way," Ginny urged. Hermione finally removed her hand. Ron was washed out and his blue eyes were a mix of disbelief and frenzy. He stared at the back of Harry's head as if he was considering taking it off.

"No. You...that's not right." Dean suddenly looked at Harry. "You didn't." The hurt in Dean's voice was almost too much.

Even through his anger, Harry appeared sorry, and she knew that he was. He was such a good guy at heart, and she knew that he didn't want anyone to hurt and especially because of him. She only wished that Dean could understand that, and even Ginny and Ron to some extent. "I'm sorry," he said. Dean opened his mouth but only a sharp, heavy breath came out. He bit his lip and walked toward the door.

"Dean," Ginny said softly, making a move toward him. Dean didn't stop. He walked right past her and out the door.

"Wow," Lavender whispered. Hermione looked at her. There was something strange about the way she looked at Harry. She clicked her teeth at him but turned around as well. "Dean!" she called.

With them gone Hermione actually felt somewhat worse. Ron, Harry, and Ginny were the ones that mattered and now there was something more between them. She was supposed to know what to say, but she had nothing. Ginny didn't take her eyes off the door, and Harry looked at her as if his heartbeat was based on her next move.

"Ginny," he said gently.

She moved her eyes to him, and Hermione knew she was moments away from crying. She looked at her and then Ron before lowering her

head. "I'm sorry," Ginny said. Though her focus weren't on any of them, for some reason Hermione had a feeling that she addressing Ron. He must have sensed something because he opened his mouth and reached out his hand. Ginny didn't give any of them time to move. She rubbed her eyes and ran from the room.

Harry immediately chased after her, but Ron grabbed his arm. "Don't!" Harry ordered, snatching it away. "Not now, okay. I need to find Ginny." It seemed as if hearing her name broke Ron out of whatever anger he was in. He let him go and Harry ran out of the room.

Ron stared out the open space in total silence and stillness. She waited for him to either run out or scream but he did neither. "Ron?" she finally said. His name seemed to trigger his brain to turn back on. He gently closed the door and leaned against it. He repeatedly ran his fingers through his hair and he blinked less and less. "Ron?" she said again. He actually seemed to be in shock.

"Whatâ€¦what happened, Mione?" he asked. "What was that? All of thatâ€¦what-what was that?"

"I don't know. I honestly have no idea," she said. "Come here." She sat on his bed and held out her hand. If she didn't sit, then she felt as if she would fall. Her body was in hyper mode but mentally she was exhausted.

He slowly walked over to her and sat next to her. He took her hand and held it tightly. He seemed bewildered as well. "Bloody fuck. I can't believe it. Any of it. Harry and Ginny." He searched her eyes. "They reallyâ€¦you knowâ€¦over holiday?"

She had to move away. She got out of his grasp and leaned against his post instead. "Yes, I guess they did." She wasn't sure if she needed to tell him that she already knew. He was devastated enough. She didn't want to make anything worse.

"Fucking bleeding bollocks!" he groaned, rubbing his eyes.

"Sweetheart, you have to calm down," she said, though she didn't feel calm either. She needed to help Harry and Ginny. She needed to make sure that Dean wasn't plotting something or Lavender wasn't spreading stories, but she was still stuck. Hermione felt as if her body and mind worked on a five-second delay because nothing came together.

"Calm down? How am I supposed to do that? Did you not see Ginny's face?" he asked.

"Did you not see Harry's? Please, don't forget about him in this," she said.

He rolled his eyes. "I'm not forgetting him. I'm not forgetting that he had his cock penetrating my sister while she was grieving three stories down from me."

"I don't think it's like that, Ron," she pressed. "Don't assume anything until you know the facts. Do it for Ginny's sake." Her eyes burned, and she fanned her face to keep them dry.

"Want me?" he asked.

She wiped a tear away. "Yes." He got up and held her tightly. She placed her ear against his chest to listen to the rhythm of his heart, but it beat incredibly too fast for her. "Oh, Ron."

"Yeah, I know," he said. He pulled away. "What are we supposed to do?"

The door opened and Ginny came through. Her face was red and splashed with tears. She wheezed and held on to her stomach. "Ginny?" Ron said.

She wailed and ran over to him. She pushed herself into his arms, and he lost balance and sat back on his bed. "I'm so stupid, Ron. I was wrong, and I fucked everything up. It's gone. He's gone!" She cried against his neck. She wrapped her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist. Every choked breath seemed to release an even harder and more strangled batch of tears.

Ron's froze and looked at Hermione. She was lost. She had never seen Ginny in such an agonizing state before, and Ron obviously hadn't either. He seemed confused, hurt, and irate. For a moment she thought he would push her away and find Harry or Dean, but his face quickly turned to something sensitive. He pulled his long arms around her and held her closely. "You're not stupid."

"Y-yes I am, and I ruined it. I'm so sorry, Ron. Please, I'm so sorry," she bawled, holding to him even tighter.

He kissed her forehead. "You don't need to apologize to me. Nothing about you is stupid, and nothing about you is wrong."

"I don't know what to do. I love him. I really love him, and I-I don't know." Ginny choked and wailed again.

Ron held her tighter. "You don't have to do or know anything right now because I'm going take care of you, okay? We can stay right here and just like this. I'll stay right here with you."

"Oh, oh, Ron!" Ginny sobbed.

"I know, Ginny. It's okay. I love you so much, and you don't have to worry. I'm right here. I love you." He closed his eyes and kissed her head again. He rocked her gently and stroked her hair. Ginny simply cried and held on to Ron as if he was the only thing keeping her alive.

Hermione felt her own eyes sting again. Ginny's tragedy was horrible, and she could only imagine what had happened and what Harry was feeling. However, there was something else that touched her even more. Watching Ron tend to Ginny in such a fierce and affectionate way was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. She knew that they cared for each other, but she had never seen



them so connected and involved before. It seemed like when everyone else was falling apart, they were coming together even closer. Ron was the knight that Ginny needed him to be, and it made Hermione fall in love with him all over again.

He opened his eyes and looked at her. She understood. "I'll get you two some time."

"Thank you. If you run into my roommates, tell them that they better not come up here. I mean it. No one gets in until I physically look him in the eye and tell him that he can be in there. Bollocks to the passes," he said.

"Okay, of course." Hermione wanted to say something to Ginny, but she was too far-gone. She simply reached out and touched her arm. She then caressed Ron's cheek, and he pecked the side of her hand. She gave him a small smile and left the room. She turned back for just a moment, and Ron was still rocking Ginny and holding her securely.

Hermione knew what she needed to do now. She had to find Harry. There was only one place he would be. The abandoned classroom had been their safety room all year. She gently twisted the knob and was surprised to find it unlocked. She opened the door and saw Harry sitting under the window. She closed the door behind her, but he didn't move. "Harry," she said. He still didn't move. She walked over to him and kneeled in front of him. His expression was vacant and his already messy black hair was even wilder. "Hey," she said softly.

"I don't want to talk right now," he finally said.

"I know. I just wanted to see if you were okay," she said, feeling her heart pull out of its place. Harry's voice was just as dull as his expression. He seemed completely defeated.

"Iâ€¦I think I broke up with Ginny." The moment the last word got out, he closed his eyes tightly and gripped his wand. A spark flickered from the tip.

Hermione held herself together. She would be strong for her best friend. "I know. She told Ron and me."

He finally looked at her. "How is she?"

She couldn't tell him the whole truth. Things were bad enough. "What do you think?"

He sighed and looked down again. "Right. I really just want to be alone right now."

"Okay," she whispered, though she didn't want to leave him. However, she would do whatever he wanted if it helped him in any way. She rubbed his arm. "I'll be back later."

"It's fine," he mumbled. She gave his upper arm one more squeeze before reluctantly leaving him. She closed the door and locked it, so he wouldn't be disturbed. Hermione honestly didn't know

what to do with herself. She stood outside the door for a while before deciding to go to the Common Room to wait for Ron's roommates. She had to help in some way. She sat by the fire and looked at his chessboard what was only partially cleared. She slowly picked up the rest of the pieces and eased them into the worn case that Ron kept his set in.

"I'm glad you're still here," he said sometime later.

She turned to him. "I haven't seen anyone."

"It's okay," he said out of breath. "I put a tie on the door. They'll know what it means. Let's walk." He didn't even wait for her as he walked to the portrait.

She tried to keep up with his long strides as they walked the halls. She grabbed his arm to stop him. "Slow down, Ron. Where's Ginny?"

He exhaled heavily and sat by the wall. She sat as well, and he took her hand. "She's sleeping in my bed. After she stopped crying, she went quiet. It took a while for me to realize that she had fallen asleep in my arms. My little sister literally cried herself to sleep. She's that worn out by all this." He traced his fingers over the lines on her palm and pushed his thumbs into her skin.

It was cute and for a moment things weren't so extreme. "Is this helping?"

He grinned a little and didn't stop. "A bit. I love how small your hand is. It feels good."

"Feels good to me, too," she said softly. They gazed at each other and it was finally just about them. For a moment she realized that things were still okay between them. She still had him. Although, there was something urgent in Ron's eyes and she felt as if he needed her in some other way.

Whatever it was, he washed it away. He left their gaze. "She didn't say much, but she did tell me that Harry broke up with her."

"I know. I found him when you were upstairs," she said, hoping that Harry was doing okay alone.

"How is he?" Ron asked in almost the exact say way that Harry had asked.

She thought it was best to give him the same kind of answer. "What do you think?"

He finally let go of her hand and rubbed his palms into his thighs. "Well, I reckon it serves him right."

"Ron, that's not fair," she said.

He gave her a look. "How is it not fair? He shagged Ginny and then dumped her."

"No," she said firmly. "That's not how it happened and you know it. A lot went on in between Christmas and now, and it's not like Ginny was forced into it. She wanted it just as much as he did."

He cringed. "I don't want to hear that!"

"It doesn't matter what you want to hear," she said, "You know the truth, and you have to deal with it like an adult. Harry and Ginny slept together, yes, but they've been sleeping together since they started dating. Ginny isn't a child, Ron."

"I don't care if Ginny isn't a child. She's my family," Ron said, putting a hand to his heart.

"I know she is and I know how much you love her and want to protect her, but Harry didn't do it all on his own." She thought about her next statement and decided to go for it. "I could have sworn that you considered him family, too."

"Don't start lecturing me on how I feel about Harry. We've had this argument before. You know that I care about him, but when it comes to shagging and my little sister things are different." He stood and pulled at his hair. "Fucking hell, Hermione, Harry had sex with Ginny over holiday. That was months ago and he never said anything! Doesn't it bother you at all?"

She didn't know what to say, but she soon realized that there was no point in lying. She stood as well. "Ron, I already knew about it. Ginny told me not long after we came back here, and Harry confirmed it that same day. So, I've known about it for a long time."

He simply stared at her. "What?"

The softness in his voice and the largeness of his eyes made her mind flash to Dean. The guilt was back. "I'm sorry."

"I don't believe this. This is mad. You must be taking the piss," he said, putting his hands on his hips and pacing.

"Please, it's important that you stay calm about this," she said.

Hermione was stunned when he actually started laughing. He laughed so hard that his entire face turned red. He stomped his foot loudly and groaned. "Yes! That's right! I need to stay calm. I need to stay bloody fucking calm and accept the fact that my sister, my best friend, and my girlfriend have been lying to me for months, again!"

She glanced around them. Two students were watching them. Hermione took Ron by the wrist and walked him further down the hall. "No, you stop that right now," she said in a hushed voice. "It's not like before. Ginny and Harry told me in confidence. It's not my place to tell. If they wanted you to know, then they

would have told you. Would you honestly like it if I betrayed your sister's trust?"

He eased out of her grip and stopped. "Don't work that bullshit now. You should have told me, Hermione!"

"Why?" she demanded. "Ron, sweetheart, I love you but I can understand why they didn't want you to know right away. They knew you would get like this. You wouldn't try to understand. They wanted to wait until things were more stable before telling you."

"You make me sound like such an asshole," he said in a gentler voice. "Is that what you think I am?"

"No. Of course I don't but like you said, when it comes to matters like this it's different--"

"So, you encourage them not to tell me, yeah? What in the bloody hell did you suggest?" he spat.

"I told them that I'd support whatever they decided but that telling you at the time probably wasn't the smartest thing to do, yes." She stood as straight and tall as she could. "Obviously, I was right. It's dire enough now. Can you imagine how much harder it would have been for you to know a few months ago?"

"No, I bloody can't because I wasn't told anything. You had no right to dismiss me like that. You and Harry have no right to think that I'm not good enough to handle things like this. I can understand Ginny not telling me, but Harry is supposed to be my mate. Of course, you get to know. You get to know every bloody move he makes because you two are joined at the hip. This is bullshit!" Ron kicked the wall behind him and swore.

Hermione wanted to feel for him, but she was actually more angry than upset. Ron had a lot of nerve to talk about keeping secrets. "Well, maybe he just didn't feel comfortable telling you. Some things are difficult to say to the people you really care about. I'd think you'd understand that."

He stopped fuming, and he had to know that she had him. He set his jaw and his silence confirmed that he was in fact hiding something important from her. "Yeah, I understand that completely."

"And I understand why you're upset. I'm sorry that I didn't say anything. It wasn't easy, but I wasn't lying to you. It was purely not my place, and it just wasn't your business to know if Ginny and Harry didn't want to tell you." She tried to keep her voice steady. Too much had happened in one day. "I want you to know that it was hard for them, too. I know they both needed you, but they didn't want to make things worse. They're both sorry it happened. Really, they are."

He looked at her with a pained expression. "I don't need them to be sorry. That's not what this is about."

"Then what is this about, Ron?" she asked.

Ron shook his head. "You have no idea what it does to me to hear you say that it's not my business to know. Ginny is my sister, and Harry is my friend. If it's not my business then whose is it? What am I to you lot? I'm I really just this thick bloke who's not smart or trustworthy enough to handle anything? Fucking hell. I don't even deserve a chance, do I?"

She mentally groaned. Of course, he took it in the worst way possible. "Ron, I didn't mean it like that. You know that's not what we think."

"Bloody forget it," he said, walking away.

"Now where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm going back to my sister," he said.

"Are you at least going to talk to Harry later?" she asked. "He needs you."

"I'm sure he'd rather have you. Besides, Ginny needs me more. She's the one this is all happening to, and if you think I'm a prick for believing that then fine." He walked away from her without another word. She looked after him but decided there was no point in chasing after him. He needed to cool down, and she was incredibly offended by his words. She thought that Ron understand that he kept the pace of her heart. She loved him more than anything, but it was as if he lost sight of that fact more every day.

If anyone should have been upset, then it was herself. Even with everything she and Harry had hidden from him, Ron had secrets of his own. He wasn't perfect. Hermione rubbed her eyes and tapped her foot against the floor. She needed to put her complications and focus on the bigger issue. Ginny and Harry were no longer together, and she couldn't let it stay that way. She walked back to her room to think.

When she opened the door, she saw Lavender and Parvati in deep conversation on Lavender's bed. Lavender immediately stood up. "How's Ginny?"

There seemed to be honest worry in her features. Hermione sat on her bed and looked at Parvati. "She told you?"

"Everything," she answered.

"Of course I did. I had to tell someone, and Patty's my best friend. I don't believe in keeping secrets. It ruins friendships," Lavender said matter-of-factly.

Hermione dug her fingers into her pillow. "Well said, Lavender, and Ginny is rather upset. She's with Ron."

"Good. I know he must be making her feel better. Poor Ronnie. I hope he's okay," Lavender said.

Parvati gave Lavender a look before looking down. "I'm sure he's fine. Hermione was with him. Besides, Harry is most likely the gutted one. I passed by Ginny as she came running back to the Common Room. They must have broken up. Have you talked to him?"

Hermione smiled genuinely for the first time in days it seemed. Parvati returned it and nodded a little. "Yes. He's really upset but he should be. He loves Ginny more than anything. They did break it off, but we really shouldn't be saying anything."

"Don't worry. What's said here stays here. I know the rules," Parvati said.

"Lavender?" Hermione asked.

She rolled her eyes. "I'm not going to say anything, Hermione. I don't want to make things worse. Anyway, Dean is a mess. He's really torn right now."

"Then why aren't you with him?" Hermione asked in irritation. For some reason the mere sound of Lavender's voice made her feel even more distressed. She had to get her act together and stop being so immature.

"Because he wants to be alone right now, and I'm respecting his wishes. There's no need to get mad at me because things with you aren't perfectly put together anymore," Lavender said.

"What do you mean by that?" Hermione asked.

Lavender's eyes grew a little, and she shook her head. "Nothing."

"No. You meant to say that. What do you mean, Lavender?" she asked again, standing up.

"Ladies! Enough! There's been enough arguing for one night. Hermione, take a breather. You're really flushed," Parvati said, standing up as well.

Hermione was so angry and sickened that she didn't see a point on protesting. "Fine. I'll leave. Lavender just stay out of places where you don't belong." It wasn't intelligent, but it was the best she had. She left the room and leaned against her door. There was only one place that would help make her mania disappear, and it was the only place she wanted to go to at the moment.

She walked back to the abandoned classroom. It was still locked. When she unlocked it and looked inside, she saw Harry still under the window. It didn't look as if he had moved at all. Already, a rush of relief came over her. She knelt beside him again. Right away, she noticed one thing different about him. His eyes were slightly red. He glanced at her for only a second. "I told you that I want to be alone."

His voice was wobbly, and it broke her heart. "I know," she said softly, "but I don't want you to be alone. I love you, and I want to be here for you."

He slowly moved his eyes up to hers. The greenness was so deep and heavy with feeling. She was amazed at their brilliance. Harry was such a beautiful person, and she knew that all he wanted was to be happy and have something warm of his own. He stared at her, and she stared right back. She slowly leaned forward and pressed her lips gently to his forehead. She tried to pass all the love and support that she could to him. He was her brother, and she would lift him when he couldn't stand on his own.

She pulled away and smiled. "I'm going to be here for you, Harry."

He actually smiled a little as well. "Thanks. Iâ€¦I really need you right now."

"Well, here I am. Move over," she said. He scooted over and she sat closely beside him. They were silent for a while.

Harry sniffed and took several deep, shaky breaths. "I really, really love Ginny, Hermione. She's all I want."

"I know she is. Things will work out. You did what you had to do, I know it." She took his hand, and he laid his head on her shoulder.

"I hope so. It has to work out," he said.

"And it will. Don't worry." She wanted to reassure him, but she also wanted to reassure herself. They continued to sit in silence, but Hermione didn't mind. It was what Harry wanted, so she gave it to him. She was there for him completely in body. Though, her mind was elsewhere.

Hermione got out of bed later than she planned to the next morning. She didn't sleep much, but she was just unable to move. When she went to the boys' dorm, Ron was already gone and Harry refused to go to the day's classes. She didn't blame him. The two didn't leave the classroom for hours or at least it felt like hours. She went to breakfast and saw that neither Ron nor Ginny were there either. She figured that they were off somewhere talking. So, she took a few bites of an apple and went to Slughorn's class. She hadn't had time to rewrite her notes and she needed to.

She stopped dead in her tracks when she saw Ron and Lavender standing not too far from the classroom. She was against the wall and Ron was in front of her. They seemed to be heavy in conversation, and their eyes were connected. Ron said something and rubbed his neck. Lavender nodded and took his hand. He pulled it away and shook his head while saying something else. Hermione couldn't take it. She walked right past them and into the classroom.

"Hermione," Ron called. She ignored him and took her seat. He sat right next to her in Harry's chair. "Hey, what was that about?"

"I should ask you the same thing," she snapped. She couldn't believe that she had to deal with this. Never in her life did she imagine that she and Ron would have to go through something like him not being completely faithful to her. It didn't seem possible. She knew that he wouldn't but more and more the evidence told her otherwise.

He groaned. "Please, not this as well."

"You should probably get to your seat, Ron." She slammed her book down and he sighed. He roughly pushed the chair in and took his seat next to Lavender. Hermione laid out her ink and quill and tried not to explode. All through the class period she thought about what was happening to Ron. Things were fine. He loved her, and he wanted to be with her. There was nothing that Lavender could give him that Hermione couldn't. Sure, Lavender might have been prettier, but she had nothing else going on for her. Lavender was probably a bit more relaxed and probably funnier, but Ron didn't seem to mind her rather dry humor. The only thing Hermione knew was that she wouldn't be a stupid girl for any man, not even for Ron.

Something poked her in the side. She quickly looked down and saw a folded piece of parchment continuously sticking her. She glanced up. Ron was looking at her and moving his wand back and forth. He nudged his head and she quickly took the note:

Don't run to your next class. Meet me outside the door, please.

She didn't know if she wanted to hear what Ron had to say at the moment, but she figured that she might as well. She quickly looked back and nodded before getting back to work.

After class she met Ron like she said she would. He looked at her apprehensively and put his hands deep into his pockets. "Can we talk?"

"It can't be now. I have to get to class," she said.

"But that's my point. Do you think you can skive runes today?" he asked.

She looked at him in shock. On top of everything, she was now expected to miss class. Schoolwork was her outlet when all else failed. "Ron, you know I can't just miss a class. I'm not like you. I care about my work, and I want to do well. I really-"

"I know. I bloody know this speech by heart. I obviously wouldn't ask unless it was important. Please. Please, just this once for me. I really need you right now," he said anxiously.

She didn't know what to do. She was furious at him, but she didn't know what it would mean if she could be there for Harry when he needed her but not for Ron. "Fine, but let's talk somewhere else. I don't want any of the teachers to see me." She took his hand and swiftly led them to the library. They walked back to their usual spot by Filch's closet. "At least this



way I can always say that we missed a class to study for another one."

"I don't care about that, Hermione. Things are shit right now," he said, leaning against a bookshelf and putting his hands on his knees.

She put her hands on her hips and looked at him. "What were you talking to Lavender about?"

He hung his head. "Like this and that bloody tone you have."

She looked around before moving in front of him and tugging on his hair. She raised his head. "I have a right to have a tone, Ronald. What were you doing with her?"

He moved out of her grasp. "Don't say it like that. I wasn't doing anything. I wanted to make sure that she wouldn't go around telling everyone about what she heard yesterday. That's all."

"It didn't seem that simple, Ron," she said.

He loosened his tie and pulled on his collar. "That's because nothing is simple in your world. There always has to be something more with you."

"Because there usually is," she snapped as quietly as she could.

"Well, there isn't," he said. "I had to get out of the room because I couldn't stand looking at Harry so bloody upset anymore. I went downstairs and waited for you like I always do, but I reckoned you were still asleep. So, I went to breakfast and saw Lavender. I asked her to meet me outside of the class so I could have a word. I told her to keep her mouth shut, and she said she would."

"And the fact that she was all over you?" she asked. She hated that she must have sounded like Lavender to him.

"She wasn't all over me!" he hissed. "Since you clearly saw everything, you must be talking about her touching my hand. I'm sorry about that. I pulled away and told her that it wasn't right. What more do you want from me? That's not even why I wanted to talk to you. This is stupid. You know me."

She stomped her foot. "Then what do you want to talk about?"

"I want to know how things went last night with Harry," he said softer. "He didn't get back till late, and I know you were with him."

"You really care?" she asked honestly.

"Yes, I care. I told you that things with Harry and me aren't easy. I want to rip his prick off, but it doesn't mean that I don't care about his wellbeing," Ron said with a shrug.

She rubbed her temples in confusion. A new day certainly didn't make things better. She was tired and hungry, and it only hindered her understanding to a greater extent. "He was in a horrible mood last night, but you should know more than me. You live with him."

"We didn't exactly talk. Dean was quiet, Harry was quiet, and Seamus and Neville tried to make things easier with jokes but it didn't work. It was shit. If he's wondering about Ginny, she's out of it. She didn't go to class either. She's too upset." Ron stopped to catch his breath.

"I can understand," she said. "Harry may not look it, but he feels the same way that she does. You know how stoic he tries to be."

"Fuck. I can't stand them being like this. I just want to make their pain away or at least take it all for them." He started chewing on his nails as if it was the solution to all his problems.

She looked at him and felt torn. No matter what kind of anger and uncertainty she felt toward him, she couldn't deny the emotion and love that she had for him. She loved Ron more than anything else in her life and that would never change. Seeing him so distraught was something she couldn't put up with. She took his hand and pulled his nails away from his mouth. "Stop that," she whispered.

"I'm sorry. I'm just—I don't know what to do. Things with Harry and Ginny are fucked up, and you're mad at me," he said.

"Ron," she started.

"No. Don't tell me that you're not. I know you well enough by now. I can feel you, Hermione, and it's tearing me up. You feel it, too. I know it." He gazed at her deeply.

Once again, she didn't know if she was more touched or confused by his words. When he said things like that, there wasn't a question in her mind that he loved her. However, it conflicted with everything she saw and the small voices in her head. "You're right. I do feel it. That's why we need to talk. I'm getting too emotional over everything."

"So am I. Can we talk after class?" he asked.

"I can't. McGonagall has some work for me. I have to go there straight away, but after is fine," she said. She honestly didn't know how she would make it through the rest of the school day and a meeting. She was worn out.

She could see the fury in his expression, and she knew that he didn't find her duties important. "Fine. Whatever. I'll be in the Common Room. You'll be there, right?"

"Of course," she said. He looked down for a moment before putting his hands on her arms and walking her back against the bookshelf. He pressed himself against her. "Ron, what are you doing?"

He bent down and looked at her firmly. "This is what it looks like when someone is all over someone else. I thought maybe you needed a quick lesson."

She glared at him. "Don't make fun of me. If I had been that way with Harry, then you probably would have hit him." She was angry but a spike of pleasure went through her at the feeling him against her and especially in the library.

"Yeah and I really would have hit him if he did this." He kissed her hard and Hermione squeaked. It wasn't the time or the place.

She pushed him away. "Ron." Her lips tingled and a small current shot through her.

He breathed roughly. "What? Can this not be simple either?" There was need as well as irritation in his voice.

She pulled on his tie and brought their lips close. "Well, if Lavender had done this, I would have hit you instead of her." She kissed him forcefully and caused him to moan. She didn't know why she and Ron were talking the way they were. All she knew was that the heat had taken over. With each passing day they touched and joked a little less. If she could even get one moment of it back, then she would take it. He dug his tongue in her mouth, and she began to unfasten his tie completely. Things between Harry and Ginny were in dire straits. She didn't want it to have to be their fate as well. It wasn't fair. She and Ron were supposed to be over their differences. They were supposed to be completely happy together.

She pushed him away again. "Ron, please, there's too much going on."

"I know. I'm a bit mental right now. Lack of sleep&#160;lack of happiness&#160;lack of you," he panted, moving her hand away so he could suck on her bottom lip.

She let him and whimpered as his hands moved to her skirt and under. "I-I know what you're trying to do. I-oh- I understand, but it won't compensate for whatever it is that you're feeling or hiding from me." It came out before she could stop it. She opened her eyes, and Ron pulled away from her and took a step back.

"So, I can't even touch you now without there being something more to it?" he asked.

"You know me just as well as I know you, Ron," she answered.

"Fine. I give up." He grabbed his bag and began to walk away.

"Do you still want to talk tonight?" she asked, un-sticking herself to the shelf.

"I'll be there," he muttered. Hermione ran a hand over her sweaty brow and tried to relax. Ron Weasley was probably the only man who she could want to shag and scream bloody murder at all at the same time.

Right after the school day was over, she walked to McGonagall's classroom. She had washed her face and readjusted her attitude. There was no reason for her professor to know that a bubbling cauldron of tension brew in her stomach. While she didn't feel as tired, her hunger pains were worse. She had no choice but to skip lunch so she could find out what she missed in class. Professor McGonagall was sitting at her desk and Cormac was at one of the tables when she walked in.

"Professor?" she said, glancing at him.

McGonagall looked up. "Right on time, Ms. Granger." Hermione walked over to her desk. "I thought it would be appropriate for the Prefects to personally interview the seventh years before we officially start getting things for the graduation ceremony."

"It seems as if you and I are being paired up tonight," Cormac said sweetly.

"Yes, well, we'll see how it goes with you and Mr. McLaggen. If it's a success, then we'll proceed with the other Prefects."

Hermione hoped that her agony wasn't visible. The last thing she wanted to do was spend even a minute with Cormac. "That sounds like a great idea. Cormac—do you want to go for a walk?"

"Don't forget to take notes," McGonagall added. Hermione tried her best to smile.

Cormac slowly got out of the chair and gave a fake smile. "Sure. Do you need me to take your bag for you? It looks heavy."

"No, I'm fine, thanks," she rushed. They both gave McGonagall another smile before leaving her classroom.

"Let's just get this over with," Cormac said as they walked down a hall.

"Fine by me but you have stop for a moment so I can get a quill out," she said.

"No need. You can take notes on your own time." He buffed his nails with his sleeve. "I've got a date," he added.

"How?" she asked with a frown.

"Not that it's any of your business. Plan to report me and get Gryffindor in even more trouble?" he asked.

She rolled her eyes. "I didn't tell, Cormac. It would be stupid for me to."

"Oh, right, you and Weasley," he said with a chuckle. "You still with him?"

"Yes. Not that it's any of your business," she said. He finally stopped walking. She felt uneasy being around him. Even since their argument they had stayed away from each other. Cormac moved on to the next poor girl who even looked at him in passing.

He stood arrogantly and grinned. "Well, we can play nice then, yeah? I would like another dance."

"I don't think that will happen. I'm assuming McGonagall wants us to talk about food and decorations," Hermione said, reaching for her quill parchment in her messy bag.

"For Merlin's sake, let me help you," he said, reaching his hand in.

She snatched her bag away. "I said that's okay!" The strap broke and all her things fell to the floor. She bent down. "See what happens when you don't listen?"

"Granger, honestly, you need to calm down. I'm not going to hurt you or your precious notes." He bent down and took her bag and the broken strap. "Reparo." He handed her the bag and grinned. "No harm."

She let out a breath. She really did need to start relaxing. "Thanks and I'm sorry. I'm just really stressed right now."

"Matters with your friends, I reckon?" he said, helping her collect her notes.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she quickly said.

"Please, you four are the highlights of our entire house. You're all anyone wants to talk about. It's pathetic really," he said.

"So why are you so interested in us then?" she asked.

"I'm not. Hermione, whatever is going on with your little friends doesn't effect me, but whatever it is that's between you and Weasley makes me laugh a little." He stood and she could only frown at him in puzzlement. "If you had been smart and stayed with me, then you wouldn't have to worry. Lavender is fit as fuck, but she's not feisty like you. It's weird; I thought that's why Ron fancied you in the first place. Not so sure any more." He smirked at her.

Hermione looked away and felt her eyes sting. "I'll tell McGonagall that you want champagne and blue table cloths." She got up and tried to walk away from him in a straight line.

"That was quick," McGonagall said.

"Cormac didn't have too many things that he absolutely wanted." She quickly scribbled what he wanted down on a piece of parchment. "I'll collect the rest from you when this is over and

create a chart with what the other Prefects wrote down." She wanted to get out as quickly as she could. She was hot and felt horribly nauseous. It was even a little hard to breath.

"That will be lovely, Hermione. Thank you so much for helping," McGonagall said. Hermione nodded. She was afraid that if she opened her mouth, then she would throw up. "I do want to talk to you about something."

"Yes?" she croaked. Blankets of sweat smothered her skin. She needed to tie her hair back, but she didn't have a band.

"Well, I think I owe you an apology. It may have seemed as if I made allegations about you and Mr. Weasley involving the sleeping arrangements. It wasn't in due cause. I've talked to Mr. Weasley and--"

"What did Ron say?" she interrupted. She put her hands on the desk for support. Her knees were shaking.

Professor McGonagall raised an eyebrow. "Well, he informed me that you two have never participated in such behavior. He was so bold and honest as to say that he suggested it many times but you refused. I had no choice but to believe him at that point. He knows how much trouble he could get in to for telling me."

"Oh, right-right. Um, yes." It was all she could get out. Comfort fell on top of her worry, but it still didn't feel right. "I'm glad he told you the truth."

"Yes and my apologizes once again. I'll only reprimanded him but easily because he came forth. He did the right thing. It's good to know your partnership is for the best. I was concerned at first," she said.

"Oh, there's no need. Ron and I are fine. We work well together. If you'll excuse me." Hermione had to turn away. She thought her knees would buckle. "Good night." She didn't give McGonagall time to respond. She practically ran out of the room and down the hall to the Common Room.

She didn't know what was wrong with her but her body hurt, and it felt as if the air was slowly being sucked out of her. She was lightheaded and her throat was dry. Even Cormac knew something was going on with Ron and Lavender. There was no need for him to lie. Something must have happened. She had to find out. When she went through the portrait hole, she saw Ron sitting on the couch. He looked up. "Hermione? Are you okay?"

"Why do you asked?" she said, readjusting the strap on her heavy bag. It was digging into her muscle tissue and turned her lightheadedness into full-blown dizziness.

"You're all red and sweaty. Come sit down," he said, looking terribly concerned.

He reached out for her but she moved away. "Did you tell McGonagall that you asked me to sleep with you and I said no?"

"Yeah, a few days ago," he said. "Here. At least let me take your bag."

"Why?" she asked, feeling her heartbeat pick up. She didn't let him take it. She was fine.

He sighed. "Damn it, Hermione."

"Just answer me first," she demanded.

"Okay, okay. I did it because I wanted to get her off your arse for at least a day. Like I said, it's an impasse for anyone who tells. I reckoned going forth would make her believe me. It's me of all people, and it worked." He held out his hand and she let him take her bag. "I didn't even get in that much trouble. Just got a lecture and I have to help her organize some rubbish this weekend."

Though the bag was no longer cutting into her shoulder, the pain and dizziness was still there. "But why? Why would you get in trouble for me? It was a lie. I'm guilty," she said.

He frowned. "No, you're not. Besides, I don't mind. I don't care but you do."

She was confused and the confusion actually clouded her vision a little. "That's incredibly kind and sweet."

"Well, I am capable of being those things. At least when you're involved, I think. Hermione, I love you. That hasn't changed. Notâ€¦because of all this," he said.

She shook her head and moved closer to the fireplace. She was even more baffled. If Ron truly wanted Lavender, then it wouldn't make sense for him to do something so selfless for her. She was stupid. She knew Ron loved her. Cormac was wrong. Lavender was wrong. She was clearly wrong as well. Hermione needed to ask Harry about Ron's behavior but she remembered that he was still brooding in his room. It all crashed back. Harry had broken up with Ginny. Ginny had cried herself to sleep. Ron knew they slept together and felt hurt about being left in the dark. Ron may or may not have done things with Lavender and Lavenderâ€¦Lavender was everywhere. The lies were everywhere.

"Hermione?" Ron seemed to whisper.

"Iâ€¦I have work to do," she rasped. Ron grabbed her arms and started saying something to her, but she couldn't hear him. In fact, she could barely feel his hands on her. Her ears shut off and everything fuzzed and went black.

She woke up and immediately groaned. Her head was pounding. She looked around and adjusted to the darkness. She was in the hospital wing. She started to sit up and felt something on her hand. She looked to her right. Ron's head was on her arm and he appeared to be asleep. She had no idea why she would ever be in the hospital wing. She shook her arm.

"Hmm?" Ron said. He raised his head and gasped. "Oh, oh, Hermione! You're awake!" He threw his arms around her and held her closely.

She groaned again and tried to hug him back but her arms felt too heavy too. "Ron, why am I here? What happened?"

He pulled away and kissed her mouth, cheeks, and forehead before sitting on the edge of her bed. He took her hand and kissed her knuckles before holding her hand against his chest. "You passed out. I triedâ€¦I tried to wake you up but it didn't work. I shouted for help and some seventh year used the levitation spell and brought you here. I was too out of my mind to do it." He used his other hand to run his fingertips up and down her forearm.

"Why did I pass out?" she asked in horror.

"You're not sick. Pomfrey said it was most likely exhaustion triggered by stress and lack of proper nutrition. She sees it a lot in the seventh years. Your body just gave out. Do you not remember anything?" he asked, tucking hair behind her hair.

She closed her eyes as his fingers lightly brushed over her ear. "Iâ€¦I had a meeting with McGonagall. I had to interview Cormac. After thatâ€¦I saw you." She tried to put the pieces together. It was difficult. Things were still so choppy.

"Yeah, you were more flushed than I've ever seen you, and you were acting completely mental. You didn't hear anything I said then your eyes just rolled into the back of your head. You fell and you wouldn't wake up for me. Fucking bloody hellâ€¦I-I was so scared." Ron sniffed loudly and wiped his eyes but the tears came down anyway.

"Sweetheart, I'm fine," she said. She couldn't believe that she had let everything get to her so greatly. What was worse was that Ron had to see her in that moment. She didn't know what she would have done if she had to see him in such a state.

"It doesn't matter. It was the worst thing I've ever seen. I didn't know what to think. My heart stopped. It hurt so much to see you like that. Fuck, I was so scared, Hermione. I don't know what I would have done ifâ€¦everythingâ€¦I justâ€¦" The tears kept coming and he kept rubbing them away. "I'm sorry, love."

She rubbed his back and felt extremely thick. She was so distracted and worried that she couldn't see what was right in front of her. It was Ron and she knew him. His word was good enough, and she couldn't assume anything without talking to him first. "Ron, I'm okay. You got me here and I'm fine. Pomfrey is right. I haven't been sleeping well, I'm more stressed out than ever, and you know that I skip eating sometimes because of it. I just need a proper rest."

"And you're bloody going to get it. You're in here till morning, but I don't want you doing anything else when you get out. For one day you'll eat and rest like a normal person," he said.



The idea sounded lovely and almost too good to be true but she would try. "What time is it?" she asked. The only light came from the lamps near the front entrance and the starlight from the windows.

He glanced at his watch. "It's after two in the morning. Harry and me were both here, but Pomfrey made him leave around midnight. She tried to get me to leave, but she quickly discovered that she'd have to roll my dead body over the threshold before I left willingly."

"Oh, Ronâ€¦" she started.

"That's not important now." He rubbed his eyes until they were red and puffy. "Why didn't you tell me you were feeling so bad?"

"I don't know," she said. "I honestly didn't think it was that bad. I guess I ignored the signs. It's my fault."

"No, it's mine. I'm your boyfriend, and I'm supposed to take care of you. I haven't been. I've been yelling and making you question me. Fucking hell, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry that I had part in making you like this." He kissed her cheek and put his forehead to hers. "Please, I love you. I love you more than anything else in the whole world. You have to talk to me. Don'tâ€¦don't leave like that. I need you too badly for that. I'm really sorry."

She put her hands to his neck and let her own tears out. "I'm sorry, too. I love you so much, Ron. You're the most important part of my life. I didn't mean for things to get this way."

He held on to her wrists. "Whatever you need from me, just say it. I'll give it to you."

She thought about it. She wanted to ask about Lavender. She wanted to know what he was hiding. She wanted to know how to help Harry and Ginny. She even wanted to get started on the Ancient Runes coursework that was at the bottom of her bag, but she realized that what she needed most of all was her best friend who also happened to be her boyfriend. She agreed with Pomfrey's assessment about why she had collapsed, but she had been in love with Ron for too long not to understand the other reason. Her body had also given out because she thought she was losing him again.

"Just climb in with me, please. Help me go back to sleep," she said.

"I can do that. Here, drink this first." He poured her glass of water and put it to her lips. She gulped the cold liquid down and already felt a little better. "Good?"

"Yes, thank you." She moved over and pulled the other pillow from behind her and laid it next to her head. Ron lay next to her and put his arm around her. She rested her head near his chest and snuggled as close to him as she could. She missed sleeping next to him so much.

He kissed her head and rubbed her back. "I love you, Hermione."

"I love you, Ron," she whispered, closing her eyes at his marvelous touch. She had to rest.

\*\*\*\* WOW! A lot is going on, yeah? Drama City! Lol. There are so many layers to Ron/Hermione and I love cracking into each one. This is another one of my favorites. It came out differently from what I have in my notes and I'm thankful. It's so much better! Oh, and a shout out to a certain HHr shipper that won't stop bugging me. "THAT is how you can write tender a Harry/Hermione moment without it being romantic. Their friendship is loving enough, mate!"

## CHAPTER 49

Hey lot, thanks for the reviews! I know that it's been a disgustingly long time since I've updated. I wanted to update this sooner but I got a callback on a job that I was dying to get, and I had to train and everything for that all week! I'm rather proud of myself, lol. Anyway, I'm getting ridiculously close to the end of this story, so I'm trying to update as quickly as I can! I'll have the next chapter up pretty fast. It's countdown time, haha.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Hermione, are you sure you're okay?" Harry asked again.

"Yes, Harry," she said again. "For the tenth time, I think it's safe for me to study. I won't get sick from reading a book."

"It's not funny," he said somewhat gently. When he had heard that Hermione fainted, all his grief vanished and sheer terror took over. Seeing her unconscious in a hospital bed was the last thing he ever needed to look at.

She gripped his hand. "I know. I'm sorry, but I'm honestly fine. I've been resting for the past few days, and I really need to get back to work. Besides, when Ron is finished doing his chores for McGonagall, he'll probably force me to go back to my room or something. You don't have to worry."

"Of course I have to worry, but I trust you. I'm glad he's looking out for you. Do you think-"

"I really don't feel like talking about it. Not now. I have to focus," she said, cutting him off.

Harry understood completely. He nodded and got up. "Alright, I'll see you later. Don't study too much, yeah?"

"I'll try my best. Have a good practice," she said. He wanted to tell her that he'd try, but he didn't want to make any promises either. He picked up his broom and headed for the Quidditch pitch.

Gryffindor's match against Slytherin was only a few days away. Harry wanted to believe that his team was ready, but the game had been forcefully thrown to the back of his mind. Nonetheless, they were smarter and better skilled than Slytherin. They would win. He opened the trunk and took out the quaffles. He laid them out and waited on the bench. He was quiet and kept his attention on the bristles of his broom. "Harry?"

He closed his eyes from a moment before turning to the voice. Ginny stood at the opening of the tent fully dressed in her Quidditch uniform and broom in hand. She looked fantastic, and he very much wanted to tell her so. "Hi," he said. She walked in and sat next to him. His body inflated with love and need, but he didn't move. He couldn't move anymore. She merely stared at him with her gorgeous brown eyes. Her smooth, freckly skin looked so inviting, and he could smell her hair for miles. He missed her. "I didn't think you'd show up."

"Yeah, well, I have to be here," she said. "I'm still a team member, and it's my training session. We've got a game to win soon."

"I thinking beating Malfoy is the best thing we can do right now," he said. Small talk was useless but it filled the horrible gaps of silence.

She laughed a little. "I agree, but I'm not going to lie to you. I don't really feel like training."

"It's good to know that we agree on a couple of things," he mumbled. He meant for it to sound humorous, but his tone was full of spite. He twisted his broom hard in his hands and kept his attention on that.

"Soâ€¦how's Hermione been today?" Ginny asked after a while.

"She's fine. Busy studying in the library again. She promised to take it easy, and Ron will intervene soon enough. I'm glad she's better. It'll be good to see someone recover." Once again, his tone was heavy. He simply couldn't talk to Ginny for too long without his anger pushing through. It wasn't how he was supposed to feel. He bit his lip and decided that it would be best if he didn't say anything at all.

"Harry," she whispered. He finally moved his eyes to her. She laid her broom down and swung her leg over the bench so she could face him completely. It was almost too much for him. "Since weâ€¦youâ€¦since the breakup." Ginny let out a slow, shaky breath and licked her lips. "I've been thinking a lot. I've been forced to think about all the shit that I'm keeping with me, and you were right on a lot of issues."

"I wasn't trying to be a prick, Ginny. I was being honest. Like the stuff with Dean," he said. She didn't answer him, just looked away. He reached out and touched her hand. It was soft, warm, and it felt so good. He pulled away just as she looked at him. "Like the stuff with Dean," he said again.

"Yes, like the stuff with Dean," she repeated. He let out a huff of breath and shook his head. "Listen, Harry."

"What?" he said shortly.

"Look, you were right about some things but not all of them," she shot. "I'm trying to be honest with you now because I do care. Even if you don't think I do. Being honest is the only way that I know how to make the situation better. I want to make things right because I want to be with you, Harry."

"And I want to be with you, Ginny, but that's not the issue, is it?" He tried to control his aggression, but it was too hard. Right when he thought things with Ginny had finally come together, they broke apart. It was wrong. The whole year had been a complicated puzzle that he couldn't put together correctly.

"I know. I'm the issue," she said.

He dragged out a sigh. "I didn't mean it like that."

"But I do. You were right," she said.

"About what?" he asked in apprehension.

"The night we won against Slytherin and I just left you. Before I went to bed, I went to find Dean." She ran both hands through her hair and shook her head. "I wanted to see how he was doing. He had been upset all day, and it was on my mind."

A spike of intense feeling charged up his spine. "He was on your mind while you were with me?"

"It's not how you think. It's not as if I was fantasizing about him while we were kissing," she said. "Yes, he was on my mind but as a friend. I used to see Dean as sort of my male best friend, Harry, and that's even after I broke up with him."

"That doesn't make any sort of sense," he said angrily.

"Oh, it doesn't? You don't know what it's like to want your best friend back? Even if there are other things and other people around you, you just can't settle until things are better. That means nothing to you?" she asked.

He knew what she was getting at, and he didn't like her always comparing her relationship with Dean to his friendship with Ron. It wasn't in the same universe to him, but maybe that was his problem. He couldn't take anything with Dean too seriously, and it was the reason why everything had happened. "I guess it does,"

"I know it does. I think on some level you can understand why this has been difficult and confusing for me, but that's not even important," she said. "What's important is that I know I've been selfish, Harry. I haven't been honest with you or with myself about still wanting Dean as my friend. I need you to know that I see that."

Harry wasn't sure what he felt. It was complicated, as were the sensations in his chest. He was furious but hopeful at the same time. "I don't know what to say. I'm sorry." If she was looking for him to have the magic words, then she was out of luck. He didn't have the answers to anything.

Ginny frowned and opened her mouth but said nothing. She picked up her broom. "Fine. If it's okay, I'd like practice then. I need to show you a new pass that I want to teach the other chasers." The tone in her voice told him that she didn't want to talk as ex's anymore, and he didn't mind. He was too hurt to say anything particularly nice away.

"Fine," he answered. He grabbed his broom and headed out of the tent. They only talked about Quidditch for the rest of their time together.

When they were finished, Ginny left for the castle and Harry irritably and loudly put the equipment back. He was sweaty and hungry, and he really wanted to talk to Hermione before she was swept away by Ron. As soon as he got back to the castle, he literally bumped into the last person he wanted to see. "Ow," Dean said, backing up and rubbing his forehead. Harry didn't bother apologizing. He walked past him. "Oi, wait a second."

"What could you possibly want from me?" Harry asked, spinning around. He wasn't fooled. He knew Dean had planned it all, and the bloke must have been tossing off every night to his success.

Dean looked as if he was fighting back some of his own fury, but Harry didn't want him to. He wanted him to attempt another go at him. He had no reason to hold back anymore. "Trust me, I'm not looking for a chat with you, but while you're here I might as well ask. Have you seen Hermione? I can't find her or Ron, and I need to give some notes back to her."

"You borrow her notes?" he asked, not believing him at all.

Dean rolled his eyes. "Harry, someday you'll notice that the world doesn't revolve around you. She's not just your friend, and not everything you touch belongs to you."

Harry had a million ways to respond and most of them weren't pleasant, but he found a way to swallow it. "Did you check the library?"

"Yes, because that wouldn't be the first place I'd look," he said sarcastically. "Obviously I did. They're not in there, and they're not in our room."

They must have been in the abandoned classroom or up at the tower. Either way, Harry probably wouldn't get another chance to speak with her before her mandatory bedtime set by Ron. It cut his tolerance with Dean even thinner. "Find her on your own," he said distractedly before walking away.

"You have a lot of damn nerve!" Dean called.

He stopped but didn't turn around. "No, you're the one with the bloody nerve. I hope you're happy and that you got what you wanted." He found the strength to look at him. "I know you don't care about how this has turned out for me, but know that Ginny isn't any better off." Dean's composure changed and a longing took over his expression. Harry had nothing more to say, so he walked off.

His mood only soured more throughout the night, and it didn't improve by the next day. Harry had to get his head on straight. They had a game to win, and it would hopefully bring some joy to them all. He knew that they desperately needed it. So, he forced himself to get dressed and go to breakfast. He ate slowly and by himself. He needed space alone to think. He surveyed the Slytherin table and examined Draco. Catching the snitch before him would be the greatest victory imaginable. He had to beat the slick bastard and prove that he couldâ€¦

"Harry, are you alright?" Hermione asked. He tore his eyes away from him and looked up. Both Hermione and Ron were giving him curious looks.

"Yes, I'm fine. Just thinking," he said. They sat in front of him and Ron immediately started spreading marmalade on toast.

"What were you staring at? You had a terrible expression," she said.

"Nothing. Well, Malfoy. I've been going over the game in my head," he said.

"Then it might be better to write it down. You look as if you're about to explode," she said, giving him her signature look of concern.

"Here. I want you to eat all of this," Ron said, putting toast, fruit, and eggs on Hermione's plate. He poured her juice as well.

She took the pitcher and cup away from him. "Ron, I think I can feed myself."

"Then prove it to me," he said. "Bloody hell, you shouldn't even be going to class today."

"I can't stay in bed forever. I'm well rested now, and I have work to do," she said.

He rolled his eyes. "That's bollocks."

She frowned and pinched his arm. "It's not rubbish, Ronald Weasley. I care about my duties. You will respect that."

He rubbed his arm. "Sorry."

"Apology accepted," she said sternly.

"I do respect your duties. I just don't want you overworking yourself," he said.

"I won't. Give me some credit. I know that I have to be more attentive, and I will be." Her expression softened. "I'm going to take care of myself. I promise."

Harry watched Ron stare at her as if she was made of glass. He knew that he was overrun with guilt and anxiety. "Do you promise to eat breakfast as well?"

She put a hand to his cheek. "Yes, I promise." He didn't look very reassured. He took a small slice of strawberry from her plate and held it to her lips. Their eyes stayed glued on each other as she took the fruit into her mouth, and her lips ever so slightly touched his fingers. As Hermione chewed, Ron moved his thumb across her bottom lip. Harry shifted in his seat and almost got up. His friends were always so intimate with each other. He wondered if they realized that they made even the tiniest gesture seem private. He couldn't help but feel jealous of their relationship sometimes. They were an island all by themselves.

Hermione swallowed and Ron tapped her nose. "See? Food isn't so bad."

"Yes, you've convinced me," she said in a teasing way. "I think I may actually try this curious fixation called eating."

"You're lucky I'm letting that one slide," he said.

"Oh, my big tough man," she said, sticking out her lip.

He tugged on her collar. "You want me to bite that off?"

"No, sir," she breathed as her cheeks flushed.

"Then don't test your good fortune," he said. He gulped down a large spoonful of cereal. "All right, I have to go. I'll see you class."

Hermione moved her eyes away from him for just a second. "Of course," she said gently. Ron rubbed her upper arm. "Yes, it's okay," she added, obviously understanding whatever the signal was supposed to mean.

Ron grinned and pressed his lips tenderly against hers. He pulled away. "I love you," he said in barely a whisper.

She nodded. "Love you, Ron." He pecked her quickly again before getting up and walking out of the hall. Hermione watched him and held her hands tightly together. "Where do you think he's going?"

Harry wasn't sure if she was addressing him or not. It seemed as if she was asking the air around them. "I don't know. It's not like we're talking a whole lot these days. I reckon you were able to guess that just now."

Hermione finally focused on her food. "Right and my health is the bulk of our conversations. It's like we're dancing around the issues, but it's okay right now. I'm actually enjoying the peace." She bit into her toast and chewed at a snail's pace.

"Maybe you should take another day," he said.

"No. I can't run from everything. Besides, I honestly do want to work. You may not understand this, but it'll calm me down. Coursework relaxes in a way," she said.

"Yeah, I get it. Game days are usually when I'm most composed. Don't know if that will hold true in a couple of days." He glimpsed at Draco as he spoke.

She reached across the table and took his hand. "You'll be fine. You, Ron, Ginny, and Dean will work together. This will end up being a really good experience for all of you. I think Gryffindor needs this game more than we all realize."

"That's why I need to concentrate. I agree completely. We'll win," he assured, hoping that it was true. After Hermione ate all her food, they went to defense class. He had to sit next to Ron, but all he did was indiscreetly gaze at Hermione. Harry decided to focus on Quidditch. He flipped through his planning book and rewrote plays that he wanted his team to use during the match.

"Mr. Potter?" Snape said.

Harry looked up from his work. Everyone was staring at him, and Snape was right in front of his desk. He wondered how long he had been ignoring him. "Yes, sir?"

"Alas. Thank you for allowing me some of your precious attention, Mr. Potter." Snape slithered to the front of the room. "Now, as I have already asked you, what is the best method in defending yourself against the Imperious Curse?"

He wracked his brain, but it was empty. "Iâ€¦I don't know, Professor Snape."

"Well, it was your assigned reading last night," Snape said slowly, "there should be no reason why you can't answer."

"I must have skimmed that section," Harry said impatiently. He usually had more endurance when it came to Snape being a prick.

"Mr. Potter, due note that your attitude will not be tolerated in my class. Your celebrity status will get you nowhere here. Once again, what is the best defense against the Imperious Curse?" he asked.

"I told you that I don't know," Harry said loudly.

"Pity, Mr. Potter. Not only is your laziness intolerable, but you little outburst just cost Gryffindor five points." Snape scanned his dark eyes over the classroom. "Be sure to thank your classmate, students. You all will write an essay over the best



defense against the Imperious Curse. Two rolls by next class period." Everyone groaned and Ron slammed his book closed. Snape twitched a smile and settled his attention on Harry. "As for you, Mr. Potter. Since you seem to know all that you acquire, I suppose there's no reason for you to be in my classroom for today's lesson."

He knew that Snape was looking for weakness and looking for him to apologize, but he purely wasn't up to it. "I reckon so, Professor Snape." He packed up his books and scooted out of his chair. He left the room and didn't close the door behind him.

Harry actually felt a little better as he walked back to his room. He knew that Snape would plot horrible ways to get back at him, and all his classmates would give him an earful. However, some of the anger was gone. It felt brilliant to get things off his chest. There was so much going on in head, but when he returned to his dorm he just sat on his bed and continued to work on plays. His free period was right after his first class, so he would have no reason to be rudely interrupted again.

Awhile later, Ron came into the room. He sat on his bed. "Snape was vile after you left. Well, more than usual."

"Sorry about that, but he did tell me to leave," Harry said.

"Yeah, but I reckon no one thought you'd have the bollocks to actually go. Ha," He pulled things out of his school bag, and Harry wasn't sure where to take the conversation. Other than discussing Hermione's condition in the hospital wing, the two hadn't spoken so much since his breakup with Ginny. Harry couldn't tell what Ron thought about it or about the fact that he had shagged his sister months before officially dating her.

"Did Hermione say anything after class?" Harry asked finally.

"She's upset that you lost your temper, and of course she's worried," Ron answered.

"She doesn't need to be," he said.

"I told her that, but she's too stubborn to listen. I don't want her to add on any more stress. She has to stay healthy," Ron pressed, as his eyes grew wider.

"She'll be all right, Ron. I think what happened has really had an effect on her. She'll take better care of herself," Harry assured.

Ron rubbed his palms into his thighs. "I'm going to take better care of her also. I'm not going to let her get that mentally sick again. If I have to give her a sleeping draught and force food down her throat every night, then I will."

Harry nodded and tried hard to keep his mouth shut. It was too difficult. He had been around Hermione for far too long. "That's good that you will, but you have to know that it's not just

eating and getting enough rest, right? That's not all her collapse was about."

"I'm aware, Harry. She's stressed about school and Lavender and what you did," Ron said.

"And you," Harry added.

Ron looked up. "Sorry?"

He knew that he was in a big enough hole, but he couldn't sit around and let Ron and Hermione's relationship end up like his with Ginny. "Ron, you know she's worried over whatever it is that you're keeping to yourself. You know, what you still haven't told me about."

"Harry, I really don't need this," Ron muttered.

"It's important. It's for Hermione's sake--"

"Don't tell me what's best for Hermione like I'm just some prat who doesn't care about her," Ron swiftly said through gritted teeth.

"Ron," Harry said just as strongly, "she's also my best friend. I'm allowed to give my opinion. I want her to be happy, and I want you to be happy. Trust me, whatever you're keeping from her isn't nearly as bad as what you're doing at the moment. Bloody talk to her, Ron. All she wants is your honesty."

He snorted. "This is bollocks coming from you. You're lecturing me on honesty? So, I reckon you lying to everyone doesn't count."

Harry counted in his head. Ron's feelings didn't come from nothing. "You're right. I've lied about a lot of things, but I'm not the only one who's apparently made mistakes. I'm not saying that I'm perfect and know every damn thing, but I'm trying to learn from it all. I'm trying to talk to you. Why are you fighting me?"

"Because things aren't that simple, Harry," Ron said. "If you haven't noticed, we're not the same anymore."

"I know we're not," Harry said a bit softer, "but if there's one thing that we still agree on then it's Hermione. She's what's important right now, Ron. You have to get over yourself and whatever it is that's eating at you. I don't want to see her in the hospital again. She's really all I have these days."

Ron was still and quiet for a while. "I'm glad she's there for you. Your friendship with her is really special. I know you care about her a lot."

"I do," Harry said in earnest.

"Still. As greatly as you two get on and as much as you may love her, there's no way in hell or anywhere else that you could possibly understand what I feel for her," he said. "I may not get

every feeling right all the time. I also know that I tend to just go off without much thought, but you don't get to tell me how to love her."

"You're not even listening to me," Harry said.

"I am. I mean do you think I'm stupid? Like I don't know that I'm fucking things up or that I'm probably the main reason why she collapsed?" He rubbed his neck roughly. "Harry, I watched her. I saw her fall. I've been beating myself up every moment since because I know she's anxious about her and me. I know I hurt her, Harry, and it's killing me. It's not like I don't feel anything."

Harry felt as if he was looking at Ginny. All year he and Hermione had thought to some agree that siblings had it the easiest. He wished that he hadn't been so naïve. "I know you feel things, Ron. That's not what I'm saying."

"When she collapsed and wouldn't wake up, everything in me stopped working." Ron closed his eyes for a moment and actually shivered. "Hermione is my entire life. I'm not blind. I know what I've got and how important she is. I don't want to lose her."

"Believe me, I get it," Harry urged. He wanted to tell him that it was all he had ever felt for Ginny, him, Hermione.

Ron didn't seem happy about their mutual understanding. "I'm glad you do, so don't talk to me like I'm thick. I don't want her in the hospital either." He grabbed his bag and yanked things out of it. "The one thing I'm trying to avoid is messing things up so much to the point where Hermione falls asleep in your arms after crying, like Ginny did with me."

A pang hit Harry's chest. "That's not fair."

"Maybe not but it's the bloody truth. How about you use your own advice to help fix things with my sister. She's extremely important also, and last time I checked she's supposed to be the one that you have." He turned away from him and took his defense book out of his bag. Once again they were silent. Harry looked back to his workbook but no longer felt the energy to write. Instead, he grabbed his school bag and left the dorm. He needed to be alone.

On his way to the library, he thought about everything he had worked for during the year. Though he loved being Ginny's boyfriend, he wasn't sure if the time had been worth them breaking up and not being friends. Planning all the schemes with Hermione now seemed pointless, and he couldn't remember the last time he and Ron were truly fine together. Even though his life had never been the greatest, it was once perfect in its own way. He wanted it all back, but he didn't know how to get it. Everything had seemed so simple when they first started.

"Okay lot, this game is just like the last one. All we have to do is keep making them fly. They'll run out of steam, and their attitude alone won't be enough. We can do this!" Harry shook his fists and half his team was just as eager as he tried to be.

However, Ron, Ginny, and Dean didn't have the light in them. Harry couldn't blame them. He didn't either, but he couldn't let it affect him. They needed to win. They simply had to beat Slythern. "On three, Gryffindor!" he shouted, putting his hand out. The team joined him. "We can do this. We just have to focus," he said it more to the three than to anyone else. He knew that Ron's mind was on Hermione. Ginny's mind was on him, and Dean's mind could have been on anything.

"On three, Harry," Katie said, eyeing him manically.

"Yes, right. One, two, three!"

"GRYFFINDOR!" they all roared. His teammates ran out of the tent screaming, and Harry swallowed the lump of nerves. He hadn't felt so nervous since playing as a first year. He took a deep breath and joined his teammates and classmates on the pitch.

Harry immediately understood that he had no reason to worry. Slythern wasn't any better. Unfortunately, his team had apparently gotten a lot worse. They played frantically and out of synch with each other. Easy saves weren't made. Good passes were dropped, and teammates were unnecessarily put in the path of the bludgers. Harry tried to focus on the snitch. Something had to be salvaged. He flew without caution and his turns were sloppy. He was so distracted by everything else that was going on.

The golden ball zoomed right in front of his face, and he chased after it. He reached his hand out to connect with it. He had to grab it. They had to win. He pushed himself forward and attempted to swipe it, but he overextended and almost lost control of his broom. By the time he corrected himself, the snitch was already too far ahead and right in the grasp of Draco Malfoy. He caught it. The game was officially over, and they had lost. Defeat didn't begin to cover the wave that swept over him.

While Slythern got to rejoice in the practice tent, Gryffindor was left on the pitch. They huddled together. Harry was at a loss for words. He had played so poorly. He let his emotions get in the way, and it cost them the chance at winning the cup. "I'm sorry everyone," he said out of breath to his mute team.

Katie put her hands on her hips. "It's not just your fault, Harry. There are a few people on this team who obviously left their focus in the showers this morning." She glared them all down, but he knew whom she was referring to. Ron, Dean, and Ginny looked just as guilty as he felt.

"It's okay," a fourth year chaser said. "We had a good year."

"No! It's not okay! This game should have been ours! We were supposed to win this effortlessly and beat Ravenclaw for the cup! This was my year to win!" Katie yelled. Harry felt even worse. Winning was important to him, but he knew no one took it more seriously than Katie. It was her last year on the team.

"I'm sorry, Katie," Dean said.

"That's not good enough," she said, almost in tears.

Ron unfastened his chinstrap and snatched his helmet off. "This is fucking bollocking shit!" He picked up his broom and stormed away from them.

"Yes, pretty much. What a great way to end the season, yeah?" Katie said, walking off as well. Harry closed his eyes as he heard the rest of his team slowly slump away. He opened them when it was quiet again. Ginny was still there. She was flushed, sweaty, and devastated. He didn't have any comforting words, and what he wanted was a good hug from her and a heavy snog to ease over the loss.

"I'm really sorry that I let you down today, Harry. Just remember that we all lost this game. You're still a great captain," she said.

"You think so?" he asked honestly. It was all he had been thinking about.

She took his hand. "Of course I do. We're a team. We just couldn't block it all out this time." She squeezed his hand and gave him a small smile before walking off. For the first time in a long time, he felt the strong connection to Ginny that he knew would always be there. She went beyond everything he thought he wanted and purely gave him what he needed. Somehow her touch and words gave him the courage to walk back to the castle.

He didn't get too far in before he heard a terrible bit of laughter. "I was wondering when you'd finally slum in, Potter."

Harry turned around and saw Draco standing smugly a few feet away. "Leave me alone, Malfoy."

He began walking but Draco caught up to him. "But I want to talk to you for a moment."

"Fuck off, prick! You won. Go celebrate with your bloody team," Harry snapped.

"There will be plenty of time for that later," he said. "I'm only here to congratulate Gryffindor on a brilliant display of skill and patience that you lots are famous for. I see why your team is celebrated so highly. You're a brilliant captain."

Harry stopped walking and gripped his wand. He counted slowly in his head. "Malfoy, I mean it. You have the rest of the term to take the piss out of me. Give me one night off."

Draco chuckled and put a hand to his chest. "Well, Mr. Potter, I am offended. I'm not taking the piss at all. We've always been in agreement that having weasel and girl weasel on the team were good things. They proved that today. Thank you for always having more heart than balls. If it wasn't for them, then Slythern wouldn't be going to the finals."

Harry clenched his jaw and felt blood pound against his skin. "Just because you won doesn't mean you have a better team. You're still rubbish as a seeker, and your team is rubbish when it comes to hard work. You got lucky."

"Yes, it was luck that made me catch the snitch while you were wobbling like an idiot," Draco said.

"You're damn right. That's exactly what happened. You fed off my mistake. That's not skill, Draco. Anyone can do that." Harry pushed past him and kept walking.

"So, why were the gingers so off today?" he asked loudly. "We all want to know. Was it because your little girlfriend wasn't able to rub up against your scar the night before, and weasel hadn't felt mudblood's filth on him for ages?"

Harry stopped and turned around. "What do you mean by that?"

A bit of excitement shined in Draco's pale eyes. He causally strolled up to him. "Hmm, I've got your attention, eh? Let's just say that I hear things about the sleeping arrangements in different houses."

"No, don't give me that bullshit. How the fuck do you know about what goes on in Gryffindor? You hate all of us, and you have no friends," Harry said.

Draco pulled off his Quidditch gloves and neatly folded them into his pocket. "Hate is a strong word, Potter. I simply can't tolerate the good and pathetic behavior. Gryffindor is full of ignorant people who think that having a big heart and stupidity disguised as bravery is enough to get them whatever they want in life."

"Malfoy," Harry growled.

He held a hand up. "Then again, it's also filled with annoying and tedious girls who feel as if they must sneak to Slythern every night and disturb what we have going on. I told Patel repeatedly that I didn't care about her relationship with Blaise, but she wouldn't take the hint. I had to get my point across another way."

Harry put the pieces together, and a sick ferocity formed in his stomach. "Are you saying that you're McGonagall's anonymous tip?"

Draco smirked and shrugged. "It certainly wasn't anonymous when I went to her office and told her that it would be wise to remind students of where they belong at night. I was sick of seeing a Gryffindor in Slythern quarters."

"You arsehole," Harry said, taking a step closer to him. He couldn't believe it, and he wasn't sure if Hermione would either. He wanted to take the handle of his broom straight to Malfoy's head.

"What? How was I to know that it would turn into a scandal for all you Gryffindors?" Draco started laughing, and he clutched his stomach. "If I would have known that you not being able to sleep with your girlfriend would make you both miserable, then I would have said something months ago. Howeverâ€¦" He sneered and looked at him in a sinister way. "If I would have known that Granger not being able to cozy against Weasley would make her lose consciousness, then I would have told McGonagall years ago. It's just a pity that she didn't stay asleep or lose life all together."

Something fiery and mighty released from his body. He let out a holler and before he knew it, his fist connected to Draco's jaw. He fell back against the floor and clutched his face while groaning. Harry watched him. He shook terribly and his hand hurt, but he felt loads better. A heavy chunk of his aggression and furious energy was gone. Draco's hand emerged, but Harry didn't have time to react. He was hit with a spell and flew back against the wall. His head smacked against the stone, and he slid to the floor. His vision blurred and a loud ringing boomed in his ear. Pain set in his head and chest.

"You fucking bastard!" someone bellowed. Harry tried to focus, but all he saw was a flash of red tackle a flash of white to the ground. He wanted to get up but his vision was still too cloudy. He heard yells and yelps as the two figures fought on the floor. He closed his eyes and after a minute or two the fight seemed to be over. "Harry, Harry, focus! Are you all right? Are you all right?" Ron's voice asked.

"Hmm?" he said. It took all his strength to drag his eyelids open.

"No, wake up." Ron snapped his fingers right in front of his ears, and it shook him awake. Harry blinked repeatedly until his vision was normal. The pain still throbbed throughout his body, but he could at least see and the ringing wasn't as loud. Ron was kneeling before him. He clutched both his shoulders. "Harry, can you hear me? Can you see me?"

"Y-yeah, I hear you. I can see you," Harry finally said when his brain turned back on.

Ron let out a breath of relief. "Brilliant. I'm glad you'll at least wake for me."

"Ow! Oh, ow! " Draco whined. Harry moved his eyes to him. He was still on the ground. One hand covered his face and the other cupped his crotch. Judging by his fetal position on the floor, it was easy to tell what Ron's final attack had been on.

"Quiet, Malfoy!" Ron ordered. He turned back to Harry. "So, are you okay?"

"It's my head. I hit the wall with the back of it," Harry said.

"I know. I was walking, and I heard you two down here. I turned the corner and saw ferret throw a curse at you when you weren't

even looking. The bloody twat." Ron reached for the back of Harry's head. As soon as his fingertips touched his scalp, Harry hissed and tensed. Ron pulled away. "Sorry."

His eyes widened. There was blood on Ron's knuckles. "Fucking hell, am I bleeding that much?"

"What? Oh, no. You've only got a spot." Ron wiped his hand against his Quidditch trousers. "This is Malfoy's and possibly mine. I reckon I cut my hand on his pointy little rat nose."

Harry looked back over at Draco who was still groaning on the floor. It was marvelous, but he knew that Ron would get in serious trouble for it. "You didn't have to do that, Ron."

"Yeah, I did. I told you that I've wanted to get that fucker all year. He only got a couple of good hits in," Ron said, pointing to his face. Harry saw the slight redness around his left eye. "Besides...he hurt you. No matter what, I can't really allow that to happen."

He smiled a little. "Thanks."

"What on Earth is going on here?" McGonagall asked, rushing over to Draco. Snape was right behind her.

Harry stumbled to his feet with Ron's aid. "Professor, I can explain."

"No! Let me explain. Weasley and Potter attacked me!" Draco said, getting to his feet with Snape's help. His nose had a constant stream of blood flowing from it, and his face was scarlet.

"That's a load of dragon shit! You attacked Harry first!" Ron shouted.

"Mr. Weasley, it would be wise if you lowered your tone and changed your choice of words," Snape said.

"Potter, explained yourself," McGonagall ordered.

A dull pain throbbed against his skull, but he tried to focus. "Malfoy made me angry, so I hit him. He's right on that." There was no point in lying. It took too much effort on his bruised brain.

"But Draco used his wand and hit you with a spell," Ron promptly added. "Fist against wand isn't fair!"

"Silence, Weasley!" McGonagall barked. "Mr. Malfoy, is that true?"

Draco clutched his stomach and panted. "Yes, I used my wand on him, but Weasley assaulted me next and wouldn't stop even when I was down."

"Mr. Weasley?" Snape asked.



"I bloody well did assault him, Professor Snape. I'll admit it." Ron glared at Draco. "And you better be thankful that I did stop, Malfoy. You'd be a lot worse if I gave you what you truly deserved."

Harry didn't have the strength to hold him back, but Snape was smart enough to walk backwards with Draco in his grasp. "Minerva, I think it would be prudent for you to handle your house, and I'll handle mine. It's obvious that all three boys should be held accounted for."

"I agree. Potter, do you need to go to hospital wing?" McGonagall asked. Harry nodded as nausea started to flood around his head and slowly drip down his throat. "Then go see Madame Pomfrey and afterwards meet me and Mr. Weasley in my classroom."

"I should go with him. He's really peaky," Ron said, putting an arm on his shoulder.

"Fine Mr. Weasley, but you both come to my office right after. You two go down that hall, and I'll accompany Severus with Draco. Move. Now," she demanded.

Ron took Harry's broom and the two walked down the hall to the hospital wing. "You should probably get your hand looked at while we're there," Harry said.

"No, I'm fine. It's the last part of me that I'm worried about being damaged. Once Hermione finds out about this, I'll be in as much pain as Malfoy. Probably in the same places, too," he said.

Harry was relieved to discover that he only had a mild concussion. Madame Pomfrey gave him potion that made his nausea disappear and the bump on his head not hurt as much. Against his will, Ron let her examine his hand and mend the bone. McGonagall arrived with Professor Snape and Draco, but she rushed them out of the room before they could see what harm had really been done to him.

The moment they got to her classroom, she practically shoved them against a table. "Sit here and stay quiet. When students are injured in a fight like this, I have to file a report. I'll be right back," McGonagall said. Harry and Ron sat and watched as she stomped out of the room.

"What do you think she's going to do to us?" Harry asked.

"Well, all three of us will definitely be punished and get detention," Ron said gloomily. "We'll have points taken away as well, but I'm fairly sure you'll get the lightest sentence."

"Why is that? I started it," he said.

"Doesn't matter. Draco used his wand against you when you were unaware. That's a major misuse of magic, and I entered the fight with no intention of stopping it civilly. I used violence, and that's a strike. Being Prefects doesn't us either. That's three major counts against Draco, and two major counts against me."

You've only got one minor offense." Ron finally stopped and took a breath.

Harry looked at him in shock and wondered if he had bumped his head as well. "Wow, you sounded exactly like Hermione just now. You rambled out facts and school policies like a Head Boy would do."

"Fuck off," Ron said. "I've been a Prefect for almost two whole years. I know the rules. I just don't see the point in following a lot of them."

Harry chuckled and shook his head. He felt a lot better with the potion minimizing most of his pain, but he was still hurting from Draco's hit and from the loss. He snuck a glance at Ron. He flipped his wand between his fingers and stared off. It was strange. He was sure that they were still fighting, and they were moments away from having their bollocks cursed off by McGonagall, but he felt more comfortable around him then he had in months.

Harry decided to seize the opportunity. "Sorry about the match. Watching Draco catch the snitch was the worst."

"Even if you had caught it, they were probably too far ahead in points. I let them make a lot of goals. I'm sorry about that. Katie was right. My mind wasn't there," Ron said.

"I reckon we all had other things on our minds," he said.

"Yeah. Hermione was the only thought in my head, and it wasn't in a good way like usual. All I kept seeing was her face and how unhappy she is. She's unhappy because of me." The bruise on his eye was settling, and his knuckles were a bit torn up and stained with blood. He didn't seem to notice one bit of it.

"I don't know if this helps, but Draco told McGonagall about everyone sleeping together. He confessed it right before I punched him," Harry said.

Ron dropped his jaw. "You can't be serious."

"I wish I wasn't," Harry said. "He said that he just told McGonagall to remind Gryffindors to stay in our house. He didn't like seeing Parvati with Blaise so much over there, but I don't believe that for a second. He had to know more was going on."

"That blond prick. I should have known. Once I see him again, I'm putting him right back into the hospital wing. He's caused me so much shit," Ron said.

"At least you can tell Hermione that it wasn't Lavender after all. You were right," he said.

Ron didn't seem pleased. "I guess but that also means that Hermione was wrong. I know her. It's going to make her feel bad. All the stress and accusations were for nothing."

"Well, maybe not all for nothing," Harry eased in. "I know you don't want to hear it though, so that's all I'm going to say."

"No, you can say more if you want to. I should probably hear it," he mumbled.

Harry gave him a look. "Why? So you can storm away?"

Ron shook his head. "I won't. I reckon it's most likely true." Harry looked at him curiously. He sighed. "I'm always the last one to the tent before a match."

"I know you are. It's fucking mental. We get up at the same time," Harry said.

"There's a reason for that. Now, don't take the piss," Ron said. "Before every game, Hermione and I have this little thing we do. Right before I leave for the pitch, I give her a hug and ask her to wish me luck. She then tells me I don't need it and kisses me. Then she gives me this incredible smile that just gives me everything I need to play."

"Ah," Harry said. "And you two didn't do it today?"

"No. It still happened, but when she smiled at me it was different." Ron gazed off and as he could see her right in front of him. "I've known for awhile about how distant we've gotten, but for whatever reason seeing her smile like that today, like she got kissed by a dementor instead of her boyfriend, tore me up. I don't know what I'm doing, Harry, but it's not helping. You were right. You've always been smarter than me."

"I'm not looking to be right, and I'm obviously not that smart. Things aren't going great for me. If I was smart then Ginny would still be my girlfriend, and we wouldn't have this between us, Ron." Harry almost preferred Ron to be angry and with him then seeing him so unsure of himself.

He suddenly gave him an expression that was easily recognizable. He had seen the look on Ron's face many times before. It was deep and powerful and honest sympathy. "I hate that you slept with her and didn't tell me, but what I hate even more is that you told Hermione. It was a secret that was only between you two."

"I didn't plan on telling her, Ron. I wasn't going to tell anyone. She found from Ginny, and I couldn't lie," Harry explained.

"But it's more than that. It was another thing that was just for you two," Ron said.

"It's not like that at all. It's not as if I enjoyed having Hermione find out, and you know that we're just friends." Harry almost wanted to laugh at the implications. "This is ridiculous."

"No, it's not," Ron said angrily. "I know you two are just friends. That's what bothers me. Even as her boyfriend and as your best friend, I'm still not good enough to be apart of

things. I know it's stupid and I have no right to be such a prat about it, but I can't help it. I've been really angry with the both of you, and it's made me stupid about a lot of things."

"I don't know why you think things have to be either you or me when it comes to Hermione," Harry said. "We're best friends. She sees me as a brother and I see her as my sister. Like you and Ginny."

"Yeah, I know," Ron rushed.

"Yes, you do, but what you still apparently don't know is that whatever we share with each other or not, it doesn't make a difference." Harry didn't know how to explain to Ron once again that he was the beginning and end for Hermione. "It's like you're Hermione's bloody sunlight, Ron. I don't understand how you still can't see that."

Ron shrugged, almost as if he was giving up. "I dunno. I do try, but it doesn't feel like it's enough sometimes."

"Then tell her that. I know that I wish Ginny had told me some things way before now. There are things that I should have told her as well," Harry said.

"Harry, if there's one thing I do know it's that Ginny wishes the same. I know how she feels." He looked off again as if he was in another world. "This is the last thing that she ever wanted to happen. It just fit together better in her head, like it has in mine."

"It's not in her head anymore. It's out and I hate it," Harry said truthfully. "I didn't want to leave her." He looked down at his Quidditch trousers, and he saw Ron shift out of the corner of his eye. They were silent.

"Harry, I've been an asshole," Ron finally said. "I told myself that I couldn't understand why all this happened, but I think I can. I've wanted to be mad at you, but I'm going through it also."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, looking up.

Ron exhaled deeply and rubbed his hands together. "I feel like I'm ruining everything with Hermione because I'm not being honest with her. I want to, but I don't want to hurt her. It's not like I'm trying to make things worse or keep things from her. I justâ€¦I don't knowâ€¦"

"You think the truth will be a lot worse?" Harry helped.

Ron nodded. "Exactly, but I don't want to hide anything. I know how that feels. It horrible."

"Then be honest. You told me that you should be truthful with the people you love. I think that's true. I've never lied to you or to Ginny because I wanted to cause either of you pain. I simply thought it would be better, but I was wrong." Harry said. "I

reckon Ginny and I are finally really doing that, but it seems a bit late."

"I'm really sorry about what's happened. I know I give you both cheek, but I wish you two hadn't broken up," Ron said.

"Me too. That's why I'm pushing you so much. You and Hermione don't have to be this way," he said. "Having a girlfriend is a lot of bloody work."

Ron let out a low whistle. "Fucking cheers to that." He rubbed his eyes but suddenly stopped and hissed. "Damn, forgot, Malfoy..."

"Ron, I'm sorry that I didn't tell you about Ginny and me. Apart of me really wanted to, but the time never seemed right. I didn't want you to think that I used her. I'd never have sex with her merely because. I never planned for it to happen." He hoped that Ron could see that he was being sincere. If he was ever truly going to put the pieces together, then it had to start with Ron.

He nodded slowly. "Listenâ€¦as Ginny's brother I can't forgive you until she's happy again and this is fixed. She always comes first, but as your best mate I'm here for you. I'll try to understand. I know that you love her."

"I really do, Ron. It's never changed," Harry said.

"I'm glad. I reckon it's selfish timing that I'm saying this. I've been such a fucking tit, but what else is new?" Ron asked with a slight grin.

"Not much, I reckon," Harry cheeked.

"I'd hit you, but you've had enough of that today," he said. "Look, with everything going on, I could really use my best friend right now. I'm sorry."

"I didn't go anywhere, Ron, and I know I need mine. It's fine," Harry said, holding out his hand. Ron shook it. "However, I might reconsider if you don't tell me about what's going on with Lavender."

"Rightâ€¦" Ron said slowly. "So, um, after McGonagall lectured all of us, Hermione and I talked. We sort of argued, and I ended things badly. I decided to find Lavender later that night to see what she knew. Hermione had asked me not to though, and she was right. Finding Lavender was a mistake."

Harry didn't know what Ron was trying to tell him. "Hermione doesn't know that you saw her?"

"No. At least, I don't think so. Lavender hasn't mentioned that she told her, and I told Hermione that I went to bed right after our conversation," Ron said.

It was obvious to Harry that the weight of whatever happened hung heavily from Ron's shoulders. "You can't keep this up, Ron. I'm

here for you, too, but I don't think this is right. It's not good for either of you."

"I know. I'm going to tell her when we get some real alone time. I can't do it now. She has enough on her mind," Ron said. He opened his mouth again but McGonagall came back into the classroom. They quickly stood.

She marched over to their desk. "I hope you two realize that I don't enjoy filing reports like these and especially against Gryffindors."

"Sorry, Professor McGonagall," they said together.

"Now, over the years you gentlemen have shown vast leadership and have brought dignity to the Gryffindor house. Conversely, you two have also shown your lack of appreciation and respect for the rules of Hogwarts. I know the loss today was grave, but it does not justify violence. I'm very disappointed in you both."

"Sorry, Professor McGonagall," they said together again.

"Duly noted, but an apology will not excuse this behavior." She turned her attention to Harry. "Mr. Potter, Mr. Malfoy's taunting was simply that. Using violence against him was not the answer, and I'd think you could be mature enough to handle a few words. Fifteen points will be taken from Gryffindor, and a full weekend's detention helping Mr. Filch around the castle will do you some good."

"I understand. Thank you," he said in surprise. A weekend's detention cleaning wouldn't be any worse than what he always had to endure at the Dursleys.

McGonagall slowly moved her eyes to Ron. He stood his ground but gulped. "As for you, Mr. Weasley. You have tested my patience repeatedly this year, and this incident alone speaks volumes. Now, I am taking into account that you saw Draco attacked Harry, but it doesn't rationalize your behavior. As Prefects I have to hold you both more responsible."

"Yes, Professor McGonagall, I understand," Ron said.

"I don't want Gryffindor to suffer anymore because of your lack of judgment, and I'm not going to strip you of your badge. However, you will serve three weekends of detention with me, I will write to your parents, and you will solely be in charge of organizing the refreshments for the graduation ceremony. Ms. Granger originally took up the responsibility, but it's in your hands now. Is that understood Ronald Weasley?" she asked.

Ron's neck flushed, and Harry knew that he wanted to say something or possibly implode. However, he cleared his throat and nodded. "Yes, Professor McGonagall. Thank you, it's completely fair. I deserve this." Harry had to hide his grin. McGonagall didn't know Ron well enough to tell that he was being sarcastic and practically swearing at her.

"I'm glad you think so. It could be a lot worse, and I will not be this kind if it happens again. Well, Mr. Potter, you're finished. Return to your house in a better manner than when you left the Quidditch pitch. Mr. Weasley, we might as well get started on your new duties." She pulled a quill from her robes and handed it to Ron.

Harry gave Ron a look of support before exiting the room. He couldn't believe how lightly he had gotten off. It felt incredible, and it was even more unexpected that he and Ron were talking again. The loss against Slytherin was terrible, yet somehow getting to punch Malfoy and reconciling with his best friend had come out of it. He yawned as he made it back to the Common Room. Even with all the excitement, he was tired and needed to sleep off the still embarrassing loss and achiness.

He opened the door to his room, and only Hermione was inside. She shot up from Ron's bed. "Harry! Where were you? I just ordered Neville to find you."

Harry walked gradually to his bed. He wasn't sure where to begin. "Oh, yeah, well--"

"I'm really sorry about the defeat, Harry. I can reassure you that no one is angry—or really angry anyway," she rushed in. She sat next to him and rubbed his arm. "I know you probably want to blame yourself, but you all did your best. Given the state of things, I think your team handled the match rather professionally."

He knew that she didn't believe her words, but he appreciated it regardless. "Thanks."

She gave him a smile before looking behind him to the open door. "So, was Ron right behind you or is he sulking somewhere?"

Harry almost cringed. He'd rather take another lecture from McGonagall than break the news to Hermione. "Well—about that—see—he's with McGonagall right now."

She raised an eyebrow "Why is he with McGonagall?"

"That's the thing. Um, it's why I'm late getting her," he began. "I—sort of—got into a fight—with Malfoy."

The muscle in Hermione's jaw bulged. "What do you mean you got into a fight with Malfoy? What happened?" Her voice was calm, but he knew a storm brewed within her. Maybe he would still lose his bollocks.

"He acted like an arse so I—sort of punched him," Harry said.

"Harry James Potter!" Hermione said, throwing her hands up.

"He deserved it, trust me. Anyway, Malfoy threw a spell at me and that's when Ron—"

"What did Ron do?" she asked.

Her eyes were wide and severe and pinkness stained her cheeks. He would kill Ron for leaving him to tell her what happened. "Well, he defended me and really gave it to Malfoy."

She gasped and grabbed his arms. "How is he? Is he hurt?" she asked, practically shaking him.

He took her wrists and pulled her away. He was still a bit dizzy. "He's fine. Just a black eye and a mended hand, but he's great," Harry said. "I think he rather enjoyed himself." He knew right away that his last comment had been the wrong one.

Hermione's nostrils flared and she stood. There was nothing but red in her brown eyes. "Enjoy it, did he?"

"I don't mean it like that. Wait, what are you going to do?" he asked.

She moved hair out of her face and pointed her chin in the air. "I'm going to wait outside McGonagall's office so I can collect the delinquent."

"He was just backing me up. Remember that," Harry tried.

"Right. We should all live by Ron's rules. We can lounge all the time and hit whomever we want without good reason. The world will be perfect," she snapped. She closed her eyes and took a breath. "So, he's really alright?"

"Yes, he's fine. I'm okay also, you know," Harry said with a grin.

She rolled her eyes. "Don't act cute with me, Harry. You started this mess. I swear you boys need to grow up. There's enough mayhem in the world and even more in our personal lives." She scowled him once before leaving the room. He sniggered as he climbed into bed and settled under his blanket. He wished that Ginny were against his chest. He wanted to laugh at the situation and sleep off the defeat with her. He closed his eyes and thought about what she was doing. He hoped that she was thinking about him as much as he thought about her.

Harry opened his eyes and sat up. He automatically reached for his glasses. He heard his roommates and opened his curtain. "Ah, there you are," Seamus said. "We thought you would hide forever."

"Yeah, I wish it was that easy," he mumbled.

"I think your duel with Malfoy made up for it a little. It's all anyone is talking about," Neville said.

Harry sat up and stretched. The nap had done wonders for his head. Neville, Seamus, and Dean were in the room. Dean looked at him, but Harry turned away. "It didn't exactly happen like that, and how do you know?"



"How wouldn't we know? I found out from Hannah. You and Ron are quiet the stars tonight," Seamus said with a laugh.

"Where is he?" Harry asked.

"Probably giving Hermione a nosh," Seamus answered.

"Seamus," Dean said.

"No, I mean it. Harry, you should have seen those two. They weren't exactly discreet. Hermione wouldn't stop lecturing Ron, and she did it in the Common Room. He apparently almost killed Malfoy," Seamus said.

Harry groaned and rubbed the bump on his head. "He didn't almost kill him. He beat him up ruthlessly. That's all."

"Well, Hermione's knickers have never been tighter," Neville said. "Seamus might be right. It could be the only way to calm her down."

"Females love getting attention down there. She'll be fine, and once his black eye completely settles she'll want Ron even more," Seamus said. "Girls love bruises, right Harry?"

"You're a fucker, Seamus. Just shut up about them," Harry said. He wanted to go back to sleep. Things were less complicated there.

Seamus rolled his eyes. "I'm being honest. You blokes always give me shit for telling the truth. What do you want, yeah?"

Dean touched his shoulder. "Maybe we should save this for later. Almost killed or not, we did lose to Malfoy. I don't want to talk about him."

"I don't either," Harry said. Dean looked at him and nodded.

"Can we at least talk about how we're going to cheer Ron up when he gets back? Getting it from Hermione is almost as bad as getting it from Snape," Neville said. "I feel bad for him."

"I have some whiskey left. Hermione didn't find it all the last time she frisked me," Seamus said.

Dean smiled at his best friend. "Good one, Seam. My vote is for that."

"I'm here for you, mate," Seamus answered.

"Sure, whatever. I need to go see Pomfrey first. She told me to see her again sometime tonight. I reckon I should before I get pissed. I'll be right back." Harry slipped on his shoes and left the room. He left the Common Room and hoped that he would run into Ron and Hermione. He wanted to save Ron from the de-bollocking that was sure to happen.

"Oi, hold on," Dean said from behind him.

Harry stopped and turned around. "Yes?" he asked slowly. He wasn't in the mood to fight him anymore.

Dean dug his hands into his pockets and looked at him funny. "So, Malfoy cursed you, huh?"

"If you're here to gloat, then don't bother. It won't get to me," Harry said.

"That's not what I want. Um, let me start over. The game today—we were awful," Dean said.

He studied him but couldn't tell if he was trying to be a prick or not. "Yeah, we really were."

"Katie hasn't come out of her room since," Dean said. He started walking and Harry didn't know why but he joined him.

"She probably won't for the rest of the night. The win was everything to her," Harry explained.

"And I let her down," Dean said gloomily. "I need to talk to her and explain things. I've never played that terribly before."

Harry couldn't take his eyes off Dean. He was acting so civil. "I don't think any of us have. I reckon it will be good to talk to her but don't be surprised if she doesn't accept your apology. Katie takes a while to come around after a loss. Besides, it's me she really wants an answer from."

"Why? Because you're the brilliant seeker?" Dean asked. His tone was more of what Harry was used to.

"No. It's because I'm the captain and I didn't play like one today. She knows my style well, and she can tell when I truly care about what I'm doing," Harry said.

"That's right. You two have been playing together for years. You have your own special language," Dean said with attitude.

Harry sighed and stopped walking. "Look, I need to go to the hospital wing. What is this honestly about? What do you want, Dean?"

Dean shrugged. "I dunno. After the match I had a really long and annoying talk with Seamus. It's been the most maddening day of my life."

"That's great," Harry said dully.

"I'm not finished," Dean shot. "Look, I'm not sure—what I'm supposed to do here so I'll just say it. I'm sorry for playing so lousy."

"Oh—um, it's alright. We were all rather thick out there." Harry felt extremely uncomfortable. He was beyond furious and

over everything associated with Dean, but a persistent and hopeful part of him wanted to hear him out.

Dean nodded. "Yeah, well, a lot of other things have happened too. I reckonâ€¦I'm not so proud of those situations either."

Harry didn't understand his cryptic and as hopeful as he was, it wasn't enough to overcome his bitterness. "Like breaking me up with Ginny?" he asked. He knew he was being a prick, but he felt as if he earned the right. For once he just wanted to feel and act like everyone else.

Dean glared at him. "I didn't break you up with Ginny."

"Then we have nothing more to talk about," Harry said with a shrug.

"Fucking hell you prick. Justâ€¦hold on," Dean said. "There were obviously issues between you two long before Ginny and I even dated. However, maybe-maybe I did make things worse when I didn't have to."

It must have been because he had already been in a fight earlier that day because he didn't even feel like hitting him. "So, you're admitting it?" Harry asked.

"Stop acting so self-righteous, Harry. It's not as plain as you think," Dean said.

"Then what the hell is it?" he asked. "What are you calling it?"

"You don't understand. This whole situation has been a nightmare. All year I've had this feeling, and when Ginny started dating you it got worse. I lost it," Dean said.

"Oh, I understand," Harry said darkly. "I was there during it all. I watched you turn into someone completely different."

"I don't feel the need to justify anything to you. I felt betrayed, and I still do," he said.

"And that is justifiable? That's worth hurting Ginny and putting her through all this?" Harry asked. His usual temper and aggression wasn't there. He was genuinely curious.

"No, it's not," Dean said. "I want Ginny to be happy and if she's not with me, then I have to deal with that. It's not as if I've wanted to bind her hands and keep her chained to me."

"It seems that way," Harry said gently.

"But it's honestly not. It's just that the way things have happened is wrong to me. You have no idea what I've been thinking. You two went behind my back all year, and the whole shagging thingâ€¦"

"We didn't plan that," Harry said. "It just happened. You don't have to believe it, but it's true."

"Like the truth really matters right now. Harry, we used to be friends, and I thought you were someone I could trust," Dean said. "I thought Ginny was someone I could trust."

Everything was interconnected. Listening to Dean and watching him was like listening and watching Ron. Harry knew that Ginny had said the same words to Dean at a time, and Hermione was in the same situation that Harry was in. Even Lavender was caught in the middle. She probably felt the same strand of hurt that Dean did due to Ron and Hermione's actions. It was sobering for Harry. Hermione was right. He could hide from it.

"I'm sorry," he finally said. "This isn't what I wanted."

"It's not what I wanted either. It's not what I wanted for Ginny," Dean said.

Harry decided to press his luck for a second time. "What about with Lavender? Is she your way of getting back at Ginny?"

Dean gave him a look and started walking again. "I also don't expect you to understand that. I told you that Lavender and I have a lot in common. Somehow we've become good friends through all this."

"And that's all? How stupid do you think I am, Dean?" Harry asked. His patience was catching up to him again.

"Alright, I took things too far okay?" Dean said. "Lavender and I talked and we both just wanted to prove that we were fine. Maybe I did want to make things difficult for you and Ginny, but I never wanted things to turn out like this. I thought I'd feel better, but it's worse. I still love her so much, but I can't even sit next to her and carry on a conversation."

"That's not my fault," Harry said. "It's not like I told Ginny she couldn't be friends with you."

"I bloody know that, but it's not the point. All I wanted to do after the game was see if she was okay, but I remembered that I made us like this. I watched her the whole time I played." He made an expression that was so similar to one that Ron had made earlier when talking about Hermione. "She'd never looked like that before. Quidditch is her thing and watching her give up was surreal. Even if she doesn't fancy me, I can't keep acting like I don't still fancy her."

"Dean, Ginny loves you," Harry said a bit spiteful. "I'm not trying to cheer you up either. It's the truth."

"Well, maybe, but not in the way I want her to. Not in the way she loves you." Dean stopped again and dug his hands into his pockets once more. "She was never with me like she's with you now."

"She's not with me now, Dean. That's the bloody problem," Harry said.

"You know what I mean. It's the way she looks at you and the way she talks about you. When Katie was yelling at us, all Ginny did was stare at you. Not matter what she always looks at you. Even after all this. It's never going to fucking change no matter what I do." Dean frowned and Harry could see the fire in his eyes. "I don't want to let her go, Harry, but what else am I supposed to do? I need to let her go. For her and for me," Dean said.

"What are you saying?" Harry asked. He couldn't quite believe what he was hearing.

"Harry, there's a lot between you and me. I'm not ready to go there with you, but I can't leave things like this with Ginny," Dean said. "This isn't what I thought I wanted. I don't want to not be able to talk to her, and I don't fucking want Malfoy to take advantage of us like that again."

"He's a fucking wanker," Harry said.

"Yeah, he is. It got out of control today like it has all year. Seamus kicked my are today and made me realize that, but he betted on us winning so he's more furious about that than anything else. I'm not this kind of person, Harry," Dean said.

"I understand. I'm not either. I've done and said a lot of thing that I don't think is really me," he explained. "Everything that's happened with Ginny isn't how I planned for it."

Dean nodded. "I'm going to talk to her. Honestly this time. She should know that she doesn't have to worry about me, and she should know that I punched you in Hogsmeade that day. It's been on my mind since it happened."

"I don't need you to do me any favors," Harry said.

"I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing this for Ginny and hopefully for me as well. She'll be angry, but I'll never get her back as a friend if I don't put an end to this. I know when I need to be a man," Dean said. "I only hope that she will fess up, too."

"Thanks, I guess," Harry said.

He scolded at him. "Don't thank me. It's not about you like I've been telling you for ages now. I just want to do what's right, even if I hate it. I still want her to be apart of my life."

"I was never against that, Dean," Harry said.

He gave him a once ever. "Whatever you say. See you back in the room." He turned around and began to walk in the opposite way but quickly turned around. "Just know that I really didn't plan on saying any of this to you, but if I didn't then Seamus was going to disown me. You know how the Irish are." Though he seemed rather put out, there was a hint of the old Dean that Harry recognized. He grinned a little and shook his head before walking off again.

Harry kept walking straight and down to the hospital wing. A wave of an unknown sensation washed over his body and it didn't go away even after he left Pomfrey. When he got back to room Ron was there. He was ashen and Seamus gave him the honor of getting the first big swig of whiskey. Harry sat on Neville's bed and watched Ron chug it down as if it was water. He then looked at Dean who still appeared upset but was nonetheless snickering with Seamus. It was unreal.

Everything had ended.

Everything had started again.

\*\*\*\* Ah, a breath of fresh air for this story, yeah? Sometimes it takes something big to put the thoughts and action into motion. Everything gets better in time as I've been saying. Is it all 100%? No, but it's a start! Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this. I put a lot of thought into how I wanted Harry's world to sort of change and I'm proud of it. Things couldn't stay gloomy forever. However, I know what you lot are probably really thinking. "All well and good, Rose, but um, what about Ron and Hermione? I'm going to kill you if you don't take care of that and stop making us guess what's up with Ron!" lol, well, not to worry. All I'll say isâ€¦the next chapter is full of things that are brunette and bushy and things that are ginger and freckly. LOL! That really could mean anythingâ€¦ thanks for reading and review! I'll have it up a lot sooner, I promise!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 50

Thanks for the reviews! As I said, I'm trying as hard as I can to update sooner. Okay, I want to send a HUGE cyber hug to lovemusicfics. Thanks for your wisdom, and ice cream is magic! Oh! One more thingâ€¦no, you haven't gone mental. This is the longest chapter known to wizarding kind, lol. Sorry, but it has to be this way!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Don't even think about it, Ronald Weasley," Hermione said.

"Oh, please. It's nice out here. I'll hardly see the sun this week or for the two weeks after. I know McGonagall is going to work me like a house elf," Ron said.

She crossed her arms over her chest. "Serves you right. Besides, you could have gotten sunlight yesterday but you were asleep for twenty out of the twenty four hours."

He rubbed his neck and looked away from her. "I told you, the guys and I stayed upâ€¦talking. We really didn't get to bed until well into the morning."

Hermione raised an eyebrow at Ron who looked guiltier than a death eater on trial. "Either way," she said, "we're not going to

procrastinate today. We have work to do, and I have work to do after that."

Ron sighed and put his head in her lap. "Can I at least get some sort of motivation? I need it in between arse rippings."

She looked down at him and couldn't stop her smile. Ron's vibrant hair shined brilliantly in the sunlight, and his rather pouty lips were in perfect view. Though he was an immature delinquent, she wouldn't ignore the fact that there was no other place that she wanted to be and that Ron's presence made her somewhat giddy. "I wouldn't have to rip anything if you'd act your age. I still can't believe it. You could have seriously injured him."

Whatever Draco had said to stir Harry on was probably well deserved, and she even admired Ron rescuing him from Draco. However, the consequences were simply too great. Now, she would have even less time with Ron. Her anger had capped off, and her temple still had a twinge from lecturing him so much.

"One can only hope," he said, yawning and stretching his arms. "Mione, I'm not sorry for what I did, and I'd do it again if given the chance. Smashing Malfoy's bollocks in is worth a year of detention. I'm not going to defend myself anymore. I have better things to do."

"Like what?" she asked with a slight shiver. Ron readjusted and faced her. He wrapped his arms around her waist and snuggled his nose against her stomach. It was precious and one of many reasons why she was in love with him. One minute Ron was beating Malfoy to a bloody pulp, and the next he was cuddling with her. He was a lion that only pounced when a loved one was in danger.

"Like smelling you or tickling you or possibly falling asleep as you massage my head," he said with a grin.

"But I'm not massaging your head," she said, biting her lip.

He closed his eyes and took her arm. He placed her hand on his head. "Now you are." She rolled her eyes and kneaded her fingertips into his scalp. They easily glided through the silky strands. "Hmm. This is a lot better than yelling at me for protecting our best friend, eh?"

Hermione tapped his forehead. "Hush up before I stop." She closed her eyes and leaned against the tree they were under. She continuously played with his hair, and he lightly moaned and ran his nails across her lower back. It was beautiful, and the drama of everything didn't exist. She wanted to freeze time indefinitely.

"Can we do this all day?" Ron suddenly asked.

She opened her eyes and abandoned her daydream. She looked down, and he was gazing at her as if he could read her mind. "I wish we could," she said. She gently touched the bruise on his left eye. It was a pale plum color, and the flesh was still a little

swollen. Ron refused to let Pomfrey do more for it. For whatever reason he was proud of his wound.

"It doesn't hurt," he said, sitting up and taking her hand.

She knew he was lying, but he'd never admit that Malfoy injured him. "Maybe not but it still scares me, Ron. I'm not just angry with you because you got in trouble. I'm upset that you put yourself in unnecessary danger. I don't enjoy you being harmed. No matter how little the damage is." She laced their fingers together.

"I know you don't, and I'm sorry that I scared you. I completely understand how you feel," he said seriously. "But I had to, Hermione. We lost to that tosspot, and he attacked Harry. I can't stand that any more than you can stand me being harmed."

She smiled and squeezed his hand. When Ron and Harry had arrived at breakfast together, it was like a new year of her life had started. Apparently, a shared violent experience was all the two needed to mend their friendship. Blokes were curious that way. "I do appreciate you looking out for him. I'll give you that."

"Thank you," he said, leaning forward.

As much as she wanted to feel his mouth, she moved away and put a hand against his chest. "My empathy doesn't mean that you're still not in trouble."

"Wa? Don't be like this today," he whined. "Can you even remember the last time I gave you a proper whomping?"

She gasped and hit his arm. She grabbed her bag and stood up. "First, I'm going to pretend that I didn't just hear you use the word whomping in relation to me. You've been around Seamus for far too long now. Second, I'm not being like anything. You acted badly, no matter how noble, and you have to be punished. You know the rules."

He rose to his knees. "I won't argue with that, but aren't there better ways? What ever happened to making me snog you until my lips go numb, or not allowing me to talk as you strip down to your knickers?"

Hermione blushed and touched her earlobe. "Ron," she said timidly, "what's gotten into you."

He blushed a little himself. "I don't know. I reckon I inhaled too much of your perfume. It smelled really good, and you had your hands in my hair. It just made me really alert."

"It has been awhile," she said quietly. Her own body was definitely in a state and had been for the longest time. It was almost like before they dated, when the sexual tension was so thick that she could barely breathe in it.

"Yes, it has," he said slowly, looking at her deeply with his seductive blue eyes.



He was testing her, but she wouldn't fall for his game. He was still in trouble. She held out her hand and smiled. "Then let's use that alertness and work on the beverage outline."

He glimpsed at her hand before pushing it away and standing. "You're unkind."

She chuckled. "I'm also the winner. Now, come on."

They went to the abandoned classroom to work. Hermione sat at the teacher's desk, and Ron sat on the edge of the table. He pulled the plans from his bag. "So, McGonagall said that if we want something outside of what the house elves do, then we can order from The Three Broomsticks. I told her that Hogshead would be a better place because they'll have more of what the seventh years want, but of course she turned that down."

"She wants everyone to have fun, not get intoxicated," Hermione said.

Ron flipped through his papers. "Nothing wrong with getting pissed." Hermione cleared her throat. "So I've heard," he quickly added, raising the papers to cover his face.

She put a hand on her hip and knew that he was smiling behind his work. "Let's go over the surveys of what everyone wants first. That's what I was going to do when this was still my assignment. You're safe."

"Really?" he asked.

Hermione lowered his arm so she could see his face. "Yes, but just this once." She took the papers from him and spread them out in front of her.

Ron pulled a banana out of his bag and tossed it to her. "Here. It's your lunch break."

"I already had a lunch break. It was after breakfast, and you should know this considering that you watched me like a mother dragon on both occasions," she said.

"Don't argue with me. It's your early tea then. Eat it or I'll get it in you myself, and you may not like where I put it," he said with a wink.

"You're rude and vulgar," she snapped, peeling the fruit and taking a bite. Ron unwrapped a sugar quill and slurped it between his lips and tongue. She watched him and forgot where she was for a moment. He looked up just as the drool started forming, and she quickly looked away. "So, right?"

"The assignment, yeah?" Ron asked with a smirk. He started laughing, and she threw her peel at him.

"I don't like you," she mumbled.

"I know you don't like me. You love me," he said with a handsome grin. She smiled back at him, and they gazed at each other for a moment before simultaneously began working.

Almost an hour of bickering, compromises, and innuendos went by before Hermione felt satisfied with Ron's work for the day. If she was ever going to get him on McGonagall's better side, then she had to be proactive with him. She checked her watch again. "Have somewhere to be?" Ron asked, packing up his work.

"Actually, yes, I have a chapter to study," she said.

"Oh," he said as if he was caught off guard. "I thought we could talk for awhile."

The pace of her heart ever so slightly increased. "About what?"

"Just some stuff," he said without really meeting her eyes.

She knew then that whatever it was about, it wasn't as easy as deciding drinks. "I'd love to talk," she said honestly. "Let's do that a bit later. I want to giveâ€¦whatever it isâ€¦my full attention."

"I understand. It's fine," he said.

"Ron," she started.

"I'm being serious. It's not dire. We can talk later, sure," he said. He nudged his head.

She got up and stood in front of him. Even with him sitting on the desk, she had to look up to him. She pressed her hands down on his shoulders and loved the feeling of firmness under her palms. "You're tall, Ronald."

"Don't I bloody know it? I think I can help you." He moved her back and hopped off. In a quick maneuver, he lifted her by the hips and sat her on the desk.

Hermione squeaked and giggled in surprise. "What is it with you having me on desks?"

He placed his hands on either side of her and put his forehead to hers. "I'm not sure. I should probably talk to someone about it. It's been a constant thought since I was thirteen."

"And it can continue to stay a thought," she said, though already her body was melting. Ron's smell of apple and his body heat were all around her. It didn't help that his sugar quill coated lips were almost touching hers, and his eyes were almost pleading.

"You're honestly not going to let me kiss you? You don't want me?" he asked.

"Don't start that," she said.

He moved away and shrugged. "It's fine if you don't. I just need to hear you say it."

"I'm not going to say it," she said.

He smiled. "Why not?"

She huffed. "Because it's not true. It's not about pleasure. It's about principle. It's about it's about." Ron smirked and raised an eyebrow, and she forgot her good reason for why pleasure wasn't important. "Oh, you're insufferable," she breathed before pulling on his tie and bringing their mouths together.

She instantly parted her lips. Ron's tongue overpowered her mouth, and all she could do was enjoy it. She tangled her fingers in his hair and opened her legs so he could get closer. He pulled her to him and held on to her legs. They kissed quickly and noisily. He moaned and moved his hands higher up her thighs. She shook and bit his lower lip. He felt amazing, he tasted amazing, and she was amazingly charged. She never wanted to lose the feeling. "Ron," she panted.

"I'm right here," he whispered, kissing below her bottom lip before flicking his tongue over the roof of her mouth.

She tugged on his hair and took command of their snog. "I'm sorry. You were right. This is perfect."

He parted from her lips and moved his hands completely underneath her skirt. "I'm glad you think so. See? I'm not so bad."

His hands burned her skin and took the air right out of her. "But you are. That's the point."

He snickered and kissed her jaw. "The point to what? You like me being bad?"

She looked at the tiny freckles that were sprinkled all over his face. They were adorable and clashed with his personality perfectly. "Sometimes," she said frankly. "It's not always a nuisance. Sometimes your behavior drives me mental in a good way."

He took her finger and put the tip to his lips. He slowly licked it and kept his stare fixated on her. "In a hot way, maybe?" he asked.

"Yes," she said breathlessly. All composure was gone.

He reached under her skirt again. "Well, that's interesting. So how about this?" He reached his hand under her knickers. "Is this a good bad or a bad bad?"

She automatically let out a cry. "Rrron!"

"Is this sort of bad okay?" he asked. She nodded wildly. He kissed her forehead and moved his fingers around. "You're all wet, love. What have you been doing?"

Her stomach jolted as he rubbed her. "Don't be mean. You did this to me."

"I'm prepared to take full responsibility," he said, kissing her neck.

She pulled on his hair once more and brought their mouths close. "Just stop being such a cheeky arse for once and kiss me."

"You're the boss," he said before kissing her.

They snogged intensely as Ron's fingers massaged her. They slicked around her parts, and a hot pressure inflated in her stomach. It felt so good. He pulled out of the kiss and put his forehead against hers. He moved faster, and it made her moan and shake. "Bloody hell, I really want to taste this. I want to lick every bit of you, and I want to feel it all over my tongue." He dragged his tongue across her mouth.

She almost lost it from his words and the gesture alone. She was inebriated with desire. Ron was too damn sexy and too damn special. She abandoned all appropriate thoughts. "Only if you let me get a taste of you. Let me wrap my mouth around you—ease it down."

He let out a harsh breath. He took her hand and put it against his belt. "That can be arranged. I want your best."

"Ron," she whined, feeling herself moments away.

A knock on the door broke her out of her passion. She instantly pushed Ron away and hopped off the table. He shook his head and wiped his fingers on his pant leg. "Who the hell would knock on this door?"

She adjusted her knickers and moved hair out of her face. "Harry. He knows we're in here."

"Oh," Ron answered, waving a hand. "Let him stand out there until we're finished."

"No, it might be important and we're way off focus here," she said, not really wanting to look at him. His groin area looked particularly appetizing.

He groaned. "I thought we were enjoying ourselves?"

"We were," she said. She could still feel his hand against her, and she tingled everywhere.

The knocking continued and Ron gave the door the finger. "Fine. Let's see what the tosser wants." He went for the door and smoothly smacked her arse as he past her.

"Hey, watch it," she warned with a grin.

"Yeah, yeah," he breathed. He opened the door and sure enough Harry was on the other side. "Yes, midget?"

Harry casually walked in. "Was Iâ€ interrupting something?"

Ron opened his mouth but Hermione got there first. "No, we were just finishing up. Can we help you?"

He looked between them for a moment. "This isn't about me. McGonagall spotted me. She wants Ron to know that she needs to see him."

"Oh, no," Ron said, covering his face. "She wants to start the torturing early."

"Most likely," Harry said with a shrug.

"Harry, you know that's not true! Ron, calm down. She most likely wants to see the progress you made with the order. You have a lot to show her," Hermione said. She took his bag and nudged it against his stomach.

He slowly lowered his hands and took the bag. "She's going to have my bollocks, Hermione."

"You don't have to worry about that." Hermione rose on her feet and put her mouth against his ear. "No one gets your bollocks but me," she whispered.

"You promise?" he asked gently, clutching her waist.

She kissed his cheek and lowered herself. "I promise." Ron smiled widely and she returned it.

Harry loudly cleared his throat. "Should I leave and knock again, or am I required to be here for this?"

"Fuck off, Harry," Ron said.

"You fuck off," he answered.

Hermione rolled her eyes and put her hands up. "How about we allâ€f off? Ron, go see McGonagall. Harry, continue doing whatever it was that you were doing. I have work to do. You boys are so immature."

"What else is new?" Ron asked. He rubbed her cheek. "Thanks for helping me."

"Of course, love. That's why I'm here. We're a good team," she said.

He kissed her hand. "Yes, we are. Take a break and eat something in between studying, yeah? I'll see you."

"Alright," she said.

Ron gave her one more smile before walking away. He gave Harry a once over. "How about you work on growing a few inches?"

"And you should work on losing a few freckles, prick," Harry said.

Ron snorted. "That was actually pretty good." He pushed past him and left the room.

"Wow, I almost forgot how childish you two can be together," Hermione said.

"Isn't it great?" Harry asked sarcastically.

"Yes, it is," she said honestly. "I'm glad things are getting better."

"With Ron anyway." Harry leaned against the desk.

"It's going to keep getting better. Dean is going to talk to Ginny. It shows a lot of maturity on his part," Hermione said.

"I reckon," he mumbled. "I still don't know how I feel about him almost trying to make my relationship with Ginny end. Thinking it is one thing but hearing it is worse."

"I can imagine but there's nothing more that can be done about it. All you both can do is move on," she said. "Mistakes happen."

Harry suddenly looked at her very peculiarly. "Yeahâ€¦a lot of mistakes have been made about peoples...actions."

She wasn't sure what he was getting at. "Exactly. Harryâ€¦are you okay?"

He looked away from her and shook his head. "Yes, I'm fine. Ignore that. I thoughtâ€¦I just thought."

"Harry," she started again.

"I have to go, Hermione. I'll talk to you later," he said. He left before giving her a chance to interrogate him. It was odd, but she didn't have time to think about it. She headed to the library where she could get some peace and studying accomplished. Everything was hectic but some calm was finally coming to them. Things with Harry were a little better. Dean was finally coming around, and it was only a matter of time before the air could be cleared with Ginny. So, there was no reason to think that things with Ron and Lavender couldn't get better as well. At least she hoped that there was no reason to believe it.

She studied until her hand was tired of flipping and writing. It was late and she decided to get an early dinner. She sat at a table and scooped herself a portion of mash. "Hey, Hermione," Parvati said, sitting next to her.

"Hi, do you want this?" Hermione asked, offering her the bowl.

"No, I'm fine," she answered a bit gloomily.

Hermione put down her fork. "Is something wrong?"

Parvati stared at her as if she was supposed to understand already. "Um, no, nothing is wrong. So, have you spoken to Ron today?"

It was a strange question for her to ask. "Yes, we had some work to do together after class. I'm most likely going to see him later, why?"

She shrugged and plucked a grape from the bowl. "No reason. I'm just being nosy."

"Parvati," Hermione said calmly, "what's going on?" She wanted to ask if she and Harry were sharing the same secret. Both were acting weirdly.

"Nothing, really, honestly. I need to find my sister, Hermione. We'll talk later." Parvati took another grape before leaving the bench.

Hermione needed to find Ron. Obviously something was up and she hoped that he would know. She gulped down a bit of food and went to his dorm room. She knocked on the door, and Ron answered right away. "Glad you're here," he rushed. Hermione barely had time to say hello to everyone as he pulled her into the room and into his bed. He closed his curtains around them and kissed her. "You've proved your brilliance once again. McGonagall actually smiled and said she was impressed with the outline. You're a genius." He put up a silencing charm around them and made sure the curtains were tightly closed.

A bit of relief came over her. "That's great, but you did the work. I just helped."

"Doesn't matter. You're incredible. Thank you," he said sweetly, taking her hand and giving it a squeeze. She tried her best to seem happy. She was anxious about what he wanted to tell her, and she wanted to discuss the unusual behavior she witnessed with him.

"So, you wanted to talk?" she said.

Ron's smile faded a little, and he let go of her hand. "Yeah, I do." He was quiet. It was almost like he wanted her to begin.

"Okay, so, go ahead," she said. He continued to just look at her, so she decided to be brave. A pit of dread formed in her stomach as the words touched her lips. "Does this have anything to do with Lavender?"

His eyes widened. "Why would you say that?"

"I don't know. Maybe because you're being a little weird right now, and I know you well enough to know the reasons behind some

of your expressions." She inhaled and exhaled as evenly as she could. "It's okay."

Ron rubbed his neck. "Well, um, good because it is about her."

Hermione swallowed the fear in her throat. Whatever had happened and whatever he had talked to Ginny about was finally going to come to surface. "I'm listening."

"Okay," he breathed. "It's about why Harry really punched Draco."

"Oh," Hermione said in surprise.

"You see, Draco told him something that set him off." Ron rubbed his knuckles. "It would have set any Gryffindor off though."

She shrugged in confusion and wondered how Lavender was connected to Draco. "I don't really follow."

Ron looked at her with an uneasy expression. "Hermione, Draco was the one who told McGonagall about everyone sleeping together. He apparently bragged about it, and that's why Harry hit him."

Hermione's jaw dropped. It didn't sense. It couldn't have been true. "But-but—why? I know he doesn't care for us, but why would he put himself out there?" Ron was obviously mistaken. Lavender had every motive to tell. She and Ron had argued over it. Hermione knew that she was right.

"He got tired of seeing Parvati and Blaise together in their house. He did it to get back at her and Blaise, I reckon," Ron explained.

She couldn't believe it, but it swiftly explained Harry's earlier behavior. "Oh my—"

"Now do you see? He's a fucking prick who deserved what he got. Anyway, it wasn't Lavender after all. She had nothing to do with it," he said.

Hermione left the rationalities in her head and looked at him. There was something about his tone that bothered her greatly. It was as if he was passively rubbing it in her face. "You're right. She's innocent. I jumped to conclusions, and I blamed the wrong person."

"Mione, don't," he said softly.

"Don't what?" she asked.

"Be this way," he said with a heavy sigh. "Be all upset."

"I'm not upset," she said sharply. "I made a mistake, and I caused us to get in a needless argument. Of course Lavender had nothing to do with it. You tried to tell me."

"Hermione, this is exactly what I don't want. I just thought you should know. That's all. It's not a big deal," he assured.



His words and his actions didn't coincide. He said it wasn't a big deal, but he certainly acted like it was before he had told her. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

He frowned. "I didn't really have a chance to, did I? I'm telling you now. Please, this doesn't have to do something else."

"Oh, like me accusing her, and you trying to tell me I was wrong?" she asked. "I feel so stupid." She was sure of whom Lavender was, but it was thrown off balance now.

"Don't," he said, touching her arm. "I don't care."

"Really? You don't care?" she asked.

"Why would I?" he asked with a shrug. "Yeah, I told you that I didn't think she did it, but it's not like I got mad at you for thinking she did. I told you that I was on your side, Hermione."

Hermione was flustered and upset with herself. She didn't know why she was so bothered by the fact that Lavender didn't tell. She had been so positive, but she had been wrong. She apparently didn't know anything about Lavender or what she was or wasn't capable of. It was an unnerving feeling. "I guess you did."

"No, there's nothing to guess," Ron said. "It's okay. I'm sorry."

"Why are you sorry? I should be the one to apologize. I made you feel bad for no reason, and I accused Lavender for no reason," she said.

Ron groaned. "Hermione, it's fine. It's not like you were the only one. A couple of other people think that she was the one that told, too. Lavender knows it."

"She told you that?" Hermione asked.

"Wellâ€¦yeah," Ron said slowly.

"And did you tell her that I thought she did?" she asked. Ron hesitated for a moment, and it was all she needed to hear. "Oh, Ron."

"It's not like that," he quickly said. "She already had her mind made up about you."

"You don't have to explain that to me. I know what she thinks of me," she snapped.

"Please, please, stop acting like this," he said dully.

"And how is that?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Like a child. You're not listening to me at all."

It was her turn to frown. "Oh, great, well, let me storm off like one then." She moved for the curtain, but he took her arm.

"Baby, don't," he said.

She cringed and was forcefully taken back to all the times Lavender had stormed off, and Ron had called her baby and asked her to stay. Hermione snatched her arm back. "Don't use that name with me like this." She got out of his bed and left the room. She needed to get away from Gryffindor and away from the people inside it. She was upset that Harry had kept his mouth shut as well.

Ron caught up to her. "Will you please not do this? Why does this have to be difficult? I'm being honest with you. I thought that was what you wanted."

"It is what I want, but I don't like being handled. Why are you brushing off everything? If Lavender thinks that I've been accusing her, then just wait, Ron," she said. They left the Common Room and worked their way down the staircase.

"What do you think she's going to do?" Ron asked with an almost bored tone.

"I can tell that you won't believe whatever I think, so let me just spare you," she snapped.

"Well, maybe I would have a reason," he shot back.

She stopped walking for a moment and looked at him. "Wow, how supportive."

"Don't start this," he said. "You know that's not what I mean. I just need a moment."

"Okay, then what do you mean, Ron?" she asked. "There's obviously a reason why you were apprehensive about telling me. How long have you exactly been talking about my accusations with Lavender? It doesn't feel right, Ron. That's why I'm upset. She's—I don't know."

"Hermione—"

"I don't even know what to say," she said. "What do you have to say?"

He touched her arm to stop her walking. "Maybe if you give me a bloody chance to talk and explain things, then you'll find out."

She felt a bit of heat on her cheeks. "Don't talk to me like that, Ron."

He let out a shaky breath. "I'm sorry but it seems to be the only way to get you to listen. It's like you're purposely talking over me."

She shook her head. "I can't do this with you right now."

"No, wait, stop. I need to talk to you." He stood in front of her and put his hands on her shoulders. "We need to talk."

"No, you need to calm down and so do I," she said.

He sighed and moved away from her. "Fine. Continue to make things pointlessly complicated."

"Yes, and continue to oversimplify everything," she said. She kept walking down the hall and walked around the castle until she grew exhausted. She went to bed without another word from Ron.

Hermione woke up the next morning way before she had to be up. She felt extremely guilty. Staying up half the night, then sleeping on her anger helped but made her realize how she had acted. Hindsight was a curse, and she knew that Ron hadn't deserved her wrath. She had to make it right. She got dressed and decided to wait for him downstairs. She refused to once again let things fester and get worse. She had to be mature.

She slowly walked downstairs and was shocked to see Ron on the couch. "Ron?"

He looked at her and stood up. "Hermione."

"Hi," she said gently, walking over to him. He appeared worn out.

"Hey," he said in an almost hoarse voice. He sat down and rubbed his hands together. "Hermione."

She touched his leg. "Before you said anything, I need to speak. Ron, you were right. I did act childish last night. I don't know what got into me. I was just caught off guard, and I was flustered andâ€¦embarrassed."

"I spent a good portion of the night thinking about it all. I didn't get much sleep," he said, chewing on his nail.

She pulled his hand away from his mouth. "Same here. I had no reason to be so short with you."

"I didn't act right either. The way I talked to you, and how I said things was wrong. I was really angry, and I'm a dick when I'm angry," he said.

"Obviously, so am I," she said with a small grin. "We both just need to restart the whole conversation."

Ron abruptly pulled her into a tight hug, and she closed her eyes. "I love you so much, Hermione."

"And I love you. I really, really do." She held him back and knew what she had to do. "I think I will apologize to Lavender."

"You don't have to do that," he said, pulling away.

"Actually, I think I do. If she honestly knows that I think she told, then I have to make it right. I have to be an adult about this," she said.

He tucked hair behind her ear. "Fucking hell, you're incredible."

"No, just regretful. I want to handle this right after the class day is over," she said.

"But you look so tired," he said.

"I can say the same about you," she said, moving her finger under his heavy eyes. "I'll make it an early night, but I can't have this over my head for too long."

"Okay. I have to check in with McGonagall, but if she lets me go then I'll be outside. Maybe we can eat out there and try this again," he said.

The thought of being under the warm sun and having a breather was heavenly. "Hmm, sounds lovely."

"It will be if you're there," he said, holding her close again.

She nuzzled her nose against his chest. "I'm over being like this, Ron."

"I know you are. So am I," he said.

She sighed and pulled away. "I need to finish getting ready, but I'll see you at breakfast."

"I'll be there," he said lightly. He kissed her. "I love you," he said against her lips.

"Love you, too," she answered. She pulled away from him and went back up the stairs.

She tried to focus and not feel tired and like a knot of nerves all day, and it proved most difficult. For once she couldn't be happier to leave her last class. After the school day was over, Hermione rushed to her room to put her stuff away. She knew that Lavender and Parvati always changed and met up with their friends right after class. Hermione sat on her bed and held her teddy bear. She smiled at it and ran her fingers over its maroon jumper. She then sighed slightly and looked up. Parvati was changing out of her school clothes and Lavender was at her bed, pulling things out of her school bag. Once Parvati was in her jeans and shirt, she slipped her shoes on.

"I'll be right back, Lavender. Then we can go," she said.

"Great," Lavender answered. Parvati gave Hermione a smile as she walked past her and left the room. Once the door was closed, she knew it was now or never.

"Lavender, can I talk to you?" Hermione asked.

She looked up from her books. "Sorry?"

Hermione mentally nodded and stood up. She walked over to Lavender's bed and put her hand against the bedpost. "Can I talkâ€¦can we talk?"

Lavender raised an eyebrow. "About what?"

"About Draco and some things I found out about why it started," Hermione said. She wanted to get right to it.

Lavender grinned a little. "Oh, you mean about why Harry and Ronnie beat him up?"

"Yes, exactly. May I sit?" Hermione asked. Lavender nodded and Hermione sat on the edge of her bed. Lavender pushed hair off her shoulders and blinked deliberately at her. Hermione took it as her way of telling her to continue. "So, um, as it turns out, Draco was the one who told McGonagall about couples in Gryffindor sleeping together." Lavender's eyes didn't widen. She didn't gasp or pout or make any other expression that Hermione had been expecting. "Lavender? Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, I did," she said casually. "I already know that, Hermione. I thought maybe you were going to add on to it."

"You already know?" she asked. She couldn't believe that Lavender knew before she did. "How?"

Lavender rolled her eyes. "I know you're really smart, but you're not the only one who can find out things. Parvati told me. Draco evidently confessed to Blaise while he was in the hospital wing."

"Oh, right," Hermione said. Now Parvati's actions made sense as well. Both Harry and Parvati had tried to see if she knew. She was clearly the last one in the world to get the news. "How is she taking it?"

"You want to know how Patty's doing?" she asked.

Hermione held on to her skirt for support. "Yes. We do talk, and I care about her."

"That's good," she mumbled. "Well, she feels guilty, but I told her that she doesn't need to. Draco is a wanker, and Blaise can do so much better for a friend. I'm going to tell him that, too." She smiled. "I'm glad Ronnie gave it to Draco. Aren't you?"

"I don't think Ron getting into trouble is a good thing, but I can recognize the value of what he did, yes," Hermione said.

Some of Lavender's smile vanished. "I don't think Ronnie getting into trouble is a good thing." She shook her head and exhaled noisily. "So, is that all you wanted to talk about?"

Hermione wanted to say yes. She wanted leave the conversation somewhat civil before it had time to take a turn, but she had to

apologize. She would never be able to concentrate on anything else if she didn't. "Well, no, not really."

Parvati came back into the room. "Are you ready, Lavender?"

"Yes, one second." Lavender stood up and Hermione did as well. "Look, let me save us both time. I know where this going, and it's fine."

"Excuse me?" Hermione asked.

"You want to apologize for accusing me, don't you?" She put a hand on her hip. "I know you thought I told."

"Lav," Parvati said.

Hermione held up her hand. "No, it's fine. She's right. I do. Listen, I had no right to accuse you or at least not talk to you about it. I was just upset. I have a lot going on in my life and sometimes it gets the better of me. I'm sorry, Lavender." She waited for Lavender to laugh or say something bitchy, but she didn't. She merely shrugged.

"Apology accepted," Lavender answered.

Hermione decided not to push her luck. It was over. "Excellent." She nodded and began to walk back to her bed.

"I understand about your stress. Ronnie explained some of it to me," Lavender said.

She turned around. "What exactly did he say?"

"Girls, can't you talk about this later?" Parvati asked, closing the door and standing next to them.

Lavender seemed to ignore her. "Just that you're tired and overworked, and it makes you mental like this."

"He told you I was mental?" Hermione asked, not believing her.

Lavender giggled. "No, that was a joke, but it can be inferred. You know, Hermione, it's like I tried to tell you. Being paranoid isn't a good thing. I'm not the enemy."

Hermione felt a twinge of anger grow. She wanted to be an adult, but adults got frustrated as well. "I'm not paranoid, Lavender. Don't call me that. I don't mind apologizing, but I'm not going to let you insult me."

"Oh, like you haven't insulted me all year? You're the one who accused me. I accept your apology, but it won't leave my memory in an instant," Lavender said.

"Okay, that's enough. Let's go," Parvati said, pulling on Lavender's arm.

She didn't budge. "Let me go, Patty. Why do you always do this?"

"Do what?" Parvati asked. "I'm trying to keep you two from arguing any further. Hermione apologized. Let it go."

Lavender gawked at her. "So, you're taking her side?"

"There's no side, Lavender, but if you're just going to make things worse then I'm going to say something. Just let it go, for once," she said intensely.

Lavender looked from her to Hermione. "Oh, I get it. Once again, I'm just supposed to take whatever Hermione says because she's so great, yeah?"

Hermione rubbed her temples. "I'm done. Parvati is right. You should go."

"No, this isn't fair. Why does it always have to be you as the nice one, and I'm left as the bitch?" Lavender asked. "I'm the innocent one here."

Hermione couldn't hold in her laughter. "Lavender, you may have not told McGonagall, but it doesn't mean that I trust you. I think I had reason to feel what I did, even if it was wrong."

"Hermione, stop it," Parvati said.

"What does that mean?" Lavender asked. "Are you saying that you're always right, even if you're not?"

"No, I'm only saying that we both know something more is going on. Dean already told Harry about it. I'm sure—well, I'm sure you were more than a silent partner on certain matters." Hermione hadn't planned for the conversation to go any deeper than an apology, but she couldn't stop now.

"Okay! That's officially it!" Parvati said. She stood in between of them. "No more."

Lavender moved around her and stormed up to Hermione. "Right, because out of the two of us I've been the untrustworthy one to Ron." Parvati sighed and moved out of the way. She leaned against her bedpost.

"You have no idea what you're talking about," Hermione said.

"Actually I do," Lavender said. "I used to date him—"

"Used to being the correct phrase," Hermione quickly added.

Lavender pursed her lips. "Yes, that's right, and we did talk. Sometimes I was the only person he could talk to. I know some things about him, Hermione, and Dean may be making nice with everyone but it has nothing to do with me. I won't simply forfeit my feelings."

"Oh, don't we all know it," Hermione said. "If there's one thing we can count on, then it's you barging your feelings in rather they're wanted or not."

"I can say the same about you. Don't act high and mighty with me. It's like I told you before, you don't fool me and you don't impress me." She flipped her hair. "I'm not an idiot. You have no room to talk about anything."

"And you do? You also don't impress me or fool me," Hermione said. "I don't think you're an idiot. I think you know exactly what you're doing. I know your angle, Lavender. I know you still want to be with Ron, but it's not going to happen. You don't know anything about him, and you never did. Give over it already!"

Lavender clenched her jaw and stared at her for a minute. "No," she said softly, "what you need to get over is the fact that he was my boyfriend before he was yours. You're not the only one in the whole world who can be with him!"

Hermione rubbed her temples again. There was no getting through to her. "That's your problem, Lavender, because that's not how it is. I'm not trying to mean or a bitch. It's just the truth. I'm sorry that the truth is too much for you."

"Obviously it's not the truth," she mumbled. She raised an eyebrow and tapped her foot against the floor.

Hermione didn't know to take her words. "What do you mean by obviously not, Lavender?"

"I don't know, Hermione," she said airily.

"Don't act cute with me. If you're trying to hurt me or Ron, then it won't work," Hermione said.

"I don't want to hurt, Ron. I care about him and," Lavender puffed her chest out, "he cares about me. He told me."

"What? What exactly are you saying?" Hermione asked as a pang hit her chest.

"Oh, something you don't know?" Lavender asked mockingly.

"Lavender, that's enough," Parvati said, standing up again. She looked at her as if she knew what she was talking about. Hermione didn't know what to say or do. Something was wrong for Parvati to say something. Something had to be wrong for Parvati to have the look on her face and for Lavender to share it. Hermione pushed past her and left the room.

She rushed as quickly as she could out of the castle. Her chest and head hurt, but she had to find Ron. She went out to the tree where he said to meet him. He was sitting in the grass with his back against the tree. His eyes were closed, and he looked to be sleeping. His chest rose and fell evenly and heavy breaths came from him. He looked peaceful, and it couldn't have been further away from what she was feeling.



She gently kicked his thigh. "Ron, we need to talk."

He didn't move or open his eyes. "Mmm. I'm enjoying my dream," he said with a grin.

"Ron, right now," she said.

He sighed and opened his eyes. At seeing her face, he immediately stood. "What's wrong?"

She didn't know where to begin. He had such a gorgeous face, and she could sense the concern in his voice. She trusted him with her life, but it didn't add up. "I just talked to Lavender."

"Yeah?" he asked, a bit high-pitched. "How did that go?"

"How do you think it went?" she snapped.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Well, I don't need you to be sorry," she rushed. "I need you to talk to Lavender. I need you to talk to me. I need you to do something."

He gave her a look. "Do something about what?"

"Lavender!" she practically screamed.

"Why? What happened? What exactly am I supposed to do?" he asked.

"Please, don't sound like that, and don't look like that," she said.

He shrugged. "Like what? What are you talking about?"

"Like you don't care or you're unable to do anything," she said through gritted teeth.

"Well, blimey, Hermione, I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I don't even know what's going on," he said.

"Of course," she said, throwing up her hands. "You know what, Ron? You never want to take responsibility or deal with anything. I may overdo it sometimes, but at least I'm doing something."

He paced and shook his head. "Finally, it's out."

She crossed her arms over her chest. "What is?"

"I was wondering how long it would take for you to start lecturing me about how much of a tit I am," he said. "Bloody hell, I thought that if we were together then maybe it would happen, but I guess not. No matter what, nothing I do is good enough. This is exactly what I mean!" He paced again.

"You can stop that right now!" she ordered. "You can't pretend to be the victim of circumstance this time. Lavender and I just got

into a huge fight again. It was about you and whatever it is that you're apparently doing with her."

He stopped and scrunched his face. "What?"

She made sure that her feet were planted safely in the ground. She felt as if she was moments away from tipping over. "What do you think I mean?" she asked quietly. "Look, I-I know a lot more than you think I do. I know about you and Lavender and Ginny."

"Ginny?" he asked.

Hermione swallowed hard. "I know that you did something, and I know that you told Ginny about it. I overheard you that morning in the Common Room. I heard you-"

"You were listening in on my conversation with my sister?" he asked. "What gives you the right to do that?"

"The same right that you have to get all angry at me and Harry for not being honest with you when you've apparently been lying to me!" she shouted. "You told me that you went straight to bed, Ron. That's not true, is it?"

He opened and closed his mouth several times before finally letting out a breath. "No, it's not."

"And you spoke to Lavender, didn't you?" she asked.

He closed his eyes and rubbed his neck. "Y-yeah. I did."

"Ron!" she said.

He walked over to her. "Before you get all upset, let me explain. What you thought you heard between me and Ginny wasn't about you. It was about Lavender. I talked to her, and it was a huge mistake."

"I can't believe you. You looked me right in the face and lied to me, and you kept lying!" she said a bit hysterically. "Why did you go to see Lavender? What did you talk to her about?"

"Don't make it sound like that," he said rather gently.

"How else is it supposed to sound?" she asked.

"Not like that," he said. He rubbed his face but hissed as his fingertips went over his sore eye. "Look, I know I fucked up, and I want to apologize. This is what I wanted to talk to you about yesterday."

The emotion in his voice was unmistakable, but she was too far-gone to let it reach her heart. "Why did you wait so long? Why was yesterday the right time?"

"Because it was a mistake!" he shouted. "I didn't tell you right after because I didn't want to upset you. You told me not to see her but I did."

"Then why did you?" she asked. "Why was it so important?"

"I wanted to find out what she knew. Yes, I mentioned your theory but I asked it from my point of view. She didn't believe me," Ron said. "She knew that it was what you thought, but I defended you. We got into an argument because I took your side! After it was all over, I realized that it was a mistake. I only made it worse. I know all this, Hermione."

"Then why would you need to hide it if that's the whole story? What's the big deal about that?" she asked.

"A lot happened after that night, and it never seemed like the right time. Things with Harry and Ginny got worse, I started feeling stressed again—then you got sick. I didn't know what to do," he said.

His eyes were pleading and the sensation touched her heart. She wanted to feel the goodness from him. However, Lavender's words, Draco's teasing, and Ron's actions weighed too heavily on her shoulders. "Ron—your story doesn't add up. I'm—I'm sorry."

He slowly shook his head. "Hermione, what in the bloody hell are you talking about?"

Hermione felt a bit of tightness in her throat. "Well, while you were lying and keeping things from me, Lavender did lot of talking." Her hands started to shake, so she pressed them against her thighs. "Did you know that the morning you told Ginny, Lavender told me that she talked to you?"

Color stained Ron's cheeks. "No, I didn't. She never mentioned it to me."

"Yes, I've known this whole time. At first I didn't believe it, but I slowly came around. I waited for you to bring it up, but you never did," she said.

"Hermione—"

"I'm not finished," she interrupted. "Did you also know that while I was upstairs with her just now, she told me that you told her that you still cared about her? What's about that, Ron?"

Ron rubbed his neck. "I can tell you that whatever she's been saying isn't how it is."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Oh, so, when it's not about you Lavender is a saint, but when it's something against you she's a liar?"

"Why are you talking to me like this?" he asked, his eyes gigantic. "Why are you acting like I'm still dating her or like I'm apparently not your boyfriend and care more about her?"

"Because maybe you do! Because maybe something more happened between you two than what you're saying. Maybe—maybe talking

isn't the only thing you did with Lavender to mess things up." Her voice broke and her throat cracked right down the middle.

Ron blankly stared at her. "What are you getting at?"

"I-I don't know," she whispered, shaking her head.

He walked backwards. "Are you suggestingâ€|are you sayingâ€|that I cheated on you?"

The words tore right through to her insides. It wasn't right. It wasn't possible for them, and she knew that. "I don't know! All I know is that all the sneaking around and the talks and touches with Lavender don't add up to anything good. She's telling me one thing, and you're telling me another. I don't know who or what to believe."

"You believe me!" he shouted. "You believe that as your boyfriendâ€|no as your best friend that I'd never do that to you!" Ron paced and ran a hand through his hair. His bottom lip trembled a little. "I don't fucking believe this. You think I cheated on you."

"I didn't say that," she said in a shaky voice. "But you have to understand my side."

"What? Understand that you're being paranoid?" he asked furiously.

Something in Hermione snapped. Lavender calling her paranoid was one thing, but hearing it from Ron was ten times more horrible. It was cruel and almost sickening. "Don't you ever, in your life, call me paranoid! Is that a word that you and Lavender use often to describe me? Ron, you have a lot of spine to stand there and get mad at me for thinking you did something with her. All you've done lately is walk off and find her and whatever."

"Oh, kind of like what you and Harry always do?" he asked.

She glared at him. "If you still think that I'm in love with him, then you can go to hell."

"I don't think you're bloody in love with him," he spat, "but maybe you can understand how it's similar. It's apparently bullshit that you and Harry ever had something going on. Well, believe me now; nothing is going on with Lavender and me. Nothing has happened since I broke up with her!"

She had never seen Ron so angry before, but she had never felt so angry before. It was as if all reason was lost, and all they had were their unconscious ideas. "Oh, really?" she asked coldly.

"Yes, really! I never want to do anything with her ever again, and I would never cheat on you. I can't believe you think I'm capable of doing that to you. You think I could purposely hurt you that badly?" He walked closer to her, and she could finally see more than just rage in his eyes. There was hurt there as well. "I would die for you, Hermione. I'd give my life any day

that I had to for you. How the hell could I do that but not mind cheating on you? I hate it when you're in pain. All I ever want to do is take it away, not make it worse."

Her eyes stung and tears clouded her eyes. Ron's words flowed through her in ways that hurt and felt good. "I don't know," she choked out. "That's why I'm so confused. That's why I don't know what to do!"

"You can look at me right now and say that you believe you. You believe me, don't you?" he asked. She licked her lips and tried to find the words, but she didn't know what to say. "Un bloody believable," he whispered. "I can't believe after all you've done, I don't deserve the benefit of the doubt."

She rubbed her eyes dry before the tears could fall. "Yes, let's find a way to make this not about you. I don't get it, Ron. I thought you were over all this. You told me that you forgave me and that we were past all that. What? You still don't trust me or believe me? This will never work if you don't trust me and hold a grudge."

"That's rich coming from you. You think I cheated on you with Lavender!" he yelled. "You think I shagged her. You're not listening to me and hearing my side. You never listen to anything I have to say."

"There's a difference," she said.

"How? How the fuck is there a difference?" he asked.

"Because Harry and I are people you know and people you can trust. We both love you, and we don't have ill will toward each other. We're your best friends," she explained. "Rather you want to believe it or not, Lavender isn't like that. You're sitting here yelling at me but not once have you said anything about her being in the wrong. What am I supposed to think?"

He was quiet for a moment. "You're supposed to know that it's never going to matter whatever the bleeding bollocks Lavender says. You're right, you and Harry are my friends, and I'm your friend. That didn't change when I dated Lavender or now that I'm dating you. Lavender can say whatever she wants, but it's me." He put his hand against his chest. "It's me, Mione. I'd never hurt you like that, but as always what I say and what I show you isn't enough. I'm never enough for you."

"You are enough for me," she said breathlessly, "but with all thisâ€¦I have to wonder if I'm enough for you."

Her statement seemed to change him, and the softness in his features vanished. "If you think I'm a cheater, then why are you wasting your time with me?"

A terrible pang hit her again. "Sorry?"

"I don't know, Hermione," he breathed. "You're the one who knows every bloody thing. If you're so sure that I'm cheating on you,

then why are you bothering to talk to me? I'm just shit, right? Things are either the way you see it or not worth anything. You bloody tell me what's happening now."

Ron still wasn't listening, and she didn't know what to say to him. She was too angry and upset to even stand properly. "I don't know, but I'll let you know when I find out." She turned away, and he took her arm. She snatched it back. "Don't touch me, Ron. I don't want to be here with you right now."

There was something distant and raw in his eyes that made him almost unrecognizable. "Fine. Get away from me."

She felt dizzy and foreign to her surroundings. She didn't feel like herself, and she couldn't tell if Ron was standing in front of her. She stormed off and went back into the castle. She got as far as the Prefect's bathroom before all the air left her lungs. She slammed the door closed behind her and slid to the floor. She felt heaviness in her eyes, but she was far too irate to cry. She held her legs against her chest and rested her head on her knees. Everything replayed in her head. She couldn't believe it. It wasn't right, and she felt unbelievably frightened. Fighting with Ron was different now. There was so much more at stake now that they were dating.

She sniffed and rubbed her eyes that were still dry. She wanted to cry, and she knew that she needed to. In spite of this, nothing came out. Her fury aired out and numbness took over her body. After all the arguing and all the uncertainty, Hermione was numb.

She didn't know how long she was in the loo, but her bottom started to hurt so she left. She didn't know where to go. She didn't want to go anywhere near Gryffindor. She couldn't stand to see Lavender or Ron. Instead, she headed up the Astronomy Tower. She couldn't hear the sounds of couples giggling or having sex, so she figured it was safe to rest there. She stood near the balcony and let the breeze cool down her skin. She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes.

All she could feel was Ron's hands on her and his deep breathings in her ear. Then, the calm feeling vanished and she was numb again. She realized that it was all she had without Ron. She shivered and bit her lip. "Hermione?" She turned her head to the voice. The red hair, pale skin, and freckles made her heart skip a beat but it wasn't the right Weasley. It was Ginny. She slowly walked over to her. Her face told her everything. "Are you okay?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, I'm not."

"I found Ron but he wouldn't say much to me. Harry got him to talk, so I left them to look for you. Hermione, he's so upset. You two had a fight?" she asked.

A fight didn't begin to cover what had happened. She and Ron were soul mates. When they yelled and acted cruel to each other, it was something else. It was like the sky splitting in half, in her opinion. "Yes," she croaked. "Ginny, weâ€¦we." She didn't know

what to say. She barely understood what was happening. She put a hand to her chest, and Ginny quickly hugged her.

"It's okay. You don't have to talk right now. You don't have to talk at all," she said.

Hermione hugged her back and closed her eyes. "Ginny."

"Shh, it's okay. You're always there for me. Let me help you for once. I know how this feels," she said. She rubbed her back.

Hermione held her tightly. There was something very soothing about the Weasley family. She couldn't help but feel a bit more comfortable and a bit safer. She was thankful for Ginny, but she couldn't say that it didn't bother her a little. Sometimes she was so much like Ron. She pulled away. "Thank you. I really don't know what to say."

"Then don't force it. Come on." She nudged her to join her on the floor. They sat and Hermione let out a deep breath. Ginny rubbed her back. "Did you two break up?"

"Oh, no, certainly not," Hermione said. She didn't know what was going on, but she knew that it wasn't over. That would be another feeling entirely. "It was just the worst fight we ever had. It was so awful." She covered her face with her hands.

Ginny continued to rub her back. "I can tell. Hermione, I don't know what is going on or who's at fault. I do know that Ron loves you more than his own life, and I know he's everything to you. You can't forget that, yeah?"

"I know," she whispered. She didn't know how to explain to Ginny that love was the easiest part of the relationship. There were so many other factors that made it complicated. She didn't try to find the words. She kept quiet.

They stayed at the tower for ages it seemed. Finally, Ginny forced her to go to bed. She walked with her to her room. "You don't have to see me in," Hermione said.

"Are you sure? I had planned to tuck you in as well and read you a story," she said with a small grin.

Hermione actually smiled a bit herself. "Not really in the mood for a story tonight."

"Well, try and get some rest. I know that it seems like an impossible idea but try it," she said.

"I will. Thank you for everything, Ginny. I really appreciate it." Hermione hugged her again.

"We're friends, Hermione. It's nice to be of some help for once. Speaking of which." Ginny pointed to her closed door. "You want me to have a go with Lavender?"

"What?" Hermione asked.

She have her a look. "I may not know everything, but I wouldn't be surprised if she had something to do with this."

Hermione was so out of it that she actually considered it for a moment. "No, it's okay. Fighting only makes it worse. I'll be fine. Just...see Ron before you go off to bed. Make sure he's okay."

Ginny's eyes softened. "I will. I'll give him an extra big hug."

"Thanks," she whispered. Ginny nodded and gave her arm a rub before walking off. Hermione looked at her door as if it was cursed. She couldn't keep hiding. She opened it. Parvati was at her bed, but Lavender wasn't in the room. Hermione merely stood just inside.

Parvati looked up. "She's not here. She needed to take a walk. I'm so sorry about the fight earlier."

Hermione rushed to her bed and changed. "It was bound to happen."

"Hermione, the things Lavender said—I don't know if you should take them all to heart," Parvati said.

She looked up at her. "You think Lavender is a liar?"

Parvati looked down and shook her head. "I think she's in pain, and I think she gets out of control when she's hurting."

Hermione was beyond finished with everyone making excuses for her. "Loyal to the very end."

"It's not that simple. Look, I'm really sorry for what happened. We did some arguing ourselves after you left," she said.

"Why?" Hermione asked rudely. "Why do you really care?"

Parvati frowned. "Because I don't think it's right. Lavender is my best friend, but I don't always agree with her. I told you. I'm happy for you and Ron. I don't want to see you two end up badly. When Lavender dated him, I spent a lot of time with him also. They'd always double with Blaise and me. He's a nice person, Hermione, and he's a good guy."

"I know he is," Hermione said almost painfully. She felt like such an idiot for letting her doubts and words tell otherwise. "I need to sleep."

"Of course," Parvati said.

"Tell Lavender that if she even thinks about waking me or—"

"She won't," Parvati finished. Hermione nodded and closed the curtains and got under her blanket. She didn't feel like sleeping. She hugged her bear close to her chest. The numbness was back, and it stayed with her until she fell asleep.



Hermione barely felt like getting up the next morning, but there was no use staying in bed. Her coursework would take her mind off things. She figured that Lavender must have known to stay out of her way. She was gone by the time Hermione rolled out of bed, and she didn't see her at breakfast. Then again, Hermione didn't stay long enough to see anyone. She grabbed a few pieces of toast and left before most of the students started piling in, and she basically ran to Arithmancy to eat.

To her luck she didn't have McGonagall's class so she didn't have to sit by Ron, but she did see him in the other classes they shared. In Professor Sprout's class, she shared a section with him and Harry. His skin was washed out, and his eyes never left his planting pots. The numbness was still there. She could see him, smell him, and hear him but she didn't feel anything. She didn't understand what it meant.

When the last class was over, Hermione wanted nothing more than to try and get more sleep. However, on her way to the Common Room, Professor McGonagall tapped her shoulder. "Ms. Granger."

"Yes?" she asked as brightly as she could.

McGonagall gave her a small smile. "I want to compliment you on the progress you've made with Mr. Weasley."

"Progress?" Hermione asked as if it was the most radical notion she had ever heard.

"Yes, well, I don't think it's a coincidence that his behavior has turned around or that he's getting so much work done. I know it's by your aid, and I commend you for it," she said.

It seemed like so long ago that they had worked on the outline. "Oh, thank you, but Ron really is a hard worker. He just needs a push."

"I agree with you, Ms. Granger. Very well put. To go along with that, I'd like for you two to start the interviews tonight." She handed Hermione a folder and she flipped through it.

"That's right—the pairings." When they first thought of the idea, it had actually seemed like fun. Now, it was almost like a nightmare.

"I already contacted the Gryffindor students and asked them to meet you and Mr. Weasley in the library at different times. I also gave a copy to Mr. Weasley." Professor McGonagall spoke casually as if what she was asking wasn't a big deal.

Hermione was stuck, but she couldn't tell her no. "Alright, it sounds like a plan."

"Thank you, Hermione," she said. "You too have shown tremendous growth over the past few weeks. As we draw closer to the end of term, the staff and I are beginning to make our suggestions for the Head Boy and Head Girl. I'm fairly sure of my nomination."

Anytime she heard Head Girl, she stood a little taller. It was what she wanted and had wanted for years, but it was currently the dimmest goal in her mind. "I'll keep that in mind, Professor McGonagall." She pulled her bag higher on her shoulder and walked away. She looked at her sheet. The first interview was soon. It gave her no time to prepare or focus her mind.

She didn't know where Ron was or what she was supposed to say to him. She went to the Common Room, and he was already there. Their minds worked in synch without them even having to try. She stopped and watched as he stared into the fire. Apart of her simply wanted to forget the assignment and leave him waiting for her, but she knew she couldn't. "Ron."

He looked up. He gave her a once over and noticed the folder in her hands. "McGonagall?" She nodded and didn't move. He got up and walked over to her. He stood too close to her. She could practically feel his heartbeat against her body. They were silent and still.

She didn't know what to do, and her body began to ache. "We might as well go to the library now. People might show up early."

"Okay," he said. She wished that he wouldn't gaze at her so intently. Her body pulled toward his with all its might. She turned away from him and led him to the library. They walked silently to the library. It was painful and complicated. They didn't look at each other or say a word, but they kept close to each other. It was almost like they had to be physically close to handle everything, even though being together made it harder.

Hermione picked a table close to the front of the library doors. She laid out their papers and took out her quills. Ron loosened his tie and touched his black eye. She wanted to ask how it was feeling, but she didn't. All she did was sit and wait.

Interviewing the students proved to be easier than she thought it would be. She and Ron didn't have to talk to each other much. They bounced questions off each other, but for the majority they talked to the other students. Hermione even felt a little esteem by interviewing the seventh years. However, when the last set of seventh years came giggling in, all her positive energy flew away. It was John Grant and Kelly Murray, the seventh year couple that always seemed to be glued to each other. Tonight was no different. She watched and tried to speak to them as the two snogged, laughed, and touched each other right in the open, as if the biggest worry was if they had chapped lips.

"Can we get back to it?" Hermione asked for the third time.

"Oh, um, yeah," Kelly said. She pushed John's mouth away from her neck. "Champagne."

"We've got that written down already," Ron said rather rudely.

"Oi, don't be a prick. We want champagne, something red for decorations, and pie," John said. "Come on, love." He stood up and held out his hand. She took it and giggled.

"Wait, we're not finished. We need to talk about music," Hermione said.

He rolled his eyes. "We don't really care about what the ceremony looks like or what the music is. I have to leave the country for a while right after I leave here, so I'm not going to waste my time dancing or chatting with teachers." He looked at Kelly. "We won't be there long anyway, yeah love?"

She smiled. "Mmm, you've got that right."

They started kissing again and as much as it annoyed Hermione, she couldn't take her eyes off them. She finally felt something slink up her skin. They clung to each other and slobbered all over each other as if they were alone in bed. It was sexy and it turned her on in the slightest, no matter how much she told herself that it didn't. She was past sexually frustrated, and it didn't help that Ron sat right next to her. She took a glance at him. He was looking at them as well, but his eyes moved to her. They looked away simultaneously.

"I'm sorry, but I have to ask you two to leave," Madam Pince said, touching Kelly's shoulder so she'd stop kissing. "This behavior is not appropriate for a library."

The seventh years didn't even seem to mind. They packed up their stuff. "Sorry. We're leaving. Ron, Hermione, great interview," Kelly said. They walked off and Hermione sighed deeply. Once again she were stuck.

"We need to put all this together," Ron said after some time.

"I know we do," she answered.

"Then let's do it so we can end it. My room should be empty," he said.

"Why can't we do it here?" she asked. She didn't know if she wanted to be in an empty room with Ron. She didn't want to fight anymore.

He shrugged. "Because I hate sitting in this chair. Is it going to be a problem?"

"No, it's fine," she said stiffly. They walked to his room in silence. Ron pulled his tie off and put it in the door. "Why are you doing that?" she asked.

"So they'll know to leave us alone. I want to get this over with as soon as possible," he said, kicking off his shoes.

Hermione felt somewhat offended by his need to get away from her. She understood it, but she didn't want to hear it. She sat on the very edge of Ron's bed, and he flopped right in the middle of it. He took out all of their surveys and kept his focus on the work. She just looked at him. She had no attention for their work and she didn't see how he did either. If he was suffocating like she

was, then he was a master at hiding it. She took off her shoes and looked through her own pages. Her eyes kept blurring over her handwriting, and she found it hard to read.

She couldn't do it. She hastily started packing her things up. "Okay, I'll finish some of this up later." She wanted to get everything together as quickly as she could so she could leave.

"What? Why would you want to? This is our project," he said.

"I know but it'll go faster if I work alone. I need to work alone," she said. Her throat was beginning to close in and her eyes burned. She quickly went from not feeling anything to feeling everything.

"Hermione," he started.

"No!" she said. For whatever reason she yanked her bag up. Her papers flew out and all over the floor. "See. Damn it," she sobbed. She got to her knees and started picking them up. It finally happened. The feeling came out and the more she gathered, the more she cried.

Ron knelt in front of her. "Hermione, let me help you. You don't have to get so upset. I'm going to help you."

The softness in his voice just made her cry harder. They were tears that had been held in for the longest time. "No, I don't need your help. I can do this by myself. I'm-I'm better alone."

"Don't say that," he said softly. He started to help but she snatched all the papers away.

"I've got it." She shoved the rest in her bag and started to get up, but Ron took her wrists. "No! No!"

"Hermione, stop it," he said in an unsteady voice, not letting go.

She didn't know what was wrong with her. She pulled her arms away and started slapping his hands, his arms, and his chest. "Leave me alone. Let me go! I need to go."

He captured her hands. "No. You're not leaving."

"No, get off me. Let me go. Leave me alone," she cried. She pulled a hand away and slapped his chest and his neck. "Let me go, Ron! Let me go!"

He took her wrists again and held on to them firmly. "Hermione, stop it. Just stop it." She froze and tried to yank her arms away, but he was too strong for her. "What you're doing right now isn't working. Stop fighting me."

"Let me go," she cried. She didn't want Ron to let her go, but if he didn't then she would be stuck.

He pulled on her arms to where her forehead was right against his. "No, I'm not letting you go. I'm not going to let you walk away from me again. I told you, so listen to me. I'm not letting you go."

Hermione groaned and sobbed and tried to pull away, but it was hard to fight him. Ron was strong yet gentle. He was warm and smelled so good. She used her knees to back away from his face and squirm. "Hmm, Ron, don't..."

"Come here. Come here," he whispered. She tried to back away but somehow her hands found his shoulders. He started to stand, and she joined him without anymore hesitation. He still held on to her upper arms and hers still pulled and dug into his shoulders.

It was a bizarre sensation. It seemed as if forever passed as they stared at each other. Hermione didn't know what to say. She was tired of talking and her mind was exhausted. She was mad, confused, hot, and completely in love. She looked over Ron's body and felt heat and craving all over. She didn't want to yell. Her throat was tired, but her body was screaming madly.

"I want you," he rasped, his voice husky.

"I want you, too. I want you so badly," she sobbed. They gazed at each other, breathing harshly. She stood on her toes and Ron bent down so their foreheads could touch. They slowly moved their heads from side to side with their eyes closed. Their hands were still clamped to each other. It seemed to last for only a second before they kissed. The moment his lips touched hers, she was dissolved and on fire.

She shivered and he gave an almost strangled moan. He pulled away. Hermione didn't open her eyes. She needed to breathe. Then, she leaned up and kissed him. It was a soft and tender kiss. She let it linger before breaking away. They did it repeatedly. They gave each other short, powerful kisses then parted for air. After a while their kisses became more demanding. They ransacked each other's lips. Ron's hands finally moved. They went to her back and tangled themselves in her hair. He bent down slightly, his tongue burst in and explored greedily. Their mouths dueled and their tongues intertwined.

Hermione pressed herself against him as closely as she could. Ron was hers. He always had been and he always would be. It was her own stupidity that kept her from ever truly realizing it. She kissed him harder, but groaned into his mouth because it wasn't enough. There was too much passion, frustration, and love between them. She needed to feel Ron's skin moving and melting against her own. She needed to feel his soft, long fingers tracing over her body and his gentle hands spreading her legs apart. She needed to feel his hardness pushing inside her, taking her, declaring her, making her remember whom he was and whom he was loyal to.

She pulled away slightly. Her yearning and lust overwhelmed her in a blinding heat. She looked up at Ron and saw the hazy desire in his beautiful blue eyes. They were her best friend's eyes. Her

best friend who also happened to be her boyfriend and the love of her life. She knew that, but there was something different about the air around it now. She outlined his mouth and loved the curve and the lush of his lips. He automatically closed his eyes, and she found comfort in the gesture. He needed her touch, and she needed his.

"Ron, please," she whispered.

He shook his head. "No. Tell me exactly what you want. I need to hear it."

She was beyond challenging him. She wanted her voice to be heard, and she wanted her demands met. She wanted everything. "I want you inside me, Ron. I want you to take me."

Ron let out a choked groan and picked her up. She gasped in surprised and held on to his shoulders tightly. He laid her on the bed and kissed her frantically as they quickly tugged on shirts and socks and trousers. Hermione couldn't get to Ron's skin fast enough, and he seemed offended by every inch of clothing that covered her body. He ripped at the buttons on her shirt. "Get this off," he grunted. She worked on his belt as he pulled at her bra straps. She was out of breath and needed the clothes to be gone.

Right as her skirt was torn off, she grabbed her wand from her pocket and mumbled the verbal spell against her stomach. Ron stopped his moments. She felt a tingle in her groin and relief in her chest. She had practiced almost every day. She nodded to let him know that it was okay. He went back to stripping her. Once naked, he pushed her back onto the bed. It was hard to breath and her skin was burning, aching to be touched by him. "Ron," she started.

He looked at her manically and bent down to kiss her. They feed on each other hungrily, and Hermione felt the spark glow even hotter. They were naked from head to toe. Their thighs and pelvises touched. Her breasts pressed against his chest, and their hands caressed each other. She held his head and trace the outline of his face as they continue to devour each other with hot, passionate kisses. He finally pulled away. He hovered over her, taking a hold of her leg and raising it. He kissed her knee and bit it. "I want this. I fucking want you so much." She whimpered and jerked. She believed him. He then spread her legs widely, and she allowed herself to be opened up to him.

She watched him as his finger reached out to touch her middle. Hermione's back arched up off the bed, and she let out a loud moan at the contact. The feeling of it was overpowering. He looked at her. She bit her lip and nodded. He smirked. He placed his other hand on her stomach and dipped his head. When she felt his tongue lick her gently, she lost control, blaring his name and quivering underneath his mouth. He licked and sucked all over her area and nerve and slipped a finger inside her. It felt so good, and the shock of pleasure seized her body, sending shudders through her. She sucked in her breath. She felt like she was

being pulled inside out, and the pull brought out waves of pleasure deep from within her.

Hermione's mind raced with the sensations. It was amazing, but she needed more. "Ron, please, please, take me," she begged. He stopped and got to his knees. He ran his tongue up her torso and licked over each breast. Hermione shivered, and he moved into position between her legs. She spread them and he moved them up closer to her, to where her knees were almost level with her shoulders. He placed his arms on either side of her waist, and she knew right away that he would get deeper access to her.

A mixture of fear and excitement overtook her. She was open and exposed and completely at his will. It was what she wanted. He looked at her with a blaring heat. He bent down and kissed her gently. It didn't take long for the kissing to grow deeper and fevering. Their tongues danced madly. Hermione felt Ron take his hardness and run it up against her. Without wasting another second, he eased it inside. Hermione cried out at the fullness she felt. "Hermione?" he mumbled against her lips.

She nodded. "Please," she slipped out between their snog. He went further in. He stretched her, swelled inside her, and filled her up so completely that she never wanted to move. It was almost as if he was doing it in a different way. He was so much deeper inside her than he'd ever been.

Ron slowly pushed in and out of her body, and she moaned in pleasure. Hermione tried to meet his thrusts and arch her back. He removed his mouth from hers entirely and kissed her chin. "Is this okay?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes," she panted as he thrust again and the sharp pleasuring feeling grew. "Ron, have me the way you want to. I'm fine. I want to feel every part of you." She didn't like the feeling that Ron was holding back. She wanted all of him. That was what they had promised to each other. He looked into her eyes and seemed to understand. He nodded and kissed her deeply. Ron pushed into her faster and a bit harder. Hermione let her tears fall, and she moaned as his hardness slowly began to pound into her and give way a powerful blaze deep inside her.

They clung to each other, and pressed their bodies tightly together. Ron buried himself so far inside her that she truly felt apart of him. Hermione wrapped her legs around him, and he slipped his hands under her, pulling her up higher so he could thrust deeper into her. Hermione cried out, lost to the passion of their union. Ron matched her sounds with his own low and wonderful moans. Their sounds filled the air, driving them deeper into the abyss of passion and lust for one another.

Hermione felt the pressure and fire move down to her middle. She could feel her orgasm building, but she didn't bother trying to hold on. She wanted to release and feel everything that Ron was making her feel. She closed her eyes as he pushed into her over and over, not stopping or slowing down. It became too much for her. She raked her nails into his back as she climbed higher and higher. Then, it crashed all around her. All she felt was his

steaming length making her cum as it shocked every inch of her insides.

She gasped for air as it hit her with a force that almost made her heart stop. A throttled scream tore from her throat, and her entire body shook and spasm. "Oh my god, Ron!" Hermione cried. She clenched her muscles around him and it only took a few more strokes before he buried his entire muscle inside her and held still, shaking and moaning. She watched him as he came incredibly inside her body. He was flushed and drenched and beautiful.

"Hermione, oh, Hermione," he slurred. His blue eyes focused and bore into her eyes. In the moment their sensations matched. Hermione could feel everything Ron did, and he seemed to mimic her pleasure. He tightly shut his eyes, groaned, and collapsed on top of her.

Hermione's arms went around his neck. She never wanted to let him go. She planted kisses on his cheek every few seconds, and she wrapped her legs him. He was still inside her, and she could feel every part of his sex burning inside her body. For several minutes they were quite and took in what they had done and what they meant to each other. The cloud began to clear from over them, and her brain seemed to turn back on after awhile. He lifted his head. He was pink in the face and dampened with sweat. She smiled at him and moved soggy locks out of his face. She looked around the room and gasped. Ron's knitted blanket was on the bed next to theirs. She turned her head in the opposite direction. They were in the bed closest to the door. It could only mean one thing.

"Oh, Ron, we're in Harry's bed!" she said in mortification.

Ron shot up and looked around. He rubbed his neck. "Shit, I guess we are," s-serves him right, I reckon. Never did get him back for making Snape assign us that essay."

She hit his chest. "This isn't funny." They scurried out of his bed, and put their underwear back on. In silence they straightened Harry's sheets, blanket, and pillows. Hermione took her wand over it and cleaned anything that resembled bodily perspiration. She wasn't sure if she would ever be able to look him in the eye again. When they were finished, they stopped and looked at each other. Hermione didn't know what to say. She certainly felt better and more relaxed, but their passionate moment of sex didn't fix their problems or erase the hurt and anger they both felt.

She gave him a once over. His firm body was almost completely bare except for his black, almost too small boxers. He cleared this throat. "Well, um, I don't know about you," but I feel a little better, yeah?"

She tugged on her ear lobe. "Yes, so do I."

He turned a little more serious. "I know it doesn't fix anything."



"No, it doesn't," she said, walking closer.

"I don't even know if this is the right time but...I'm ready to talk, if you are," he said.

She nodded. "I think it's as good as it's going to get."

He took her hand and led her to his bed. She snuggled under his comforter and leaned against his bedpost. He sat at the other end. He closed his eyes and scratched his head. "I don't know where to begin," he said.

"Wherever you want to," she said.

He opened his eyes and squeezed her foot. "I didn't cheat on you, Hermione. That's the first thing I want to say. You got that?"

"Yes, I believe you," she answered sincerely.

"But something more did happen. You were right about that. It's just not what you think," he said, massaging her foot. It tickled a little but if it helped him get the words on, then she would put up with it. "When I went to see her, it wasn't just about what you said. I had my own suspicions."

"You thought she told?" Hermione asked.

"No, but I knew that if anyone would have an idea about what happened, then it would be her. Through Parvati I found Lavender, and she and I took a walk," he said.

She didn't like the way it sounded, but she would listen regardless. "Where did you go?"

"Just around the halls. There's this bench by the corridor that leads to one of the old potions labs. She wanted to go there," Ron explained. "As I already told you, I asked her what she knew. I told her that some people, including myself, thought that she had some ideas about what was going on."

Hermione jumped as his thumb worked into her heel a little too hard. "But she didn't believe you?"

He snorted. "Not a chance. She knew that you most likely accused her, and it was sort of the truth. I didn't see the point in hiding it, but I defended you. She started going on about how you're mean to her and how you're always trying to make her seem like a bad person."

"Ron," Hermione said, "you have to understand..."

He held up his hand. "I do, sort of. You keep forgetting that I dated her for quite some time. She always says bitchy things when she's upset, so I defended you. I started yelling at her, and I reckon I got pretty nasty, too." Ron honestly looked upset with himself.

She didn't know how to take it. Ron's feelings were so much more complex than she thought. "And that bothered you?"

"Well, yeah," he said, rubbing his neck. "I yelled at her and basically called her words bullshit. She asked me if I gave a damn about her at all anymore, and I just said no. It wasn't right. I didn't mean to be such an asshole."

"I know that, Ron. You have such a good heart," she said.

He didn't seem too comforted by her words. "I don't know about that. She started crying. I mean really crying, and it wasn't in the same way that she used to all the time. I think I actually hurt her, and I couldn't stand it. I just can't handle girls crying and especially because of me. Does that make sense?"

She grinned a little and felt herself fall in love with him all over again. He had no problem almost murdering Malfoy, but seeing a girl tear up did his head completely in. "I think it does."

"Well, that's when something came over me. I knew that I had to make her stop feeling so terrible." He looked at her a painful way. "Please, don't get mad at me."

"I'm not going anywhere. I promise," she reassured.

"I touched her shoulder, and I told her that I did still like her," he said.

She sat up more. "But why would you say that, Ron?" she asked a little shortly.

He didn't move his eyes from her. "Because I wanted her to stop crying and because it was true."

A pounding in Hermione's ears grew louder. It didn't make sense. "So, you do still have feelings for her?"

"No," he quickly said. "Not like that, Hermione. Look, this has never been easy for me. Dating Lavender, breaking up with her, and dealing with everything involving us and her has been the most complicated process ever."

She felt a big put out, and she tried not to feel bitter. "But why? I thought you and me were well just it."

"It is and we are. It hasn't been complicated because I've been unsure of what I want. It's been hard because being with you has really made me realize my feelings for Lavender," he said.

"And what is that exactly? You're not being very clear," she said.

"I know. Hermione, I don't fancy Lavender. Even when I dated her it was almost like nothing more than a physical attraction to her. Then again, even though I knew that I didn't fancy her, I did like her. I realized it even more after we broke up," Ron said.

Hermione shook her head. She was once again totally lost. "I don't understand."

"I haven't been very honest with myself. I kept telling myself that a part of me did fancy her to make myself not feel like such a prick, but I can't do it anymore. I know Lavender can be a bitch. I show she can be a bit rude and whatever else you've seen her be. I never thought that it wasn't true." He let out a deep breath and shook his head. "However, you have to understand that it's not how she is all the time. She's a good person underneath all that."

"It's hard for me to see that," she said honestly.

"I get why. She's not you, Hermione. Lavender could never measure up to what you are or how you make me feel. All those times you got mad at me and implied that somehow I was choosing her drove me mental," he said.

"But that's how it seemed sometimes. Like now, you're telling me that she's a good person, but you also understand why I don't completely believe that? What does that mean?" she asked.

"When we were dating, it wasn't always us snogging or her talking forever and ever," he said with an eye roll. "She did listen to me, and she was there for me when I needed her." Hermione knew deep in her heart that his words were true. It had always been annoying, but Lavender did stick up for him whenever anyone said anything against him.

"It wasn't perfect and it's not like she was that way all the time, but she was that way," he continued. "There's another side to her, I swear. So when I told her that I still liked her, I meant it as a friend. I never really wanted her as my girlfriend. I knew that before she and I ever got together. That's something I've only wanted with you," he said. He blushed. "This is going to sound stupid, but I wanted a friend. I was out of my mind about you, and I was still unsure about who you wanted to be with. I wanted my own friend. I wasâ€¦lonely."

Hermione was touched by his words. She knew they were honest, and she recognized his need to feel close and wanted by someone. She had never felt brave enough to fix her loneliness in the past. She hid it in her books instead. "I've seen her with Parvati and even Blaise. I can't lie and say that she's not a good friend. When she actually cares about the person, I guess she can be rather helpful."

He smiled a little. "She can be. When we didn't try to be a couple and we just spent time together, it was okay. She may be my ex and breaking up with her may have been the smartest thing I've ever done, but it doesn't mean that things ended so simply. I couldn't just tell her to piss off and not feel bad about it. I'm sorry."

"I never wanted you to do that," she said. "I never thought that you weren't allowed to care."

He shrugged. "Sometimes it honestly felt that way."

"Well, you have to understand my side now, Ron. You have to know that telling Lavender that you still liked her is going to mean something different for her," she said.

He groaned and rubbed his cheeks roughly. "Believe me, I know. The moment I said it, I realized that she would take it a different way. I tried to explain more, but I think it was too late. I'm not all thick. I know Lavender still has feelings for me. It's another thing that made it so complicated and such a big mistake."

"I still don't see why you didn't tell me," she said.

"I didn't tell you because I didn't know how to say it without you feeling hurt or unsure about my feelings. I wanted to see if I could talk it out with Lavender first and get her to understand. I led her on once while we dated, and I didn't mean to do it a second time," he said. "It was never about lying to you. I just didn't want to hurt you."

"I want to say that I would have completely understood at the time, but I'm not sure if I would have." Hermione looked down at her hands. She knew that she played a big part in Ron's apprehension.

"That's what I was talking to Ginny about," he said softly. "That's the mistake I made. Telling Lavender that without thinking clearly first. I'm too impulsive, or at least that's what Ginny says. She and I are closer now."

"Harry and I have noticed," Hermione said with a smile. "It's really wonderful."

"I think it is, too. After talking to her and listening to her problems and seeing her with Harry and Deanâ€¦all I've wanted to do since is make sure that we didn't turn out like that," he said. "I've tried so hard to not really feel anything, just be perfect to everyone."

"I know exactly what you mean. Not just about Harry and Ginny but about wanting to be perfect, but I think we both know that it doesn't work that way, sweetheart," she said.

"I slowly realized that. I've tried being the mediator, and I've tried to listen to you and Lavender. It just doesn't work," he said in frustration. "Hermione, there's no secret and there's no side. You're my girlfriend. You're my best friend, and my whole bloody world. It's never been about taking her side or not wanting to believe you."

"Really?" she asked quietly. It felt good to hear him silence her fears.

"Hermione, I love you with every last part of me," he said tenderly. "I never hid it from Lavender. All I tried to do was

not hurt her in the way Dean got hurt. I didn't want her to think that I was just going to forget about her, and I didn't want her to go off on you or make things hard for us. I did it all for you and me. That's all it's ever been about."

"I guess I got lost along the way. When you said that I think of everything else instead of what I have right in front of me, I really did understand what you were saying," she said. She let out an aspirated sigh and chuckled. "I just want to do everything."

"I know you do, believe me. I'm well aware," he said with a smirk.

She lightly kicked him. "Hush. Anyway, I guess it's not all her fault. I never really tried to give her credit or care about what she's going through or you for that matter. I also know that you would never cheat on me. Even when we were arguing, deep in my heart I knew the truth."

"Then why didn't you say that? You have no idea how something like that tears me up," he said.

"I don't know," she said regretfully. "I've just been so silent and furious and stressed and jealous. It took over me, and I couldn't stop it. I was still jealous of Lavender, even if I had no reason to be. I don't know how to explain it."

"You don't have to. Have you ever seen me just laugh off the subject of you and Harry?" he asked.

For the first time, his worry was clear to her. "I've never really thought about it like that."

Ron crawled over to her. "Hermione, I want for things to be simple but I know they can't be. I have to talk to Lavender. Tears or not, no one is allowed to touch what you and I have."

She smiled. "You have no idea how good it feels to hear you say that. On top of everything I've been feeling, I've been really scaredâ€¦" She trialed off and couldn't find it in her to finish.

He got under the blanket with her and took her hands. "I would never let this be over. No matter what I say or what you say or what happens, I'll always come back and fight for us. Just being your friend isn't even an option anymore."

She kissed his forehead and moved as close as she could to him. "I've been so aggressive because I want to take care of us. I know I collapsed because my body couldn't handle the idea of not being with you. I'm so glad that you didn't let me go earlier. I didn't want you to. No matter what, this is first. You're everything, and it won't ever change."

"I know that I'm not the best boyfriend in the world, but no one will ever love someone as much as I love you," he said with a smile and tucking hair behind her ear. "This is what I'm supposed to do, Hermione. I'm supposed to be with you."

"And I was made to be with you. No other girl knows how to treat you, Ron. You mean so much, and I know it. I feel it everyday." She put her hand to his cheek. "Is this what you want?"

"Yes, more than anything else. I promise," he said.

She ran her finger over his mouth. "Then let's not do this anymore. No Lavender or Harry or McGonagall or anything. This is about you and me," she said.

"It always has been about us," he said, kissing her finger.

The emotion came back in a wave. Everything she already knew and everything she was learning washed over her. "I've let so much blind me. I'm so sorry."

"And I'm sorry for ignoring things that I should have taken care of ages ago. I'll never give you a reason not to trust me again," he said.

Her lip began to tremble. "And I'll listen to you and talk to you more. I've worked so hard for this."

"We've worked so hard for this. It's not going anywhere. Ever," he said.

He kissed her hard and passionately. She let him command her mouth, her mind, and her body once more. They eased off their bottoms and he placed his hands on her hips and slowly found his way inside her. As they made love again, he gasped and moaned as she whimpered and sobbed. Ron gazed at her. Hermione kept her eyes on him. They tried not to think but only feel. Ron's mouth moved to her ear. "I didn't mean those things I said when we fought, Hermione. I'm so sorry. I love you."

She shuddered at his words and how deeply and honestly he spoke. She moved her head up and kissed his ear before whispering, "I'm sorry, too. I was stupid. I don't want us to hurt each other. I just want to always feel this."

He kissed her and slipped his fiery tongue in and out of her mouth. "You will. I'll always give this to you. Hermione, this is what I want. It's all I've ever wanted."

She gripped his arms and felt emotion in her throat and pressure in her stomach. "It's all yours, love. I'll never stop being yours." They didn't talk after that. They didn't want to or feel the need to. After a while, they came again. Hermione gave a choked cry, arched her back, and gripped at his arms. Ron bit her bottom lip and groaned as he filled her body with his sex for the second time that day.

He stopped and finally parted from her mouth. They breathed heavily. Their eyes, bodies, and hearts were connected once more. Hermione felt so alive. She realized that for the longest time, even after getting together with Ron that she had forgotten what living really felt like because of all the uncertainty and

stress. Ron finally reminded her. He brought life back into her in a wayâ€¦

Hermione opened her eyes and stretched. She didn't remember falling asleep. Her last memory was running her fingers through Ron's hair as he rested his head against her chest. She was so tired. She looked around. She was incased in Ron's bed. She grinned and picked up the maroon pajamas and undershirt that was lying in Ron's spot of the bed. She slipped them on and peeked out the curtain. She jumped. Harry was on his bed, looking through a book. He looked up and smiled. "Hey, Hermione."

She paused for a moment and waited for him to yell at her for using his bed, but he didn't. "Oh, um, hello." She pulled the curtains back.

"Ron went to turn the surveys in. He told me that you might be asleep for a while. I don't mind. I'm just glad that I can be in my own room again," he said with a smirk.

She blushed and moved her eyes away from his. "Yes, well, we had a lot of talking to do. We worked things out."

"Yeah, it's been called that before," he said.

She threw a pillow at him. "Leave me alone."

The door opened. "Mione, I was just thinking about you," Ron said excitedly. He sat next to her and kissed her neck. She closed her eyes and grinned.

"And we were just talking about you taking over the room again. You know you've had the room more than anyone else this year, right? If we were going by passes, then you'd be up to at least twelve by now," Harry said.

"I'm sorry that it bothers you so much," Ron said sarcastically. "I think Snape may have some room in his private quarters."

"You are so clever, Ron," Harry said, throwing the pillow back.

Ron blocked it with his hand and looked at her. "McGonagall was happy with what I gave her. I've been impressing her so much lately."

"Yes, she may actually forget that you fall asleep in her class on a weekly basis," Hermione said.

"Shut it. She just might," Ron said.

She shook her head. "Never going to happen."

He tugged on her hair. "You're such a positive person."

"If positive means realistic, then yes I am," she said, putting her forehead to his.

"More like pessimistic," he mumbled.

"Now who's being mean?" she asked. They kissed and Harry cleared his throat. Ron didn't let go of her though, and she didn't really want him to. They simply scooted back and pulled the curtain closed again.

It was only then did Hermione moved away from his lips and sat on top of him. He held on to her waist, and she looked down at him with a grin. "So, I take it Harry doesn't knowâ€¦aboutâ€¦"

"What? About us shagging on his bed? About us using his blanket to exchange fluid? No," Ron said in a lowered voice.

She pinched his stomach. "Good. I don't think we should tell him."

"Oh, I'm going to tell him. Just not when he can get back at me by shagging Ginny on my bed," he said.

She pinched his again. "Why would you do that? It's childish and embarrassing."

"Ow!" he said, moving her hand away. "It's not either of those things. Do you have any idea how brilliant it's going to be to tell him? By the way, Harry, if you're wondering what that white stuff on your pillow is don't worry. It's all natural mate."

She tapped his nose and cringed at the thought. "That's vulgar."

"And bloody perfection," he said with a yawn.

"You tired?" she asked.

"Yes, very tired. All the talking and all theâ€¦"

"Sex?" she finished. She moved forward and rested against his chest. She nuzzled his neck and moved her fingers under his shirt and over his freckly and firm chest.

"This is the only time I'll say that I'm thankful to be tired." He trembled as she touched him, and he held on to her tightly. "Are you hungry?"

"Not really," she answered, closing her eyes.

"Neither am I," he said, yawning again. "I just want to go back to sleep."

"Good idea." She got under his covers and fixed her pillow.

He stared at her blankly. "You're sleeping in here?"

"I plan to. Will it be a problem?" she asked.

"No, it's just," he put a hand to her forehead. "I can't believe you want to. It's more than breaking the rules now. It's basically against the bloody law. Three years in Azkaban is the rumor."



She pushed his hand away. "I think one night might be okay. Besides, I don't think the sixth year Prefects will mind too much."

"Not at all." Ron got under the blanket also and put his stomach to her back. He kissed her head. She tried to think of something to say, but she knew that she didn't need to. She simply closed her eyes and fell into a peaceful sleep.

The next day they woke up and decided to go straight to breakfast. Hermione was practically starving. They held hands as they walked out the Common Room and to the Great Hall. It felt a bit different. All the pressure against her chest wasn't there. "Ronnie," Lavender's voice said from behind them.

Some of Hermione's bliss disappeared. They stopped and Ron sighed. Lavender walked up to them. She looked between them and frowned a little. "Yes?" Ron said, after Lavender didn't say anything.

She pushed hair off her shoulders. "Well, I was wonderingâ€¦if we could talk."

"I'm going to breakfast with Hermione right now," he said. Hermione could tell that he was trying not to be rude.

"But this is really important. I'm sorry but it really, really is," Lavender said.

"It's okay. I can meet you in there," Hermione said to Ron. The last thing she wanted to do was fight again.

"Thanks," Lavender said.

"No," Ron breathed. "We really need to eat, Hermione. Lavender, it will have to wait."

"Ronnie," Lavender said.

"Don't Ronnie me. It's not my name, so stop calling me that," he said tensely.

She frowned at him. "What's gotten into you?"

"I could ask you the same thing." He walked a little closer to her. "Don't think that I don't know about what you've been saying and what's been going on."

Lavender put her hands on her hips. "What exactly did she tell you?" She looked at Hermione. "What have you two been talking about?"

"Lavender," Hermione began.

"It's none of your business what we've been talking about," he quickly said. "Look, I know you've been saying bollocks to Hermione about us. I can't believe you'd do that."

"I've only been saying-"

"Lies," he interrupted heatedly.

"Ron, you don't get it," Lavender said. "She's been the one."

"You need to stop bringing her into this," Ron said. "It's driving me mental, alright? Stop talking about Hermione and stop blaming her for everything. This isn't about her. What's going on isn't her fault. It's mine."

"What do you mean?" Lavender asked.

He took a breath. "Lavender, whatever you think is between us isn't right. Hermione's my girlfriend, and I love her. It's always been that way, and it's never going to change. Not for you or for anyone."

Lavender's eyes glossed over a little, and she bit her lip. "Ronâ€¦I don't think this is something we should talk about in front of her."

"Well, I do," he said. "I'm sorry, but what you feel isn't because of Hermione. Be whatever you want towards me. I reckon I deserve some of it, but she didn't do anything wrong. So leave her bloody alone. She's not the one that hurt you."

Lavender let a tear fall down, and she looked down. Hermione slowly began to understand what Ron had meant about Lavender. She didn't seem to be faking her misery. "This isn't fair."

"Neither is everything that's been happening," he said.

She shrugged. "I don't know what you want me to say, Ron."

"I don't want you to say anything right now. We need to talk about some things later, but right now you have to understand that you're finished acting this way toward Hermione. You're done trying to interfere in our relationship. I won't let it happen anymore." Ron looked at her firmly and there wasn't a hint of uncertainty in his voice. Hermione had never seen him so sure before.

Lavender gazed at him for a moment before walking away without a word or a look back. Ron watched her move down the hall, and Hermione touched his arm. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," Ron asked. "I told you. I'm done with it. It's about us." He took her hand and led her into the Great Hall. Hermione wasn't sure what she felt but somehow she knew that Lavender had actually heard Ron for once. Hermione certainly knew that she did.

For the first time her mind and body agreed.

\*\*\*\*Soâ€¦yeah, lol. A lot went down in the chapter, and I feel like RHr shed a skin that REALLY needed to be shed. I said this

ages ago, but for my story the Ron/Lavender and Ginny/Dean storylines aren't as simple as they were in the books. I feel like there's so much room to explore other options. Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this. I could go on forever about so many things but I'll summarize: RHr 4 EVA! :D Thanks for reading and review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 51

Thanks for the reviews! I know it's been a long time since I've updated. I'm sorry. The updating option on FFN has been down for like three days! Just bad luck all around, lol, but I was able to fix it for me! Well, that and we're getting soooooo close to the end of this story! I'm rather excited. I've got a lot planned. :) OH! Okay, I lied. I've got one more thing to say. I went over some past reviews and I noticed that a lot of people were wondering when I'd throw in more HBP ideas and things that happened in the book, action and magic and Harry's destiny wise. Well, I reckon I haven't been clear about it but this story just isn't about that. While I did keep some themes from HBP and DH in this story, it's never been my intention to really follow that plot. This is more of a character/relationship based story, and I guess more AU than not. However, keep an eye on my profile and what I bring to the table next. That's all I'll sayâ€¦!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

"Oh, oh, oh, hrm-hm!" Hermione choked out, grinding her hips. "Y-you want me to go harder?"

"Can...you?" Ron panted, gripping her hips and drawing her forward.

She lowered herself to his sweaty face that matched her own. "You sound skeptical. Do you doubt me?"

He smirked and pushed his hips up as she continued to rock on him. "No. I just don't know why you haven't given it all to me. I thought you wouldn't hold back?" He clicked his teeth. "You've really let me down, and I've never been more disappointed in you."

Hermione bit the tip of his nose before raising and putting her hands flat on either side of him. "You've got way too much cheek, but you're in luck because I don't want to stop. I'll give you all that I have."

"Then bloody do it," Ron demanded, closing his eyes and tangling his fingers in his hair. She kept to her word and rocked a little faster. "Yes, Hermâ€¦ione," he groaned.

She smiled as she thrust in his lap. She loved hearing Ron say her name in the strangled tone of pleasure. She moved her eyes from him for a moment and took in their surrounding of the Prefect's bathroom. It was laughable. Hermione and Ron had decided to take a walk before she left for Hogsmeade with Harry,

but before she knew it they had ended up on the floor of the loo. Ron's jeans were at his ankles, and she was on top of him with her knickers next to his head. She knew that it was wrong, but she couldn't help it. She had missed every piece of Ron, and she wanted him in a way that she hadn't before. They were finally completely open to each other, and it was in more ways than one. She no longer felt guilty of her constant need. Ron's desire matched hers, and he was always ready when she was.

Hermione stroked him harder, and they both gasped. He was steaming and solid, and it felt incredible and so much bigger in their newly found position. "Ron, Ron, this is amazing."

He took her knickers and pulled them in between his fingers. "I agree. This was-oh-such a fucking good idea."

"Ron, don't stretch them out," Hermione said, trying to concentrate as she wildly took over Ron's body.

He quickly nodded. "Okay, sorry." He dropped her knickers and placed his hands on her waist. It made her go faster. She moaned loudly again and drove against him. Ron responded immediately. His eyes rolled back, and he arched his spine as his body moved up every time she drove. "Yesâ€¦fucking Merlin, Mione. You're so brilliant. Bloody hell, ride me as hard as you want. My cockâ€¦it's all yours."

Hermione felt the burn glow hotter and morph into an even bigger ball of pleasurable fury. Feeling him and hearing him gave her a new burst of confidence. She had no idea how she fared against other girls, but she knew how to please Ron. She moved down and snogged him deeply as she went faster. She rode him and lifted herself a bit. Ron held on to her and broke away from her mouth. He kissed and sucked on her neck as he moaned.

"Do you like this, sweetheart?" she asked. Ron bit her neck in response. She rocked at a new pace. His hands reached under her shirt and found themselves on her breasts. He squeezed them for a moment before snaking under her bra and brushing his fingertips over her nipples. She gave a high-pitched gasped.

"Probably as much as you liked that," he said. She responded with another powerful thrust. He tugged and pinched them gently. Hermione rocked as fast as she could. "Hermione, Hermione, you're so good," he groaned.

She felt dizzy. She bounced up and down and back and forth on his hardness. "So are you, Ron. Soâ€¦areâ€¦youâ€¦" Hermione let out a throttled moan as the pressured built. She was so close, but she wanted to hold it in until Ron came. It felt even better to let go after him so she could feel his vibrations against hers.

"Hmm, Hermione, Hermione," he chanted in a low yet whiny voice. It was too much, and she couldn't take his perfection. She bounced against him with all her might and bucked. The pulse reached her middle and exploded. Ron pulled on her hair and brought their lips together. They huffed and puffed in each other's mouths as she felt him jerk and burst. He came hard just

as she did. She collapsed fully on top of him and hugged him around the neck. He wrapped his arms around her stomach and kissed her roughly. She didn't stop rocking until her spasms died down and her breathing evened out.

Time slowed down and everything broke away except for her and Ron. His smell and his breathing and his body were the only parts of her life. It was all she wanted. Hermione finally pulled away from him. He was damp, flushed, and satisfied. He took slow and heavy breaths. She brushed hair out of his eyes. "You're gorgeous."

Ron grinned handsomely. "So are you, and I love you so bloody much. Hmm." He wiped his forehead and ran his fingers through his hair. "I can't believe it."

"Believe what?" she asked, trying to settle her breathing. Her body was still recovering from their mutual bliss.

"That you just fucked me senseless," he said with a smirk.

She looked away bashfully. "Oh, that's not the exact word I'd use."

He put his hands on her breasts and softly squeezed and massaged them. "Must we have this conversation again? Hermione, what you just did was nothing short of a fuck, and I'm sure it's one of the greatest fucks in the history of fucking."

She closed her eyes and put her hands on his. Her cheeks burned more than they already were, and his touch was beautiful. Ron was vulgar, but she actually loved the notion that she had fucked him senseless. "How would you know about all that?" she asked distractedly.

"Heavy suspicion," he said. "You dominate everything you do. Why should this be any different? You dominated me like I was one of your essays. I can't believe I survived it all."

She felt the blush move down to her neck. "Well, you wanted my best."

Ron's mischievous smile grew. "I know that I did. Thank you for being so generous with your talents."

She bent down again and rested her forearms on either side of his face. "It wasn't all me. You and your bits had a handle in it."

He pecked her lips and popped his hips. "Ha. In that case we both thank you, and we appreciate your compliments."

"We? You have conversations with it?" she asked, sticking out her tongue but moving out of the way so he couldn't take it into his mouth.

"Of course I do. All blokes do. Our brains and our pricks don't always agree, and most of the time we want different things at

different times," he explained, trying and failing again to take her tongue.

Hermione laughed. "You're mental, Ron, along with the whole race of man."

"No one will disagree with that. Stop being mean, Hermione. Come here," he said. He tugged on her hair, and she finally let him take over her mouth. She sighed heavily as Ron slowly and gently blended their tastes together. She never wanted to stop kissing him, but he pulled away right as she began to feel the heat touch her stomach.

"You want to get up?" he asked against her mouth.

"No," she breathed.

He kissed right under her bottom lip. "Okay, let me rephrase. Are you ready to get up?"

She looked to the door. It was locked, but she was still a bit worried that someone would try to get in. Besides, Harry was probably wondering where she was by now. "Yes. It's probably time to get out of here. Let's freshen up." Hermione pulled away from Ron's body and bit her lip as his length left her. He gave her knickers back, and she slowly stood and put them on. Ron lifted his hips and pulled his jeans up. She held out her hand and helped him up. "I'll get that," she said, pointing to his zipper.

"You're so kind," he said. They started at each other as she fastened his jeans. There was a light playfulness in the air that was new and enjoyable. So much pressure from the year had clouded Hermione's enjoyment of her relationship with Ron, but now it was as if she was finally awake to their dating and she could enjoy it. When she was finished, he backed her up to the sinks and lifted her on to the edge of one. He took a few hand towels from the rack and handed one to her. He wetted his with cold water and dabbed it on her face and neck.

He grinned at her sweetly. "I'm not as good at this as you are."

"You're fine," she whispered as his blue eyes and lush lips put her in a trance. She turned and wetted her own towel. She ran it across Ron's hairline. They stayed silent throughout but Hermione didn't mind. She didn't know how to explain it, but it was almost like making love or telling each other how much they loved one another. She and Ron found love in simplistic rituals, and she treasured every one of them.

Ron lifted one of her legs and touched her red knee. "Does this hurt?"

"A bit. I think I got a little burn. I guess I was too rough on myself while on the floor," she said.

He got on his knees in front of her. "Shagging wounds. I think they're sexy and kinky."

She lightly kicked his shoulder. "You think everything involving me is sexy and kinky."

"That's because you're a naughty witch," he said. He took his towel and dabbed her knees. She hissed and moved away. "Sorry," he said. He touched them softer and rubbed the cold cloth over her tender skin. He kissed her knees and ran his nails up and down her calves.

Hermione licked her lips and moaned. His hands were so good to her. "That feels wonderful, Ron."

"I'm glad you approve," he said. "You knowâ€¦while I'm down hereâ€¦"

"I'll take a shower later, but thank you for the offer," she quickly said, pulling on his hair so he'd stand up.

"Worth a try," he said, hugging her waist.

Hermione rested her head against his chest. "We really need to get out of here. Harry is waiting." Ron muttered something that she couldn't understand. "Please, don't act childish. You could be joining us, but you decided to fight."

"I don't need your nagging again. I get it. Will you at least bring me back some sweets?" He backed up and picked up his robe from the floor.

"Well, since I nag maybe it's not such a good idea," she stiffly said.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Fine, I'm sorry. I'm an asshole. I meant your kind and intelligent words of wisdom."

"Thank you. I'll consider it now." Hermione hopped off the sink and cupped water in her hands. She drank some and tried to tame her hair. She always thought that her afterglow shined ten times brighter than it should have.

Ron stood behind her and circled his arms around her stomach. They looked at their reflection, and he kissed her ear. "You don't have to do that. You look great."

"Thank you, but I always feel so exposed when I have to do something in public after we have sex. It's like it's written all over me," she explained.

Ron held her tighter. "And that's a bad thing?"

"No. I just want to be decent," she said.

Ron snorted and she elbowed him in the stomach. "Oi, I'm not taking the piss. You're just really interesting. You want to be decent, but you fucked me to the point where you gave yourself knee burns no more than a few minutes ago. It's barmy."

"Complicated is the better term," she corrected.

"Either way, I love it and your attempts are useless. It's a good thing that you mastered the verbal spell and it lasts all day. As soon as you come back, I'm going to return the favor and you'll get all disheveled again. It'll be your turn to receive my talents." He nibbled on her earlobe and she trembled.

"Mmm, is that so?" she whispered.

"I think a whomping is in order," he said as he sucked on the skin right beneath her ear.

She moaned softly. She didn't even mind that he had used the term whomping again. Hermione considered telling him that she was ready now, but she did want to go to Hogsmeade and she didn't want to be rude to Harry any longer. "In order for that to happen, you have to let me go," she said after some time.

Ron stopped nibbling on her. "Damn, you've got a point. Let's go before I change my mind."

They left the Prefects bathroom, and Hermione kept nudging Ron so he wouldn't smile so smugly. They found Harry by the entrance of the Great Hall. He leaned against the wall and stared off in the powerful yet vague way that he always did. Hermione straightened her clothes once more and cleared her throat. "I'm ready."

He faced them and lightened a bit. He grinned and crossed his arms over his chest. "Really? I was about to take out an ad in the paper for your search and rescue."

Ron snickered but Hermione pointed her chin. "Yes, very clever. So, are we going or not?"

"Yeah, we're going, if you two are ready to part," Harry said.

"In that case," Ron started.

"We're fine," Hermione interrupted. She touched Ron's chest. "I'll see you later. This would be a good time to work on your essay for Sprout. You're lucky that you don't have real detention today."

He rolled his eyes. "Hermione, I'm not going to waste my time with that rubbish. I'm going to get lunch then most likely take a nap. I'm tired."

"I reckon you are," Harry mumbled.

"Don't be a jealous prat," Ron said.

"Boys, that's enough." Hermione pecked Ron's lips. "Do something productive and I'll bring you back some quills and chocolates."

"Deal," he said, kissing her again. Hermione pulled away and gave him a small wave before leaving with Harry to the carriages.

"See, that wasn't so hard," Harry said with a chuckle.



She pinched his arm. "Hush it," she said with a glare. However, he didn't stop laughing until they were seated in their carriage.

While she did wish that Ron could join them, she liked spending time alone with Harry. They had been through so much together, and she enjoyed being with someone who understood the chaos of everything that had happened that year. However, she couldn't help but hold back a little. She knew in her heart that Harry wasn't completely okay like he pretended to be. She tried to keep the conversation light as they visited the different shops around the village.

"Thank you for paying the bill, Harry. You didn't have to," Hermione said as they left the teashop.

"I know but I don't mind," he said with a shrug. "I like doing it. What else am I going to do with all the money I have?"

"You could keep saving it until you really need something," she said.

"Stillâ€¦I feel a bit uncomfortable with it. I dunno. Maybe I'm mental." He stopped for a moment so he could wipe his glasses. Hermione watched him closely. There seemed to be so much going on in his mind all the time and today wasn't any different.

"I don't think so. I think it's charming, and I think it says a lot about who you are as a person. So, where do you want to go to next?" She looked around at the swarms of people walking back and forth. There always seemed to be more people at Hogsmeade when the weather broke.

"I don't know. I'm running low on liquorish," Harry said. "I swear one of the guys goes through my bag when I'm asleep or in the loo or something."

"I really hope that's not true, but let's go get some more for you." They started walking again and she grinned. "I wonder if I should bother getting Ron any candy. I don't want to encourage his bad behavior." Hermione knew that she was going to get him something, but she enjoyed teasing herself. She tried not to think about taking him on the floor or how delicately he had tended to her sore knees.

"I'm sure you'll buy him a big bag but even if you don't, he'll get his sweets one way or another," he said.

She felt her ears burn, and she hit his arm again. "What is that supposed to mean?"

He snorted. "Hermione, you two aren't exactly being subtle or at least Ron isn't."

She tried to think of something, but she had nothing to come back with. He was right. "Well, I'll just have to have a talk with him then, butâ€¦maybe there's a little truth to what you're saying." She groaned and put a hand over her face. It was hopeless. "I

know we're over the top right now, but it's difficult not to be. We're really happy and not like before when we only thought we were. Things are really different now."

He chuckled again. "I'm just taking the piss, Hermione. You don't have to explain anything to me. I know and it's okay."

"Really?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm happy for both of you. I'd rather see you two like this than how it was that night when you two almostâ€¦whatever it was," he said. "I was prepared for this type of behavior, but I'll never be ready to see you both so miserable and at odds."

The night of their fight shadowed the happiness that she felt. She didn't want it to. It was another dark day that she truly wanted to keep behind her memory. "I don't want to dwell on it too much. It's all I've been doing this year. I just want to move on."

Something in Harry's features changed. "I understand."

Hermione knew that she had said the wrong thing. All day she had been dancing around the subject that she was desperate to discuss. She had to cheer Harry up in some way. "Did I ever tell you how amazing Ginny was that night? She really helped me get through it, rather I wanted her help or not."

Harry's mouth stretched into a smile. "Yes, you did but I don't mind hearing it again. That's the type of person Ginny is. I mean she's a Weasley, and they have a way of taking care of people."

"Yes, it's a kind and passionate but almost forceful way of healing," she said.

"Exactly," he said with a nod. "It's why I love her so much."

Hermione didn't know why, but hearing Harry use the word love always made her feel a little warmer and lightheaded. In her opinion, it meant a lot if he could use the word honestly and it was always beautiful. She encircled his arm with hers and walked closer to him. "You think you might see her today?"

"I don't know. There are a lot of people out today. I might not get a chance to," he said indifferently. However, she knew that he cared.

"If you want to go look for her, then it's fine with me," she eased in.

He raised an eyebrow. "Why would I go looking for her?" Hermione simply shook her head and shrugged. "...Have you been talking to Luna?"

"Sorry?" she asked.

Harry looked her up and down and sighed. "Never mind."

Hermione frowned at him in confusion. "Alright. Although, if you do want to go find her, then I'll be more than happy to give you two some time alone. You need it," she said. "It might even cheer you up a little. That's all."

"Thanks," he answered. "Sorry, I have a lot on my mind."

"I know you do," she gently said.

They kept walking and not too far ahead were Parvati and Blaise. "I can't believe Lavender's not with them," Harry said. "I can't remember a time when Lavender and Parvati didn't go on a visit together."

"This morning Lavender said that she wasn't coming today," Hermione said.

"Did she say why?" Harry asked.

"No, but I can think of a few reasons why she wouldn't want to come out," she said.

Harry nodded. "Are you worried that she stayed because Ron did?"

"No," she said truthfully. Lavender's face had been blank and her voice had been heavy, but for once Hermione wasn't concerned. "It's crossed my mind that it's why she's back at school, but I can't be concerned anymore. I have no reason."

He patted her hand. "Good. I'm glad you feel that way. I don't think you have any reason either."

"It's a lot easier than analyzing everything that could happen. I know Ron loves me. Just like I know Ginny loves you," she smoothly added. "It's like...all my thoughts and emotions have been through a garbage disposal, and I need to sort through the rubbish."

"Hmm, I know the feeling," he said. "The biggest and most high-powered disposal ever made. Thousands of very sharp blades hacked away at me day after day."

Hermione laughed and even threw her head back. It was another reason why she enjoyed spending time with Harry. He understood her Muggle comparisons. "You know, Lavender and Dean mean more than we thought, Harry, but they're not everything." She wanted him to open up a bit more to him and express his feelings. She knew first hand that it was a bad idea to keep feelings locked away.

Harry went silent as they walked. "Do you want to go get the liquorish now?" he abruptly asked.

She mentally sighed and knew that he didn't and wouldn't talk about it anymore. "Sure."

They split up when they went inside the store. Hermione looked around the shop and picked out things that she knew Ron would

like. She only hoped that he would keep to his end of the deal, but she had a feeling that he wouldn't. She paid for her treats and looked around the crowded room for Harry. Her eyes grew when she saw him near the shelves of chocolate talking to Ginny. Harry was trying and failing to lean casually against the wall, and Ginny was right in front of him. They didn't look angry, so Hermione practically ran over to them.

"Hi!" she said brightly to them.

They turned to her as if she had interrupted something important. "Hey, Hermione," Ginny said.

"It's funny seeing you here right nowâ€¦right Harry?" Hermione asked. It was a bit much but she wouldn't miss an opportunity to get things moving for them.

Harry gave her an intense look for a moment before looking back and Ginny and scratching his head. "Not really. Everyone comes here." If Hermione could have, then she would have hit him. Boys were clueless.

"I feel bad because Ron is stuck at school. I'm just here to get him some chocolate. It's his favorite," Ginny said.

"Oh, how sweet. That's really sweet of her, isn't it Harry?" Hermione asked.

Harry sighed. "Yes, Hermione, it is." He looked at Ginny. "That's very sweet of you, Ginny. Maybe you should get an award for it."

"Best sister of year? I've already got three sitting on my side table at home," she cheeked.

Hermione laughed a little harder and louder than she probably needed to. Harry and Ginny stared at her as if she were a nutter. "Ahâ€¦well, Harry, I think I'm going to the bookstore. Do you mind if I leave you here? You know me. I like quietness when I look for books."

"Yeah, it's fine. I'll be okay. I'll meet you back at school," Harry said.

Ginny looked between them. "Don't let me interrupt."

Hermione opened her mouth but Harry got there first. "You aren't interrupting anything. Hermione wants to look at books, and I want to pick out some stuff for Ron, too. Ah, you know the bloke can never get enough."

Ginny grinned. "Okay."

Hermione smiled so widely that her cheeks hurt. She realized that Harry wasn't as clueless as she thought. "Alright, soâ€¦have fun."

"We will," Harry said, keeping his focus on Ginny. Hermione resisted giving him a thumb's up as she walked away from them and

out of the shop. She felt like skipping down the path because she was so excited. She sent every positive vibe that she had toward their area.

"Hermione," someone said from behind her.

She turned around. "Dean?"

He walked over to her. "Have you seen Ginny?"

Some of her bliss evaporated. "Oh, well, she's at a shop with Harry right now." She waited for him to roll his eyes or say something rude, but he actually looked relieved to hear the news.

"Good," he said.

She stared vacantly at him. Last time Harry and Ginny were brought up to Dean, he had tried to punch Harry. "It is?" she asked.

"Yeah, I just finished talking to her not too long ago. Ginny and I came here together," Dean said. There was heaviness in his voice, but he didn't appear to be upset.

She didn't know where to begin. She was slightly confused. "Ohâ€¦"

"Hey, you don't have to worry. I didn't say anything bad about Harry," he said. "Not everything is about him."

"I didn't say that it was," she said. "I just tend to concern myself when my best friend's name is thrown around. You can understand that."

"It wasn't thrown around, and I barely mentioned him," he said. "Ginny and I, we still have some personal stuff between us. I'm just trying to do the right thing for once." He rubbed his hands together and cleared his throat. "Anyway, if she's here with Harry, then I reckon what I said worked out."

"What did you say to her?" Hermione asked.

He dug his hands in his pockets and looked away. "Does it really matter? I told you that we had some things to work out, Hermione. I'll see you later."

"Dean, wait," Hermione said. She hated vagueness, and she wanted to know what he had said to her. Though, he just kept walking. She gave a heavy exhale. She'd simply have to wait until she could speak to Ginny.

Being alone in Hogsmeade gave Hermione too much time to think. She actually did want to go to the bookshop now. She needed something to help clear her mind. She passed back Cormac who was walking alone in the opposite direction. He looked up right as she turned her focus away. She never wanted to be anywhere near him and his terrible looks and words again. She walked into the bookshop and was immediately hit with a lovely smell of new

pages. Her palms itched as she thought about where she would start. "Hermione!" someone else called.

Hermione once again turned around. "Hello, Parvati." Parvati's dark eyes shine, and she grinned massively. "How has your day been so far?"

"Great. How about you?" she asked.

"Fine," she said, though it was a bit of an understatement. "I think I might head back soon. I'm running out of things to do. I didn't know that you liked to shop here."

"Me? Oh, no, no, no. I'm just going to look around for a book that I know Padma wants. Thought I'd do something nice for my sister," she answered.

"That sounds great," Hermione said. The small talk was killing her, and her curiosity won out. "I haven't seen Lavender around. Did she not come here at all?"

"You were there this morning," Parvati said.

"I know but she didn't really give a reason for not coming. I know it's none of my business. I'm just curious," she said.

Some of Parvati's happiness seemed to fade. "Well, she's always considered visits a couple's thing. So, I think being here isn't really something she wants to do today. Especially everything that's happened lately with her, you, and Ron."

Hermione suddenly wished that she hadn't asked. "I don't mean to sound thick. I know she's upset. I was just wondering. Um, I know this may be a long shot, but Cormac's here."

"So?" Parvati said.

"I don't know. Maybe if Lavender knew-" Parvati laughed loudly and quickly covered her mouth. "Was that funny?"

She nodded. "Yes, it was. Hermione, I don't think you quite understand the situation. I know Cormac is here, and so does Lavender. It doesn't matter though. She doesn't fancy him as much as everyone thinks she does. Actually, she doesn't fancy Cormac at all."

Hermione found that a bit hard to believe. "Really? They went on a couple of dates together, right?"

"Yes, but they didn't mean anything. The way Lav puts it, gorgeous people don't always like each other," Parvati explained. "He was too much of an arsehole to her on the dates they went on. She turned him down, and he's been a prat about it ever since."

"I didn't know," Hermione said. She thought that people like Cormac and Lavender deserved to be together, but it could have easily been the same way that people thought she and Harry deserved to be together.

"I don't expect you to. Lavender isn't very open about her issues with Cormac, and of course Cormac will deny it." Parvati frowned a little. "I know Cormac isn't always the nicest guy, but I didn't take him as such a knob. I don't like the way he talks to Lavender, and I'm glad she gave him the slip. I should thank your boyfriend for that."

"Ron? Why?" Hermione quickly asked.

"I didn't mean it like that," Parvati reassured, touching her arm for a moment. "I mean that I'm sure Lavender not fancying Cormac has more to do with Ron than anything else." She smiled.

"Hermione, Ron's a good guy. I can tell that he doesn't always want to seem so nice, and that's why he acts like a prat a lot of time."

"Trust me, I know that all too well," Hermione said.

"So, think about it. Lavender judges other guys next to him, and I guess she did the same with Cormac. Not too long ago she finally told him that she wasn't interested. It's the second time for Cormac that he's been turned down because the girl he wants fancies Ron more." She laughed. "It's probably the last thing he'd ever expect. Cormac has to be fuming and really jealous."

"Yes, I'm sure he is," Hermione quietly said. Things started to connect in her mind. Her last conversation with Cormac made a lot more sense. In fact, his spill about Ron and Lavender and all of his most recent looks made more sense. "Is Blaise waiting on you?"

"No, he went back to the castle already. Why?" Parvati asked.

"I'd really like to help you find your book," she said.

"You don't have to do that. I'm sure I'll come across it," she said.

"No, I really want to help," Hermione urged. "I'm glad you told me about Lavender and Cormac."

"Of course," Parvati said. "I'm glad it helped?"

"It did," Hermione said with a smile.

She enjoyed spending time with Parvati. It was something that she never thought she would honestly like to do. They were different in many ways, but somehow Parvati had been what she needed all year. While Hermione helped Parvati look for her book, she put the missing pieces together in her mind. Every day she noticed that she knew less about Lavender than she thought. She went back to the castle not too long after. She walked into the Common Room and saw Ron lying on his stomach in front of the fire. She was surprised to see that he was actually doing coursework. The room was still empty because most students were at Hogsmeade or dinner. So, she felt secure to act a little mischievous. She sauntered over to him and tapped his arse with her foot.

"What do we have here?" she asked.

Ron didn't look up from his work. "I'm almost finished with the essay."

"Honestly?" she asked in shock. She sat next to him and snatched the parchment away.

Ron rolled over on his back and stretched. "Always the tone of surprise. I am capable of doing studious things without being threatened. Although, I really want my candy, and it was my main motivation." He sat up and outstretched his hand.

Hermione absentmindedly handed him the bag as she read over his work. "Well, some of your uses could go into more detail but for the most part this is all right." She looked at him and beamed. "I'm so proud of you."

"Are you really?" he asked. She nodded and patted his knee. "I'm glad. I like making you proud. It feels good."

"Oh, sweetheart," she said softly. She pulled on his shirt to bring him closer. She kissed him gently and pulled away. "I appreciate you saying that, but I hope that you made yourself proud as well. That's most important."

"If you say so," Ron said. He put his forehead against hers and rubbed under her bottom lip. "How was your day?"

"Eventful," she said honestly. She sat between his legs and twisted the loose string on his jeans around her finger. She wanted to talk about Harry and Ginny, Dean, and what she found out about Lavender and Cormac, but she decided to hold it in. "How was your day?"

"Survivable," he said, kissing the top of her head. "Look, I know that I'm usually the one not wanting to bring him up when we're like this, but where's Harry?"

She moved away and gathered his books and papers into one neat pile. "You'll be happy to know that he's with Ginny or at least he was for a time being. She found us at the candy shop, and I left them to talk alone."

"About what?" he asked almost anxiously.

"I don't know. I'm sure he'll tell us when he comes back," she said.

Ron nodded and rubbed his neck. "I hope it works out or they're at least being civil."

"Me too," Hermione said. "I think they are. They seemed happy together, and they had a common goal to achieve." He raised an eyebrow. "You'll see."



"Uh-huh." Ron unwrapped a chocolate frog and shoved it into his mouth. Hermione scrunched her face and shook her head. "How do you savor the taste when you eat like that?"

"It's not about savoring when it comes to these," he said, stuffing another into his mouth and almost swallowing it whole. "That's what the quills are for. With the frogs it's about getting that first big burst of flavor and moving on. Bloody hell, you're the brain. You should know this already."

"Whatever you say," she breathed. She wiped a spec of chocolate off the corner of his mouth. "You're such a messy boy, Ronald."

"Let me know when it's bath time, yeah? You can give me a proper wash," he said with a wink. Hermione giggled faintly and peered down. Her cheeks burned slightly. She couldn't understand it. After they had done with each other, Ron still had the ability to make her shy and a little embarrassed.

"Hermione," Ron suddenly said with a more serious tone. She looked up at him. "Coursework wasn't the only I did while you were gone. "

"No?" she asked intrigued.

He shook his head. "No, I talked to Lavender first."

Suddenly, every sense and feeling she had focused on Ron and his words. "How did it go?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. I saw her alone at a table when I got lunch, so I reckoned it was right time. I think she agreed because she seemed relieved when I asked her if we could talk."

"What did she say?" Hermione asked.

"Not much," he answered. "There weren't too many people around so we stayed at the table. The main thing was that she wanted to know what you and I talked about in more detail."

Hermione straightened and re-straightened his papers. "Did you tell her?"

He touched her hands to stop her sorting. "No, at least not everything. I told her again that I know what she's been doing to make you upset or give the impression that there's more going on between us. She got really defensive, and I could tell that she was angry."

"That has nothing to do with you, Ron. I hope it didn't discourage you," she said.

"It didn't. I knew what I had to tell her, and I knew how she might react. It wasn't all about her though." He looked down and focused on his shoelaces. He twisted and pulled on them like he always did when he was nervous or uncomfortable. "I told her that I couldn't be completely mad at her. I did use her in a way, and

it was wrong. I never wanted to hurt her, and I do want her as a friend."

"You actually said that to her?" Hermione asked in awe.

"Yeah, I did," he said rather proudly. "I mean it's true, and I wanted her to know that I understood what was going on. It wasn't all my idea. I talked to Ginny earlier, and she said that it would be a good idea to tell Lavender those things if I truly wanted to make it right with her."

Hermione's heart warmed a little. Harry was right. The Weasley family was incredible. "Do you think she accepted it?"

"I have no idea," he said. "I sort of made of her cry, and she called me a bunch of names. She probably would have gotten violent with me if we were alone. Fucking hell, she knows more swears than I do."

"She knows better than to get violent with you," Hermione said with confidence.

"What? You're the only one who's allowed to get violent with me?" he asked with a grin.

"My point exactly," she answered. "It was that bad though?"

"Probably not but it felt that way." He shook his head. "I don't know how to explain it, but she honestly didn't seem that angry. Even with the cursing. I've felt Lavender's anger before but this was different. I reckon she was more upset."

"Or maybe she was finally realizing the truth, and it was overwhelming for her," Hermione added. "I understand how that feels."

"Maybe, I dunno. All I do know is that even with all that, it felt good. It's sort of like when I broke up with her. Only this feels better. It wasn't entirely bad, and I wish that I'd done it sooner. So much could have been avoided." He rubbed his eyes as if he had spent the whole day working. Hermione knew first hand how the subject of Lavender was always exhausting.

She rubbed his arm. "I know how you feel, but all you can do is move on and be proud knowing that you did the right thing."

"For once," he said softly.

"No, not for once." She began rubbing his back.

He closed his eyes and shivered. "That feels so good. You touching me is one of my favorite things."

"I'm here all day," she whispered. They were quiet for a while, and she watched Ron's chest move up and down as he breathed and his legs twitch when her hand reached his lower back. The peacefulness made her think about Dean for some reason and what

he was trying to achieve. "I think I may try talking to Lavender again."

Ron opened his eyes. "You don't have to do that."

"I think I do, Ron," she said.

"But you know what happened last time you tried that," he said with uneasiness.

"So do I, but I really don't think this will truly end until she and I have a real conversation. In all honestly this is really about her and I. There can't be any yelling or storming off between us anymore," Hermione said.

"Well, she's not in the best of moods right now. Give her some time," Ron said.

"I will. I'm sure I'll feel when the time is right like you did. So, what do you think happens now?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, but I honestly don't think it's anything that you have to worry about," he said.

"I'm not worried about me and her or at least not just about us. What about you? You've been saying how this isn't what you wanted, yet here it is," she said.

He took her hand away from his back and laced it between his fingers. "I know but there's not much I can do. I hope that things can get better with Lavender and something is telling me that they will, but I had to do this. We're ex's and the situation is going to be bloody shit no matter what."

Hermione couldn't help but to chuckle. "What a delicate way to put it. For a moment there I was ready to quote you, but I'd had to leave that last part out."

"Why? That would be the selling point. Bloody shit always gets people's attention, as you and Harry both seem to know," he said somewhat stiffly.

"Oh, you can't still be upset about that," she said.

"A bit. We were in the middle of something," Ron said with a slight pout.

She ran her fingers up his thigh and licked her lips. "I made it up to you, didn't I?"

"Your mouth was very talented and generous, yes, but it can't make me forget everything." He took his work and candy and shoved it in his bag. He stood and held out his hand to help her up. "Speaking of oral, you and I have unfinished businessâ€¦again."

"What ever do you mean?" Hermione asked innocently as the butterflies in her stomach swarmed.

"I told you. You're back now, and my room is empty soâ€¦I think there's some whom-"

Hermione put a finger to his lips. "Don't ruin it by saying that word. Just take me and satisfy me."

He blushed. "You're so bossy, but I'd be delighted to. Let's go." He pinched her side, and she laughed as he chased her up the stairs to his room. As soon as she got in the door, Ron gently pushed her against it and held her wrists against the door.

"Ronald Weasley," she said in a gasped.

"Don't act like you're not enjoying this. You're with me now, and you'll do what I say, yeah?" He held on to her wrists tightly and didn't move his eyes away from her.

"Now who's being bossy?" she asked. He pushed into her roughly. She groaned and nodded. "Yes, sir. Whatever you say."

They snogged noisily for a while before peeling off the door and leaving a trail of clothes all the way to Ron's bed. The room filled with sounds of lips smacking against one another and deep moans but soon turned to thuds from the bed hitting the wall and whimpers from heat and pressureâ€¦

Hermione pulled up her jeans and snapped her bra back into place. She was relaxed and completely content for the second time that day. Ron watched her from the bed and threw her shirt to her. His hair was messy and his limbs hung loosely from him. Even after having amazing sex with him, he managed to make her hot and ready for him.

"Thank youâ€¦for this," she said distractedly.

He smirked and tilted his head to the side. "I aim to please, but is the thanks for the shirt or for the two orgasms I gave you? Wait; make that three if you count the one from earlier today."

"You're vile," she muttered, slipping back into her shoes. "But...I guess for both." She ran her fingers through her tangled hair. "I really need to shower now."

Ron got out of his bed and walked over to her. "You don't like me all over you?"

"Not in this way, no," she answered.

"Ah, you prefer it all in you then, right?" he asked, biting his lip.

Hermione shook her head slowly. "Do you have an endless amount of material or something?" She checked her watch.

"I'm sorry. Do you have somewhere to be?" he rudely asked.

"Please, don't get all defensive. I'm just wondering where Harry is. I thought he'd be back by now," she said.

"You know the older students like to stay out later. He's probably aroundâ€¦somewhere," Ron said.

"Still, you know Harry." She looked at Ron and hoped that he would understand her concern. He seemed to. He nodded and sighed.

"Do you want to go looking for him?" he asked.

"Yes, please," she said, rushing to the door. She abruptly stopped and turned around. "Don't worry, it was incredible. The whomping I mean. You're a genius."

Ron pepped up a little. "Thank you. I'm rather proud of this one." She rolled her eyes and led him downstairs.

Hermione had a feeling of were Harry would be. She was almost positive that he wasn't still in Hogsmeade. She led the way to the abandoned classroom and hoped that when she opened it, Harry wouldn't be under the windowsill again. Hermione's stomach was in knots as they made it to the door. She put her ear against it, but she couldn't hear anything. "We should probably just go in," Ron said.

"I don't want to be rude," Hermione said.

"It's not being rude. It's being concerned," he said with a shrug.

"Right." Hermione took a deep breath and slowly turned the knob. It was unlocked. She opened the door and gasped. What she saw before her was the last thing she ever expected. Her jaw dropped and she put a hand over her mouth.

"Oi! What in the bloody hell is going on here?" Ron asked, barging in.

Ginny parted from Harry's mouth and took her hands off his neck. She got out of his lap, and Harry stood up from the teacher's chair. She put her hand on her hips. They were both flushed and breathing heavily. "What...does it look like?" Ginny asked eventually.

"It looks like you two were five seconds away from shagging in that chair!" Ron said.

"Harry?" Hermione asked in shock. She didn't know if she was supposed to feel relief or bewilderment first.

Harry grinned sheepishly. He opened his mouth several times but nothing came out. Finally, he shrugged. "Yeahâ€¦" He took his bag from the table and offered it to Ron. "Um...we brought you back some candy."

\*\*\*\*DUN DUN DUN! Lol. I really enjoyed this chapter. There wasn't all this drama and chaos. Just a bit of fun, sex, and humor(my favorites) with a bit of mystery thrown in as well. I know there were hints of things throughout the chapter and the big one at

the end, but I promise that everything will be cleared up. Hermione and Ron are just great, aren't they? :) Thanks for reading and review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 52

Thanks for the reviews! I know I've said this before, lol, but I'm really going to bust my arse to get these chapters out! There's too much that I want to share with you lovely readers afterwards.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

~The day before "What a Day!" takes place~

"Alright, so, Mooncalf dung, what are its other uses?" Harry asked as he stopped writing. There wasn't a response. "Hermione?" he asked. He heard her giggle so he glanced up. She was in a tight embrace with Ron. They lay on his bed facing each other and snogged as if their mixed saliva was the only way to keep their hearts beating.

He looked at them curiously as they continued to pant and giggle and grope and kiss. He could have sworn that only two minutes ago the two were detached and working. It was maddening how fast they had once again found each other's mouths. However, Harry didn't mind that they were all over each other. After their terrible fight they more than deserved it, and he was happy for their reconnection. Then again, their current snogging was interfering with their study time, and he could only stand their grunting and dry humping for so long.

Harry cleared his throat. "I didn't know dung was such a turn on for you two. I reckon a huge pile of bloody dragon shit on your faces will really set the mood."

Hermione pushed Ron away from her and sat up. Her face was pink, and she was slightly out of breath. She frowned and put a hand to her chest. "Harry, why would you say something like that? It's vile."

"Just thought I'd get your attention," Harry said.

"Well, you don't have it," Ron mumbled, kissing Hermione's neck. Of course, he hadn't been affected at all.

She bit her lip and closed her eyes. "Ron," she said softly, "I think Harry asked me a question."

"No, he didn't," Ron answered, not moving away from her skin.

"Actually, I did. Mooncalf dung. What are its properties?" Harry asked.

Ron groaned and finally moved away from her. "Why does it matter?"

"Because we have an essay to write which requires us to know the answer. Harry is ideal here. We need to get back to work," Hermione said. "Now, move away." She brushed Ron's hand off her leg and straightened her shirt and hair a bit. She pulled her book over her lap and flipped through the pages. "Hmm, Mooncalf."

Ron glared at Harry. "You're a prick. You know finding answers is Hermione's greatest weakness."

"And obviously whining is yours. I don't want to do this anymore than you do. Trust me," Harry said. It was true. He had better things to do than watch his mates practically impregnate each other orally.

"Harry, you don't need to defend yourself. Ron is just being immature as always," she said, grinning at him.

Ron grinned back and put a hand to her cheek. "Yeah, and you're just being gorgeous as always."

"Charm won't get you out of doing your work," she said, kissing the side of his hand.

He shrugged. "Doesn't matter. I want you to know how beautiful you are."

"Aww, thank you, sweetheart," she said.

Ron put his forehead against hers. "I love you."

"I love you, too," she whispered before dropping her book and snogging Ron heavily again. Harry chuckled and rolled his eyes. There was no hope for them. He needed fresh air. He packed up his work and scurried out of the room just in time to miss Hermione's hand move up Ron's thigh.

On his way outside, Harry continued to laugh as he thought about Ron and Hermione being constantly glued to each other. He and everyone knew that the only good that came out of bad fights was the incredible closeness that came after making up. His two best friends were most likely shagging or performing some variation of it by now. He gripped his bag tighter at the thought of it, but it wasn't because he was interested in Ron and Hermione having sex. He was simply reminded of how close he and Ginny were when they had dated. It seemed to last only a minute, but each second of that minute had been the happiest of his life.

He left the castle and made his way over to the pitch. He sat on a bleacher and continued to look up information on Mooncalf. The pitch was his favorite place to work and think by himself. He welcomed the breeze and light from the evening sun. A smile cracked through as he thought about his first real time with Ginny on the grass not too far from where he was now, but the pitch also cleared his everyday thoughts and made him think of Sirius, his parents, and his life.

Things had been quiet all year and while it made him a bit on edge, he was grateful. He welcomed every moment that the people he cared about weren't in danger, but nothing good in his life came without a heavy cost. Of course, the moment there was peace away from Voldemort and evil, there was unrest in his normal life and constant worries and dramas and problems. Harry was almost ready to trade it in. He was used to dealing with darkness, but fighting with his friends and dealing with girl issues were things he'd never be prepared for.

"Hello, Harry," a soft and singsongy voice said.

He looked up from his book. "Luna?" he said in surprise.

She smiled. "Can I sit down?"

"Um, sure," he said. He closed his book to give her his full attention. She sat next to him and gazed out into the pitch. Her jungle of dirty blonde hair was all over the place and blew gracefully in the air. She took a deep breath and seemed to take in the setting in a way that he'd never be able to. He waited for her to speak but she continued to stare off. "Ahâ€¦I don't know where Neville is."

"I'm sorry to hear that," she breathed, finally looking at him. "Are you looking for him?"

"No," he said slowly. Another small smile crept over his mouth. Luna was one of the most interesting people he'd ever met, and she never made things dull. "I figured you were. Isn't that why you're here?"

"Oh, no, I'm not looking for Neville. I'm here to see you," she said. "If that's okay, of course. I don't want to interrupt your work."

"You're not interrupting much of anything. I'm completely lost without Hermione. I don't know why I'm bothering," he said. He did want to finish his assignment, but he was more interested in what Luna wanted to talk about. They hadn't spent much time together over the school term, and his mind pulled in one direction as to what they could discuss.

"You should probably learn how to do the work yourself. I don't think Hermione will be taking your end of the year exams for you, will she?" Luna asked. There was something in her tone that told Harry that she honestly didn't care for their current conversation.

"No, she won'tâ€¦but that's not what this is really about, is it?" he asked. "You want to talk about something else?"

She faced him and moved her waist length hair to one side of her pale neck. "I can tell that you apparently already know what I want to say."



"Not exactly, but I think I know you well enough by now. You don't put yourself in situations that don't interest you," he said with a grin.

She tilted her head somewhat to the side and stared at him without blinking. "You're a lot smarter than you look, Harry."

"Cheers, I think," he said.

"It's a compliment," she said. "You'll catch your enemies off guard if they think there's nothing going on in your head when there actually is." She paused and sighed. "So, there is a reason why I came to see you. Hogsmeade is tomorrow."

Once again he waited for her to add on to the sentence, but she didn't. "I know it is."

"Are you going?" she asked.

"Yeah, with Hermione," he answered. "Ron still has detention."

Luna fiddled with her bottle cap necklace and locked her eyes on him. She barely blinked and her expression didn't change at all. "That's a shame. Ron's far too aggressive sometimes. It's not good for his state of mind, and it's probably why he has such a hard time keeping focus anyway; Neville and I are going, and Ginny told me that she plans to go."

Harry leaned in a little, waiting for her to continue for what seemed like the hundredth time. "Okay."

She sighed. "Harry, your cleverness is disappearing."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked. He didn't know what he was supposed to understand. The last time he had really spoken to Ginny was when he had tried to calm Ron down after his fight with Hermione, but he had been distracted with the situation to really focus on her.

"Obviously, I'm trying to connect you going to Hogsmeade with Ginny going. Maybe you two should go together," she said.

He gave her a look. "Ah, I'm not sure of how aware you are of our—"

"I'm very aware," she interrupted. "Ginny and I have a relationship."

"So you should know that it's not exactly that easy," Harry said.

"Actually, it's very easy. No one is keeping you from doing whatever it is that you want. That's an inner hurdle," she said.

"Well, I don't know what that means, Luna," he said a little impatiently, "but it's not as simple as whatever it is you're getting at. Look, did she say something? Did Ginny mention me and that's why you're here?"

"No, it's not why I'm here, Harry. Ginny is my friend, and you feel like my friend." Luna inched over to him, and her presence became even more demanding. "I think tomorrow might be a good opportunity to talk to her. You two might actually be able to listen to each other fairly."

"Fairly?" he asked.

"Yes, fairly. It's something that neither of you have done," she said.

He was taken aback. He thought that he was being plenty fair about the whole thing. "Luna, I don't know what you've been told or what you think, but I'm trying to be fair to Ginny."

She sighed heavily. "Harry Potter, you never listen. I never said that you were being unfair to Ginny. In fact, you're being more unfair to yourself." He shook his head and shrugged in confusion. "Listen, Ginny and I talk a lot about things. I know that she hasn't been the easiest person to communicate with, but her feelings are so easy to see."

"Yeah, to everyone else but me," he said.

"Like that. That's you not being fair to yourself," she said. "This isn't like you, Harry, and it's not like Ginny. She deserves to be happy and so you do. You're worthy of happiness and Ginny loves you. It may not be easy to see, but it doesn't mean it's not there."

Harry was lost. "You think she really wants to be with me? You don't think this whole thing has just beenâ€¦something we wished was there but isn't?"

"I think you and I both know that everything happens for a reason, and we both know that you and Ginny have something special. Don't forget that," she said.

He nodded. "So, you think I should find her in Hogsmeade tomorrow?"

Luna smiled and looked off toward the pitch. "I think you should do what you know is right. Remember, the word hard is just a modifier. It can't make something disappear." She patted his shoulder and got up from the bleachers. Harry watched her walk away in mild confusion.

Harry sat on his bed and tied his trainers. He looked around his empty room and admired the quietness for once. Almost all his roommates were already in Hogsmeade, and Ron was probably walking around the castle moping because he couldn't go. However, Harry figured that he was mostly likely somewhere with Hermione. Harry hadn't seen her since she woke him up that morning telling him where to meet her.

The door opened and Seamus walked in. "Still here?" he said.

"Yeah, I'm giving Ron and Hermione some time to say goodbye," Harry said, rolling his eyes.

"Ha!" Seamus said. "Fucking hell, are they shagging again?"

"Almost positive," he mumbled.

Seamus sat on the side of his bed and searched through his side table. "Ron's one lucky bloke. He gets more arse than the benches in the Great Hall. I didn't know Hermione was the type." He pulled out his watch and put it on. Then, he quickly raised a hand. "No disrespect toward her. I only mean that I thought she was against having fun."

"It's fine," Harry assured. "I'm not going to punch you. That's Ron's job. I get what you mean, but I dunno. Love and sex does that to a person, I guess. I reckon it isn't all that bad."

"Definitely not, mate. Like I said, Ron's lucky." Seamus stood up and stretched. "I'm going to head off. Hannah is waiting for me downstairs."

"Okay, maybe I'll see you there." Harry scratched his head and figured his next statement would be appropriate. "Maybe I'll see Dean there, too."

Seamus nodded slowly and cleared his throat. "Um, yeahâ€¦you might."

"Why do you say it like that?" Harry asked. "Is something wrong?"

"No, nothing is wrong," Seamus said. "It's just thatâ€¦he's there with Ginnyâ€¦they're there together."

"Oh," Harry said. He told himself that he had no right to feel anything. Ginny wasn't his girlfriend, and Dean certainly had no obligation to him, but it still felt wrong.

"Don't get upset," Seamus said.

"I'm not upset," Harry added. "I'm not a prat or anything. It's fine."

"Good, because it's nothing to get upset over," he said. "Dean wants to make things right. He knows that he can't be with Ginny, but he's not going to be a dick about it anymore. At least he's going to try not to be a dick about it."

"Is that something he told you?" Harry asked.

"Maybe not in those exact words but yes," Seamus said confidently. "Besides, even if he didn't say it, I know him. I know where his head is, and it's not up his arse."

Harry looked at him and saw the seriousness in his features. "I believe you," he said with a shrug.

"I'm glad. I'm not always a tit, yeah?" Seamus said with a smile. "Look, I know my mate. Dean is probably apologizing to her at some teashop. I mean it's possibly the last time he'll get to go anywhere with her alone. It'll be fine. You're my friend, Harry, and I'm not doing to toss around with you. It's a stupid thing to do, and I hate that shit anyway." He went to the door and opened it. "I'll see you later."

"Seamus," Harry said. He turned around and raised his eyebrows. Harry wasn't sure of what he wanted to say or why he needed to say anything at all. All he knew was that there was a lot more to Seamus than he'd ever give him credit for. "Thanks."

"You're welcome, mate," he said with a nod before walking out of the room.

Harry looked down at his own watch, and his eyes followed as the hand ticked down every second. Ginny and Dean were in Hogsmeade together. He shook his head at the thought and took his glasses off so he could rub his face. He decided to take Seamus' word and try to let it go. He didn't want to ruin his day with Hermione. He sat for a few more minutes before leaving the room as well. He hoped that he had given his friends enough time.

He stood next to the wall by the Great Hall where Hermione had told him to meet her. She wasn't there. He sighed and checked his watch. He wanted to get there before the big rush of younger school kids showed up. He started laughing as he thought about his first time in Hogsmeade when he had had to sneak there. He then thought about the time he and Ginny had gone there together. It had been such a good day. He stared off toward the ground and cleared everything in his mind so he could remember how fun the day had been.

"I'm ready," Hermione's voice said.

He looked up and couldn't help but to smile. Ron was smiling like an idiot, and Hermione's posture was overly dignified. It confirmed his suspicions about what they had been up to. He crossed his arms over his chest. "Really? I was about to take out an ad in the paper for your search and rescue."

Ron laughed and Hermione pointed her chin out. "Yes, very clever. So, are we going or not?"

He looked between them and decided to have a little fun. They had made him wait after all. "Yeah, we're going, if you two are ready to part."

"In that case," Ron said.

"We're fine," Hermione rushed. She put her hand to Ron's chest. "I'll see you later. This would be a good time to work on your essay for Sprout. You're lucky that you don't have real detention today."

Ron rolled his eyes as if she had told him that it would be a good idea to not call Snape a greasy cunt. "Hermione, I'm not

going to waste my time with that rubbish. I'm going to get lunch then most likely take a nap. I'm tired."

"I reckon you are," Harry muttered.

"Don't be a jealous prat," Ron said.

"Boys, that's enough," Hermione said, holding up her hand. She kissed Ron's lips. "Do something productive and I'll bring you back some quills and chocolates."

Ron lightened up somewhat. "Deal," he said, kissing her again. Hermione pulled away and gave Ron a small wave before leaving with him to the carriages.

"See, that wasn't so hard," Harry said, laughing.

"Hush it," she said, pinching his arm and giving him a stern look. Harry rubbed his sore skin but didn't stop laughing until they were in their seats.

In the past, spending time alone with Hermione had always been sort of a give-and-take for Harry. He enjoyed her company, but there wasn't always an agreement on what was fun between them. It wasn't like spending time with Ron or Ginny for that matter. Now, he could appreciate her temperament and more than ever he liked being with her. She had been his rock all year, and she understood what he felt and what he didn't want to say better than anyone. Although, he couldn't deny that he'd rather be walking around with his girlfriend. It was one of the last visits of the term. Harry had a feeling that Hermione understood some of his grief, but she didn't question him. Their conversations were easy and superficial as they walked to different shops and had lunch.

"Thank you for paying the bill, Harry. You didn't have to," Hermione said as they left the teashop.

"I know but I don't mind," he said. "I like doing it. What else am I going to do with all the money I have?" Every once in a while he thought about his small fortune, and it made him feel a little uneasy. He didn't want too many things, and he always felt better getting things for his friends instead. Buying lunch for Hermione was a small way of showing how much she meant to him.

"You could keep saving it until you really need something," she said, breaking him out of his thoughts.

"Stillâ€¦I feel a bit uncomfortable with it," he said. Hermione was looking at him in a weird way, and he couldn't tell what she was thinking. "I dunno. Maybe I'm mental," he said. He stopped walking and wiped his glasses. They weren't dirty, but cleaning them was a great distraction.

"I don't think so," she said. "I think it's charming, and I think it says a lot about who you are as a person. So, where do you want to go to next?"

"I don't know. I'm running low on liquorish," he said almost in disbelief. He went through his supply so fast. "I swear one of the guys goes through my bag when I'm asleep or in the loo or something."

"I really hope that's not true," she said with a slight frown, "but let's go get some more for you." They stared walking again. "I wonder if I should bother getting Ron any candy. I don't want to encourage his bad behavior."

Harry merely looked at her. They both knew that she would get Ron candy. She tried to act tough and in control, but Ron was under her skin and he had been for years. He was her exception to every rule she stood behind, and it was painfully obvious to everyone in the worldâ€¦except for Ron. "I'm sure you'll buy him a big bag but even if you don't, he'll get his sweets one way or another," he said.

Hermione's ears went pink, and she hit his arm again. "What is that supposed to mean?"

He gave a snort. "Hermione, you two aren't exactly being subtle or at least Ron isn't." He could tell that she was looking for the right thing to say but he had her.

"Well," she started, "I'll just have to have a talk with him then, butâ€¦maybe there's a little truth to what you're saying." She groaned and put a hand over her face. "I know we're over the top right now, but it's difficult not to be. We're really happy and not like before when we only thought we were. Things are really different now."

He laughed. He had tortured her enough. "I'm just taking the piss, Hermione. You don't have to explain anything to me. I know and it's okay."

"Really?" she asked quietly.

He wanted to laugh again, but he held it back. He knew that it meant the world to Hermione for her to always be decent, even if she was a giggly git over her current situation with Ron. He found it enduring about her. "Yes, I'm happy for both of you. I'd rather see you two like this than how it was that night when you two almostâ€¦whatever it was," he said, not wanting to think about how miserable his two friends had been. "I was prepared for this type of behavior, but I'll never be ready to see you both so miserable and at odds."

Hermione's smile faltered just a little bit. She looked down and rolled her shoulders back. "I don't want to dwell on it too much. It's all I've been doing this year. I just want to move on." She made it sound so simple, but it was anything but for him.

"I understand," he said.

"Did I ever tell you how amazing Ginny was that night?" she asked out of nowhere. "She really helped me get through it, rather I wanted her help or not."

An automatic smile touched him. "Yes, you did but I don't mind hearing it again," he said honestly. "That's the type of person Ginny is. I mean she's a Weasley, and they have a way of taking care of people."

"Yes, it's a kind and passionate but almost forceful way of healing," Hermione said.

"Exactly," he said with a nod. It was a perfect way to describe Ginny. She was just so interesting and so bloody perfect. "It's why I love her so much," he added.

Hermione encircled his arm with hers and walked with her body right next to his. Her warmth and her smell were homely and kind. "You think you might see her today?"

"I don't know," he said. "There are a lot of people out today. I might not get a chance to." He tried to act as if he didn't care. He wanted to tell her that Ginny and Dean were there together, but he didn't want to hear Hermione's theories. He wanted to enjoy the day.

"If you want to go look for her, then it's fine with me," she said.

He raised an eyebrow. He wondered if there had been a meeting between everyone discussing what he should do if he ran into Ginny. "Why would I go looking for her?" Hermione shook her head and shrugged innocently. "Have you been talking to Luna?"

"Sorry?" she asked.

Harry gave her a look, and she honestly appeared as if she had no idea what he was talking about. "Never mind."

"Alright. Although, if you do want to go find her, then I'll be more than happy to give you two some time alone. You need it," she said. "It might even cheer you up a little. That's all."

"Thanks," he said. He mentally told himself to stop being such a prick. "Sorry, I have a lot on my mind."

"I know you do," she gently said.

As they walked, Harry looked ahead and spotted Parvati and Blaise. "I can't believe Lavender's not with them. I can't remember a time when Lavender and Parvati didn't go on a visit together."

"This morning Lavender said that she wasn't coming today," Hermione said matter-of-factly.

"Did she say why?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, but I can think of a few reasons why she wouldn't want to come out."

He felt Hermione's arm wrap tighter around his. "Are you worried that she stayed because Ron did?"

"No," she said. "It's crossed my mind that it's why she's back at school, but I can't be concerned anymore. I have no reason."

He patted her hand for reassurance. He didn't want Hermione to think that she had any reason to worry. "Good. I'm glad you feel that way. I don't think you have any reason either."

"It's a lot easier than analyzing everything that could happen. I know Ron loves me. Just like I know Ginny loves you," she said, looking at him out of the corner of her eye. "It's like...all my thoughts and emotions have been through a garbage disposal, and I need to sort through the rubbish."

It was the perfect analogy, and it was times like these where he truly felt connected to Hermione. Sometimes, a Muggle appliance was the best way to describe his feelings. "Hmm, I know the feeling," he said. "The biggest and most high-powered disposal ever made. Thousands of very sharp blades hacked away at me day after day."

Hermione laughed and threw her head back. "You know, Lavender and Dean mean more than we thought, Harry, but they're not everything."

She looked at him in a curious way, and he saw through her wise and concerned eyes that she wanted him to open up. He didn't want to. "Do you want to go get the liquorish now?" he asked instead.

"Sure," she said faintly.

When they got into the candy shop, they split up. Hermione busied herself around the place, no doubt looking for things that Ron would want. Harry went straight to the chocolate. It was what he wanted most. He scanned the different kinds and felt his mouth water. "Harry?"

The voice made him freeze right as he was about to scoop out a handful of chocolate balls. He turned around. "Ginny."

She stood before him, looking as beautiful as ever with her hair down and her arms and collarbone exposed by her shirt. She looked around the crowded store before turning back to him. "Hi."

"Hi," he said back almost breathlessly. Seeing her before him was powerful. There were many things that he wanted to do and say, but he remembered that she was there with Dean. He leaned against the wall and pretended not to care. "Having a good time?" He glanced around but didn't see Dean anywhere.

"I suppose," she answered. He waited for her to continue, but she didn't. It was too much like his conversation with Luna, and it irritated him.

"Hi!" Hermione said very cheerfully as she about ran into them.



Harry turned to her and suddenly remembered that he had come with her. Ginny seemed to act the same way. "Hey, Hermione," Ginny said.

"It's funny seeing you here right nowâ€¦right Harry?" Hermione asked aggressively. She looked at him with a strong expression that he couldn't quite understand.

Harry looked back at Ginny and scratched his head. "Not really. Everyone comes here."

"I feel bad because Ron is stuck at school. I'm just here to get him some chocolate. It's his favorite," Ginny said.

"Oh, how sweet. That's really sweet of her, isn't it Harry?" Hermione asked, once again aggressively. It was becoming clear of what she was trying to do.

He simply sighed. "Yes, Hermione, it is." He looked at Ginny. "That's very sweet of you, Ginny. Maybe you should get an award for it."

She smirked. "Best sister of year? I've already got three sitting on my side table at home." They looked at each other, but Hermione's interrupted Harry's concentration on Ginny with loud and over the top laughter. Once again they both stared at her, and Harry wondered if all Hermione's shags with Ron had finally got to her head. She was acting like a nutter.

Hermione blushed and cleared her throat. "Ahâ€¦well, Harry, I think I'm going to the bookstore. Do you mind if I leave you here? You know me. I like quietness when I look for books."

"Yeah, it's fine," he said in relief. "I'll be okay. I'll meet you back at school."

Ginny looked between them. "Don't let me interrupt."

"You aren't interrupting anything," he quickly said. Now that Ginny was there, he didn't want her to leave. Even if he only got three minutes with her, he would take it. "Hermione wants to look at books," he added, "and I want to pick out some stuff for Ron, too. Ah, you know the bloke can never get enough." He actually couldn't care less if Ron got chocolate, but since Hermione was leaving he had to think of a reason to stay.

Ginny grinned and he had to keep himself from grabbing her and kissing her plush mouth. "Okay," she said.

Hermione smiled and her body relaxed a little. "Alright, soâ€¦have fun."

"We will," Harry said absentmindedly. He didn't take his eyes off Ginny as Hermione left the store.

Ginny was the first to look away. She walked over to him and moved her thumb over a jar of chocolate spiders. "Is Hermione okay? She was acting mental and not in her usual way."

He chuckled. "I don't know. Maybe she's going through Ron withdrawals."

She leaned against the wall next to him. "Poor dear. I don't know what my life would be like if I had to have Ron a certain amount of times a day. Must be an awful way to live."

"I agree, but it could be worse. Someone could needâ€¦Crabbe a certain amount of times a day," he said.

"Or Pansy. I'd perform an Unforgivable on myself if that happened," she said. They started laughing again and looked at each other. He didn't know where to begin or where they even were. All he knew was that he didn't want it to stop.

He looked her up and down and licked his lips. "Do you want to get out of here?"

He thought that she would say something about Dean or wanting to be alone, but she pushed herself off the wall and moved her hair off her shoulders. "Yes," she said, "but we should probably buy my brother some stuff first. It's why we're here, yeah?"

They didn't take long. Harry threw bits and pieces of everything he could fit into his bag. His hands were jittery, and his mind was elsewhere. Ginny seemed to act in the same sort of frenzy. They checked and rapidly left the store. However, as they made it outside, the need to rush was gone. All of a sudden, Harry had no idea what to say. It wasn't as easy anymore like Luna said it would be.

"Um, I'd ask you for a walk butâ€¦" He kicked at the ground and decided to find his bollocks and be brave. He had nothing else to lose. "Aren't you here with Dean? Seamus told me that you two were coming here together."

Ginny looked around the busy street. "Not anymore. I've said all that I needed to say to him. I've been looking for you for almost ten minutes now."

"Why?" he asked honestly.

She shrugged once more and tucked hair behind her ear. "So we can talk."

He looked her square in the eyes and put his hands into his pockets. The phrase usually meant something bad. "You haven't said all that you've wanted to say to me yet?"

She slowly shook her head. "No."

It was Harry's turn to look around the cluttered village. He didn't know where the conversation would go, but he couldn't back away from it. He didn't want to. "Come on."

For a while they simply walked in silence. Harry wouldn't start it this time. He would give Ginny all the time that she needed. "Harry," she finally said.

"Yeah?" he answered.

"Dean and I talked about a lot of things. We talked about things that we should have ages ago," she said.

"Like what?" he asked.

"Like you, Ron, him and I, and you and me having sex over holiday. It felt different," she said.

Harry nodded and kept his eyes forward. "Why is that?"

"Because I was honest, really honest. He was, too," she said. "...Dean told me that he punched you last winter. That day I was here with Luna and Neville after Dean and I had a fight."

"I know when it was," he said.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked.

"Why would I? It would've only complicated things more, and I knew why he did it," he said.

She touched his arm and stopped walking. "That may be, but I would have liked to know."

"What difference would it have made, Ginny?" he asked. "So, I tell you that he punched me because he was angry that I understood you more than he did. Then what, huh?"

"I...don't know," she said. "Maybe nothing or maybe it would have helped reinforce what I already knew." She held her stomach and looked away. "He also told me that he wanted to prove to me that he didn't need me. He wanted to make my life more difficult and prove that he was the one better off."

Harry just looked at her. "He told me the same thing. How did you react?"

"I wanted to hit him," she said with a small grin. "I was angry, well, I still am. You were right once again."

"I'm not trying to be. I told you that," he said.

"Yes, well, it doesn't change that you were right," she said. She started walking again and Harry did as well. They were once again quiet.

"So, what did you tell him then?" Harry asked.

"I told him that I was angry and hurt," she said. "I told him that I hated everything that happened this year and that I never meant for this. Then I told him that I was sorry. I gave the

advice to Ron, and it wouldn't be fair if I didn't keep to it myself."

Ginny's words didn't bring him any comfort. "So, once again it ended with you apologizing to him?"

"No, it didn't," she said strongly. She stopped walking again. "Listen, I feel like the world's biggest bitch for not listening to you. You were right about Dean, and I let him know that. I don't know if I'll ever be able to really trust him again. I didn't mean to hurt him, but he had no right to do what he did."

Harry wanted to believe her. All he had wanted was for her to realize that they could be happy without Dean. "So, how did it end?"

"He wants to be friends and so do I, but we both know that it's not that simple. He's still really hurt, and so am I." She closed her eyes. "We're just going to leave it for awhile. I know he cares about me, and he knows how I feel about him."

"Whatâ€¦what does that mean?" he asked.

"It means that we both know that we can't be friends right now. Not like before. We need a break from each other to really heal." She sniffed and wiped her eyes. "We should have never slept together. It complicated too much and it made us think that there was more between us than there was."

"Then why did you?" he whispered. "Honestly."

She opened her eyes. "This may sound awful, but it was the best way I knew to move on. I was sure that it would help cut off my feelings, but instead it fucked everything up. Dean and I know that now."

Harry felt uncomfortable and aggravated by how complicated things were. "I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize," she softly said. "We both needed to realize it. I needed to realize that things between Dean and I won't be okay for a while, but it doesn't have anything to do with you and me. Not really, anyway."

"Is there really a you and me though?" he asked.

She gazed at him in the blazing way that she always did. "There should be. Harry, I'm sorry. I'm sorry about all of this."

"Me too," he said. "Ginny, you know what I want but the last thing we need is for you to make a decision just because you talked to him. I'm not going to go through all that again. Neither of us should have to."

She nodded. "I know. I need to think."

"You do that. I'll see you," he said. She nodded. He took her hand between both of his and held it tightly. "I mean it. I'll

see you." He put her hand to his mouth and kissed her knuckles before letting it go and walking away from her. He didn't want to spend another moment in Hogsmeade. He felt weak for wanting to do what was right, but he wouldn't rush anything. He wouldn't be an knob. He had to do what was right for her. He made his way back to the castle alone. He figured that Hermione was still at the bookshop or possibly somewhere with Ron, again.

Harry walked back to the Common Room. He wanted to think about his conversation with Ginny and enjoy his candy before his roommates stole most of it. Almost everyone who could be at Hogsmeade still was. However, when he walked in he saw Lavender sniffing on the couch. All he had to do was walk past her and to his room. She wouldn't go out of her way to speak to him, but something kept him from moving. No matter how annoying Lavender was, he didn't think that she deserved all of her sadness.

He sat in the chair closest to the couch where she was currently curled up. She didn't seem to notice him. He let his bag drop with a thud to the floor. She jumped a little and sat up. She swiftly wiped her eyes. "Don't do that. It's rude."

"Sorry," he said.

Lavender flipped her hair and sat straight in the cushion. She looked at him. "Do you need something?" she rudely asked.

"No," he said. He didn't actually want to talk to her but for whatever reason he didn't get up. "Just sitting."

More tears streaked down, and she wiped them away. "So am I. I'm just sitting." She looked down and started sniffing again. Harry studied at his hands. It was the second time that they had been alone in almost the exact same spots. "Harry?" she sobbed.

He looked up at her. "Yeah?" She had no makeup on her face, and her skin was wet because of her tears. Her eyes were a little puffy, and her hair didn't have its usual bounce. She looked more human and normal and pretty. Personality aside, Lavender was one of the most attractive girls in their year, but Harry noticed how pretty she actually was for the first time. He wondered if Ron had ever seen her in such a way.

"I never wanted to be the bitch. All I wanted was to be with Ron," she said, using the back of her sleeve to swipe under her nose. "Was it so wrong that I wanted to date your best friend?"

"I don't think so," he said. "What was wrong was that you didn't want him to date his."

She rolled her eyes and picked at her nail polish. "Like I could ever come between Ron and Hermione. Oh, Ron and Hermione. It just rolls off your tongue so gracefully, doesn't it?"

"Lavender," he began.

"I know. I know," she quickly said. "I'm being a bitch again. It's just that I knew that I'd never measure up to Hermione and

all her perfection. I tried and it turned me into this." She sniffed again. "I didn't go to Hogsmeade today because I was hoping that Ron would want to talk."

"I know," Harry said. "Did you?"

"Yes, but it went all wrong. He's mad at me, and I'm mad at him," she said. "Our whole relationship was based on a lie. I thought he wanted me, and apparently he thought that I was good enough to help him move on."

Her words were all too familiar, and he certainly didn't want to go there with Lavender Brown. "Look, we don't have to talk."

"I'm not trying to. It's not like we're really friends, Harry, but you are friends with Ron." She looked at him. "I love him, and I wanted to make him happy. Everyone thinks I'm stupid, but I saw how much he was hurting. I just wanted to make him feel better, even though it meant going up against the amazing Hermione Granger. I was never afraid of her. Just how she made Ron feel."

Harry completely understood what she was trying to say. His heart pulled toward her, and he could understand her pain. "Believe it or not, but I get that. You're right, we're not really friends, but I think sometimes I could see what you were trying to do."

"Yes, it just wasn't good enough," she said. "Ron is completely in love with Hermione and always has been."

He figured that Lavender already knew that, but she was just now understanding what impact it had. "Lavender, if you love him then you have to be happy for him. You have to let him be happy and be with whom he's supposed to be with." He looked down. "It's bloody awful to see something you want slip away, but you can't be selfish. You've pushed Ron away because of that, and it's not Hermione's fault."

Lavender started crying again. "Nothing ever seems to be her fault. It's not fair."

Once more, Harry understood her statement. "I don't know if it's supposed to be."

She shook her head. "What should I do?"

It seemed like an honest question, and Harry wanted to help her. He wanted to help himself. "Move on and let Ron go."

She sniffed roughly and hugged her legs against her chest again. "Is that what you did?"

He looked into her eyes and decided not to lie. "It's what I've always done after a while. You get used to it, eventually. Excuse me." He picked up his candy bag and left the room. He couldn't be around her any longer. It was too intense.

His talk with Lavender kept repeating in his head. It had been so powerful and even a little chilling. He had never spoken so openly before. Then again, he had never spoken to anyone who he wasn't extremely close to so openly before. It actually felt good. He had grown up somewhat over the term, and he was finally gaining control of his emotions. He walked around the castle for what seemed like ages before going to the abandoned classroom. He could always sort everything out under the windowsill.

He opened the door and was surprised to see Ginny sitting on the teacher's desk. He paused and gaped at her as if she wasn't real. She swung her legs and smiled. "I thought that you'd show up here sooner or later. I've been told, from a certain Granger, that this is where you like to go."

He closed the door behind him and didn't take his eyes off her as he threw the candy bag on the desk and sat in the chair. "What are you doing here?"

"I don't like the way we left things," she said. "I don't think we got to the point where I wanted."

"And where's that?" he asked.

"I dunno. Closer, I reckon," she said, biting her lip. The intensity slowly crept over them and flooded. Suddenly, it was hotter and harder to breathe. Suddenly, parts of Harry's body that were numb felt alive and swollen with blood and feeling.

"I told you," he wheezed.

"I know," she whispered. "I don't want to make any more mistakes. I don't want to muck this up anymore."

"And I don't want to push you. I don't want to force you to chose," he said.

"There's nothing to chose. I told you that. It doesn't matter whom I said I love you to or who I slept with first. I made huge mistakes with all that, but I'm not so thick anymore." She gripped the edge of the table and leaned near him. "I miss you."

"I miss you, too. I miss you so fucking much that I can't focus. I hate this." He thought about his conversation with Lavender again. He could understand it, but it wasn't the same. Their situations weren't the same. "I hateâ€|being away from something I know should be mine." Ginny hopped off the desk and stood in front of him. Harry put his hands on her hips and looked up at her.

She put her hands on his shoulders. "Now you know how I've always felt. It's awful."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was stupid and scared."

"So was I," she said quietly.

Harry pulled on her wrists and brought her down to his lap. He scooted up in his chair so she could wrap her legs around him. It felt so good, and he was sweaty and stiff. Ginny was bloody his. There was no other way to be. "Ginnyâ€¦"

She put a finger to his lips. "Listen to me. I don't want to lie to you. Dean helped me a lot today. He reminded me of why I put myself through all this in the first place. I want to be with you, Harry."

"Do you? You want to be with me, all of me, and only me?" he asked.

She nodded and put her small and soft hands against his neck. It made him shiver and made the hairs on his arms prick up. "Ever since I met you. People have taken the piss out of me for years, but I don't care. Not Dean or Ron or Cho or anyone can change that."

"And I want you. Not Dean or Ron or Cho or anyone will change that." He cupped her face and looked at her boldly. "I'm never going to walk away from this again. I don't care what tries to come between us. I'll bloody kill it, I swear."

Ginny closed her eyes and moaned. "Oh, Harry, I'll kill it before you ever get the bloody chance." He moved her face and put it right in front of his. He gazed at her gorgeous and pale freckly face. Everything was clear and he was safe to put his wall down. "I love you," she said. "Please, I want to do this again. There's nothing that I need to think about. I know. Nothing has ever changed. It's you, Harry. You andâ€¦"

He cut her words off with a powerful kiss. He wrapped his arms around her stomach and held her as tightly and as closely as he could. Ginny sighed and hugged his neck. His mouth fused to her and his tongue licked her lips until she opened up and let him in. He snogged her with a strength he didn't know he had, and Ginny responded and matched his intensity. It felt so good and once again he felt like he was in another world, living another life.

They didn't talk, only gasped and moaned and parted for air every once in a while. Ginny tangled her fingers in his hair and hugged his body. Harry continued kissing and continued to heal every part of him that was sore or broken. Only Ginny could make him better, and only Ginny could make him feel like there was no evil in the world.

"Oi! What in the bloody hell is going on here?" Ron's voice yelled.

Harry and Ginny both stopped and opened their eyes. She parted from his mouth and detached herself from him. She got out of his lap, and Harry slowly stumbled to a standing position. His body pounded and begged to find Ginny's body again, but his mind reminded him of where he was and who surrounded him. It also reminded him to keep his hands over his crotch area. He looked toward the door to find Ron and Hermione gawking at them.



Hermione's eyes were wide, and she had a hand over her mouth, mostly likely hiding a smile. Ron looked as if he was seconds away from exploding. He strongly reminded Harry of an angry Mrs. Weasley.

Ginny put her hands on her hips. "What...does it look like?"

Ron's already dropped jaw fell another few inches. "It looks like you two were five seconds away from shagging in that chair!"

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

Harry grinned in embarrassment. He didn't know what to say. He was dazed, out of breath, horny, and blissful. It was too much. He opened his mouth several times but realized that he was in the shit. He shrugged and scanned the room. "Yeahâ€¦" He snatched up his bag from the table and offered it to Ron. "Um...we brought you back some candy."

Ginny and Hermione laughed, but Ron shot daggers at him. "The last thing that I want is your bloody candy, Potter!"

"Potter? Seriously, Ron, calm down," Ginny said.

"How in the bloody hell can I calm down?" Ron shouted. "Here Mione and I were coming down here to cheer Harry up and-and you're here cheering him up in the best way that a girl can cheer up a bloke!"

"Isn't that the truth?" Harry mumbled to himself not so quietly.

"What was that?" Ron said, moving closer.

Hermione took his arm. "For Merlin's sake, Ron. Ginny is right. Calm down."

He looked at her. "Don't tell me that you're siding with them!"

"Would you rather that we did find Harry in here alone and miserable?" she asked. She turned to them and beamed. "I'm assuming this means that Harry no longer has to be alone and miserable, correct?"

Harry and Ginny looked at each other. He took her hand and kissed it. "As always," he said.

"See?" Hermione said to Ron. "No harm."

He simply shook his head at her in almost disgust. "I can't believe that once again you're condoning their behavior."

"Well, it's not like it's wrong for a couple to show their affection in what's supposed to be a private setting," she said.

"And it's not like you and Hermione haven't shown affection at least twice today," Harry said.

"And most likely in this room," Ginny added.

"Okay, enough about us," Hermione said shortly.

"Yeah, piss off and you can't use us as an example. I'm the older brother and-"

"Sweetheart, let it go," Hermione said. "I really need to shower, and we both really need to eat something. Here." She took the bag from Harry's hand and shoved it against Ron's chest. She gave Ginny a hug and gave Harry one as well. She kissed his cheek. "I'm so happy for you two."

"Thanks," they said together.

"Aren't you happy, Ron?" Hermione asked in once again the aggressive way.

He pouted and crossed his arms over his chest, but his stature didn't last. He sighed, rolled his eyes, and slumped his shoulders. "Yeah, I'm really happy for the both of you. Harry, if you hurt her-"

"I know, mate," Harry said.

Ron nodded. "Uh-huh." He turned his attention to Ginny. "I reckon the same goes for you now. If you hurt him, then it won't matter that I'm the older brother."

She smiled at him lovingly and nodded. "That's fair."

"Uh-huh," he said again. "You got something for me?"

"Yes," she said with a chuckle. She handed him a candy bag and kissed his cheek. "Enjoy."

"Uh-huh," he said once more, tugging on her hair. "Let's go," he said to Hermione. They made their way toward the door and Ron stopped. He looked as if he was about to be sick. "Use protection every time...and stay off the desk. That's our spot."

Hermione gasped and hit his arm. "Ronald Bilius Weasley!"

"What? I'm being candid like everyone else," he said with a grin.

"Urgh! Let's just go. Bye you two," she said with a huge smile before closing the door behind them.

Ginny sighed and shook her head. "That wasn't too bad."

"Yeah, I think Ron's getting soft," he said. He took her hand again and brought her close. He wanted to find all the things that he had missed about their relationship. "You wanna go to the pitch?"

She smiled. "Lead the way." He kissed her deeply again before taking her hand and leading her to Quidditch pitch where they rekindled old memories and made new ones.

\*\* Aww! Lol. Once again, not a drama centered chapter. It's the parallel to the last one if you didn't notice. As I said, things can't stay horrible forever, and it's time that the story changes and things grow and turn anew. We're so close to the end and loose knots need to be tightened. Does this mean that everything will be perfect and gumdrops will fall from the sky? No, but things will get better. It's always been my intention. Oh! and I had to put Luna in this chapter. She's one of my favorite characters in the series and I find her relationship with Harry amazing. Anyway, so, thanks for reading and REVIEW!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 53

Thanks for the reviews! I know it's been a while but I had to make one last revision for this story's ending and it took some time to put everything in the place that I wanted it. Now, to go along with that, someone asked how many chapters were left. Um, I'm saying including this one then four or so. I'm still not completely sure but once I know, you'll know.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

The weather was finally broken. It was warmer, brighter, and calmer outside. As the school year was quickly coming to a close, it seemed as if all the students spent their time outside when they weren't in class. The schoolyard was the perfect place to lounge, read, study, or do whatever else that was better in the sunshine. Harry walked down the hall and made his way outside. He also wanted to enjoy the air. The class day was over, and he was eager to get his hands on Ginny. He had thought about her all day, like a git, and he had to spend time with her to relieve his need.

"Harry," someone said from behind him. He turned to the voice. It was Cho dressed in her Ravenclaw Quidditch attire. He grinned but there was a bit of longing in his chest. It was also the perfect weather for a nice, long practice. The championship game was only a couple of days away, but he wasn't going. Even though he had forgiven his teammates for their collective loss, he still felt responsible for their defeat.

"Practice, again?" he asked.

"Yes. I want to get as much time in as possible," she said. "I know it's mental, but I don't want any surprises on the field."

"I don't think you'll need too much extra work," he said. "Your team has been firm and very strong this year. Slythern has nothing going for them. As long as you all stay focused, it will be an easy win."

"That's not something that I'm particularly excited about, though," she said a bit gloomily. "I'd rather have a challenge and go against Gryffindor."

"So would I," he breathed, "but things didn't turn out that way."

"I know, and I'm still really sorry about it." She gave him a sympathetic look. "Anyway, where are you headed?"

"Outside. Ginny and I want to enjoy the weather," he said as his grin returned.

Cho smiled widely. "That's what I like to hear. You two are still doing all right?"

"Yeah, we're fine," he proudly said. "We take things one day at a time, and it's working for us."

"I'm so happy for you both. I really hope it works out this time," she said.

"It will. It has to," he answered.

"And I think it will," Cho said, touching his shoulder. "I should probably go. I have a long day ahead of me. See you later."

"Bye," Harry said as she walked off. He was proud of where they were as friends. A year ago, he never would have imagined that being Cho Chang's friend would be a hundred times better than being her boyfriend. He went outside to look for Ginny and as soon as a mass of ginger hair came into his vision, a powerful feeling of happiness overtook him. He tiptoed over to her, bent down, and kissed her ear. "Hey."

Ginny jumped slightly and grabbed at her chest. "Harry! Don't scare me like that!"

He chuckled and sat next to her. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. You rarely get scared so sometimes I forget that it's possible."

"Shut up," she said, hitting his knee.

He laughed again and rested back on his elbows. "I thought we were just relaxing today. What's with the book?"

"Urgh, blame Hermione," she said with an eye roll. "She said that this is her favorite book on herbal remedies. It'll help me prepare for Sprout's test."

"I warned you. You have to stay out of her path when she has books in her hands," he said. Ginny shut the book and shoved it in her bag. She crawled over to him and he spread his legs so she could lay on her stomach in between them. She put her head against his stomach, and he instantly began running his fingers through her hair. It was just so bloody silky.

"I reckon I didn't catch the signs that she was after me with books." She lightly sighed and held on to the sides of his waist.

He tugged on a piece of her hair and popped his hips. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she muttered.

"Hmm, okay." He pulled harder on her hair, making her look up at him. "What's really going on?"

Ginny looked at him with heavy brown eyes. "All during history class today we talked about the game."

"Oh," he said.

"See?" She outlined the wrinkles on his shirt. "I didn't want to bring it up."

"It's fine. I actually just ran into Cho before coming out here. She's doing another practice session today." He rubbed his thumb over her cheek and across the light splash of freckles that made her face so beautiful.

"It should be us playing against her," she said, almost through gritted teeth. "Malfoy and his tossers don't deserve to go for the cup."

"I know. I really-"

She put a finger to his lips. "I know you too well, Harry. You're going to say something noble and thick like, I really ruined it for us or I really let everyone down. Let me save you the breath by telling you to shut it."

He grinned against her finger and pulled it away. There wasn't any doubt as to why he loved her or why he had fought so hard to have her. "Fucking hell. I thought Ron was the one with the bossy girlfriend."

"Well, unlike Hermione, I'm not afraid to admit it. Also, unlike Hermione, I won't be concerned with your wellbeing when I kick your arse. You take the piss out of me too much." She started to pinch his stomach and sides.

He laughed and groaned in a bit of pain. He snatched her wrists and rolled their bodies over so he was on top of her. "First, you can't kick my arse. I'm sorry. It will be an inspiring attempt but useless just the same. Second-" He didn't a chance to finish because Ginny pushed up and tried to get away from him. However, he was stronger and able to keep her down. He pressed her wrists firmer against the ground and straddled her hips. "No, you're not going anywhere."

Ginny blushed and she licked her lips. "O-okay, you win, Mr. Potter." He felt her body go limp under his.

He took in their position to its full capacity and suddenly it wasn't pleasant and warm with a nice breeze outside. It was scorching and every bit of heat seemed to travel to his groin. "Are you giving up? Surrendering, for once?"

She slowly nodded. "Yes, I don't mind submitting to you, or I don't mind doing it every once in a while."

"I reckon I'm one lucky bloke, then," he said as he lowered himself to her face. He peered around to make sure that no one was paying particular attention to them. "You know, I could do whatever I want to you." He kissed her ear again and then her neck. It made her shiver. "You're completely defenseless."

"That's the point, yeah?" she said in a shaky and somewhat high-pitched voice. "You better take me while you have the chance." He smiled against her skin and moved his mouth to hers. He kissed her hard, and she made a slight noise as he did. He let go of her wrists, and she moved her hands to his back. He deepened the kiss and lost himself in how fantastic it felt. He broke away from her mouth and eased to her neck once more. It was his favorite place to kiss and nibble on. The skin was pale, freckly, and perfectly sweet and soft.

"Harry," Ginny moaned. "That feels so good andâ€¦I've got you!" She arched her back and caught him off guard. He got off her, and she was able to get on top of him.

Harry dropped his jaw in amazement and minor annoyance. "You're awful!"

"Never let your guard down," she said, getting off him. She gave him a once over and settled on his crotch. "Did I leave you in a state?"

He hurried to his feet. "Not leave. You're going to take care of it. Now."

"Is that an order? I don't do well with those," she said, backing up.

He took steps toward her. "You will today. I'll make you."

"You'll have to catch me first," she said, walking backwards faster.

"Please, give me something difficult to do," he said. He sped up and began to chase her. Ginny laughed and shot off into a full sprint. Harry ran after her and tackled her to the ground. They took turns rolling on top of each other as they snogged and giggled like prats. It wasn't until later that day that they finally came back inside. They went to the Common Room. Ron and Hermione were on the rug playing chess.

"Checkmate," Ron said.

"Oh," Hermione groaned, rubbing her brow.

Ron held his hand out to her. "You get better every time."

"Thank you. That means a lot coming from you," she said, shaking his hand.

Ron gazed at her affectionately for a moment before looking up and noticing them. His cheerfulness faded and he stiffened a little. "Ah, look who decided to come back from the grave."

"Be nice," Hermione said, turning around and beaming at them. "You two look like you had a nice evening."

"We do?" Harry asked. He touched his hair and all around his face and neck. Ginny was aggressive and she had no problem with leaving marks on him.

Ginny chuckled and pulled his hands down. "Stop it, Harry."

"Yeah, stop and explain what you were up to all this time outside. It wasn't that bloody nice out," Ron said as he and Hermione cleaned up the chessboard.

"I didn't know that we needed to write you an essay about it," Ginny said, sitting next to him on the rug.

"You do. I don't mind," Ron said, nudging her in the side. She nudged him back.

"And what, give you all the sticky details, mate?" Harry asked, sitting in a chair. Hermione giggled and Ron glared at him.

"Don't start that tonight," he warned. "I'm upset enough as it is."

"Why is that?" Harry asked.

"Ron's upset because we had a lot of work to do today. He wanted to enjoy the sunshine." Hermione reached over and gave his arm a rub. "I told you, sweetheart, it will be worth it."

"Whatever. I'll believe it when I see it," he said with a slight pout, though he did give her hand a squeeze before letting go.

"Well, are you in a good enough mood to eat dinner? Harry and I are headed that way," Ginny said.

Ron's composure seemed to instantly change. "Why do you bother asking things like that?" He stood up and practically took Ginny's feet off the ground as he pulled her up.

"Ron, McGonagall provided us with sandwiches," Hermione said.

"Sandwiches being the key word here," Ron said. "You know those only tease me, and they didn't even have bacon on them." Hermione covered her face with her hands and shook her head. "Look, if you're not hungry then you can read and watch me eat, but you know that I'll get food in you one way or another." He raised an eyebrow and gave Hermione a look that Harry couldn't understand. It made her turn away from him and point out her chin.

"You're vulgar," was all she said.

"Glad you think so. I'll be right back," Ron said. He grabbed his chess set and headed up the stairs.

"Wait, Ron," Harry said, going after him.

"If you want to give me more details about what you and Ginny did, then forget it. I wasn't being serious about the essay." Ron opened the door and put the set back into his trunk.

"No, it's not about that," Harry said. "It's about the Quidditch game."

Ron leaned against his bedpost. "What about it? Do you not want to go?"

"No, it's nothing like that," he said. "Ginny and I talked about it earlier, and now I want to know what you think. I want to make sure you're okay about everything."

"I have no choice but to be, eh?" Ron said. "Don't get me wrong, I'm still really angry that we lost to the ferret, but at least Ravenclaw will snatch up Slytherin's bollocks and avenge us in a way."

"Brilliant," Harry breathed in relief. "I'm glad we're all thinking the same thing."

"Besides, next year we'll get them. We'll be stronger and better prepared and more focused. Nothing should stop us," Ron said with a confident smirk as he walked over to him. "Look, I know you're mostly worried about Katie, but she'll be fine. I heard that she's trying out for some summer leagues when she graduates. She'll forget all about this, and it's not like she's never won the cup before. Don't worry about it so much, mate."

Hearing Ron's words made Harry feel a bit easier about the situation. Ron always said that he was shit with words, but sometimes he knew exactly what to say. "Thanks. I know that I need to. It's just that this was my first year as captain..."

Ron waved a hand. "I get all that. You can't help being so bloody noble and all that rubbish."

Harry rolled his eyes. "What is with you and Ginny calling me that?"

He shrugged. "The mind of a Weasley is the mind of a genius. Accept it and let it fill you with joy and love."

"You're a wanker," Harry said. Ron sniggered and led the way downstairs. He ran up to Hermione and grabbed her around the waist.

She gasped and tried to wiggle away. "Ronald Weasley!"

"Yeah, Ron, show some class," Ginny said. Harry stopped at the base of the stairs and watched his three friends. They were bickering and joking and they all looked lighter and better-off



than they'd been all term. It meant so much to him that the most important people in his life were finally getting to a soft spot in their lives. Harry was never one to ask for things, but seeing Ginny, Ron, and Hermione at ease was the one thing he pleaded for.

"Harry, are you coming?" Ron asked. "If you don't hurry up, then I'll have to eat Mione, and she can go a bit mental when I snack on her in public."

"You are the rudest and most horrible person on the planet!" Hermione said as her face went completely scarlet. "Urgh, ten points from Gryffindor!" She got out of his grasp and walked out of the Common Room.

"Wait, you can't take points away from meâ€|yet," Ron said, chasing after her.

Ginny put a hand on her hip and clicked her teeth with her tongue. "It's sad, really. I'm supposed to look up to them because they're older." She turned to him and gave him a curious look. "What? Why are you staring at me like that?"

He had no words to tell her how much she meant to him. It was still hard to find the right things to say. So, he simply kissed her. "I love you. That's all."

"You're sweet. I love you, too," she said, giving him another peck and rubbing her thumb across his bottom lip.

He nudged his head in the direction of the door. "Come on. Let's find them before they either kill each other or shag each other to death. Either way, someone's life will be lost." Ginny snorted and took his hand. She held on to it tightly, and he didn't let it go.

The day of the Quidditch championship finally came. Harry, Ginny, Ron and Hermione sat at the Gryffindor table that morning and watched as the Ravenclaws and Slytherns cheered and shot insults at each other. "Bollocks," Ron said for the fourth time as he ate his cereal.

"What's wrong with you now?" Ginny asked.

"Nothing," he said. "I just think it's bollocks that some of the other houses are actually putting money on Slythern winning. It's not going to happen."

"If people want to be knobs and lose their money, then I say let them. They deserve it," Ginny said. She tapped Harry's shoulder. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," he said.

She smiled and rubbed his back. "Don't worry. It will be us preparing for this next year. Just think, as soon as the term is over we will have all summer to practice together. Practice and do other things."

"Like what?" Ron loudly asked, putting his elbows on the table and leaning forward to them.

"Ronald, stop meddling," Hermione said, pulling him back.

"I can give you a list in full detail if you want," Ginny said. Ron shuddered and stuck out his tongue.

"Hey lot," Cho said from behind her.

Harry stood up. "What are you doing here? You should be with your team."

"I'm on my way there. I needed to get my new gloves from my trunk," she said. "Plus, I wanted to tell all of you that I really do wish it could be us playing against each other today."

"I don't think you do," Ron said. "You at least have a chance at winning against Slytherin." Hermione pinched his side, but Cho merely rolled her eyes.

"If you say so, but I'm being serious," she said. "But I guess the next best thing will have to be beating Draco for the cup today. I promise that I won't let that prick walk away with the glory today."

"I believe you," Harry said.

"You should give him a second or two to think that he may have it, but then take it from him," Ginny said.

"I don't have that much self control. I'm going for the snitch the moment I see it," Cho said. She checked her watch. "Well, I really have to go before my teammates start to worry. Wish me luck."

"Good luck," they all said together.

"We should probably go, too. I want a good seat where I can see Malfoy's face when he loses," Ron said, getting up. He and Hermione led the way out of the hall.

Ginny gave Harry a look as they made their way outside. "What?" he asked.

"It's really nice to see you and Cho so friendly," she said.

He raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Yes, I mean it," she said. "I may have felt a bit differently at the beginning of the term, but I see that she's a good friend for you."

"And that's all she ever can be," Harry assured.

"I know that," she gently said. "Come on."

The four of them found seats and were not too far away from Dean and Lavender who were also there with Seamus and Parvati. It was strange that the six of them were all together again, but it didn't feel nearly as intense. Lavender didn't say anything to either Ron or Hermione, and Dean made small talk with Harry and Ginny about the game. It wasn't perfect, but it was better.

The actual match went by a lot faster than Harry would have liked. He wanted to see Slytherin slowly self-destruct, but Ravenclaw didn't give them a chance. They scored goal after goal, and Cho kept to her word. As soon as the snitch buzzed past her ear, she zoomed after it with a speed that Harry wasn't sure he could ever achieve. He watched, holding his breath, as she outstretched her hand and he finally let the air out when it was securely in her hand. She caught the snitch, and Ravenclaw had won. The stadium boomed with excitement and exhilaration at Slytherin's defeat. Harry lifted Ginny off the bench and kissed her with everything he had.

So many of the Gryffindors were happy that Slytherin won that a group decided to throw a little party in the Common Room. Harry wanted to wait and congratulate Cho, but he figured that she would be occupied for the night with her own house party. The four made their way out of the stands. Ron wrapped his arms around Hermione's waist and kissed her cheek. "Bloody hell! This is the best day of my life!"

"That's sad," Hermione said, though she appeared to enjoy her closeness to Ron and his happiness.

"No, I couldn't be more serious right now. Malfoy has received one hit after the other. It's magic at its best," Ron said. As they made it down, they passed by the Slytherin team that was coming off the pitch. Harry could make out Draco's blond head that was bent down in what he hoped was utter shame.

"There he is," Harry said to Ron.

"Aww, he looks so disappointed," Ginny said with a huge grin.

"I know. It's gorgeous. Oi, Malfoy!" Ron screamed. "How are the bollocks today?" Hermione hit his arm while Harry and Ginny burst into laughter.

"Please, Ron," Hermione said, "you don't want to start trouble."

"Draco deserves it, and you know it," Harry said in defense. "Besides, if any of them want to walk over here and start something up, then they are more than welcome."

"Mmm, I like it when you talk like that," Ginny said.

"All of that may be well and good, but it doesn't make you any better than their lot if you act in the same manner," Hermione said.

"Yeah, but it makes us feel better than them," Ron said.

"I guess that's all that matters," Hermione mumbled. "Could you all wait for me? I thought it would be a little warmer out here than it is. I need a jacket."

"Do you want me to get you one of mine?" Ron asked.

She grinned at him and kissed his cheek. "No, but thank you."

"See, I can be nice," he said.

"I'll go with you, Hermione," Ginny said.

"We'll be at the entrance," Ron said. Harry and Ron parted from them and walked over to the archway. "That really was a brilliant game. The only thing that could have made it better is if we had played."

Harry leaned against the wall and watched as his classmates bustled about. "Yeah, I love seeing Malfoy lose, but I reckon it hurts him even more because he lost to Cho. So, this may have been a blessing in a way. The Slytherns believe that the best players have to be males."

"That's interesting. They let Malfoy play," Ron said. "Ginny's right, though. We'll have all summer to practice and get better. We should look through some books and magazines to find better approaches and workout plans."

"You want to open a book over holiday?" Harry asked.

"Piss off," he said with an eye roll. "I don't mind working as long as it's something I'm interested in. I'm definitely interested in Quidditch, and that's what this summer is going to be all about."

Harry smiled. "You sound excited."

"I am," he said with an equally large smile. "It'll be the first time that I won't have to keep myself from Hermione when we're together."

"What?" Harry asked.

"Well," Ron said, rubbing his neck. "In the past we'd be outside just laying about, and I'd always tell her that I had to get back inside because I was getting sunburned. I mean, technically it was true but I couldn't be outside with her alone for too long without wanting to explode or something. It was too much for me."

"Yeah, I understand the feeling," Harry said.

"Now, we'll be able to do whatever we want...or whatever she allows, anyway. I'm really excited about that," he said. He bounced on the heels of his feet and stared off as if he was playing the entire summer out in his head.

"I reckon it's the same way for Ginny and me," Harry said. "We won't even have to do anything for me to enjoy our time. I'll be

able to spend time with her alone without all the complicated bullshit. I just hope that it lasts for a while before something gets in our way." As excited as Harry was about his future, he always took his good feelings with a grain of salt. He had to always keep his guard up in some way. It was how he survived.

"Hey, be optimistic about that," Ron said, giving his arm a pat. "Either way, any time you get will be worth it, and no evil is going to take that away."

"Not this time," Harry said with self-assurance.

"That's what I like to hear, mate," Ron said. He looked around and his eyes settled on something that made him stand a bit straighter. "It wasn't completely awkward during the game, was it?"

"Sorry?" Harry said. He followed Ron's eyes and spotted Lavender and Parvati walking back from the pitch. "Are we looking at the same thing?"

"If you're asking, then I reckon that we are," Ron said.

"Then, no, it wasn't that awkward. I was a little surprised, too." He looked back to Ron. "Are you two speaking to each other?"

"Not really," Ron said, finally moving his eyes away. "In Slughorn's class we may say hi or whatever but nothing more. I don't know what else to say to her, and I guess she's still adjusting. It's okay. She's not being horrible, and we're not having problems. It's all I really want."

"Do you want to be friends with her?" Harry asked. He was more curious about Ron's relationship with Lavender now than he was when they were dating.

"Yeah, I do, but I'm not going to push it," Ron said. "We were never really friends to start off with so if we do get to that point, it'll have to be a lot different from anything we've had before. I'm hoping that it can work out. Like I told Hermione, it honestly wasn't always bad with her."

"I think I'm starting to see that," Harry said, glancing back at her. "Lavender is mental and she's caused a lot of trouble, but I don't think she's all that bad on purpose."

"I don't either," Ron said, "and I'm glad you think that. I don't want things to be weird when we come back next term."

"It won't be on my end," Harry reassured. He thought about his next statement and decided to go with it. "Know youâ€|Lavenderâ€|she's actually rather good looking."

"What?" Ron asked in amusement. "Have you never seen her before now?"

"I just meanâ€¦without all the makeup and deranged outfits," he tried to explain. "Every bloke thinks she's fit or whatever but I dunno. I reckon I never really looked at her before with all that going on."

"Oh, and now you are? I don't know who to tell first," Ron said with a frown.

"You know what, ignore me," Harry rushed.

Ron chuckled and Harry gave him the finger. "No. No. I get it. I'm just having a laugh," Ron said, holding up his hands. "I use to tell her that she didn't need all that stuff on her face, and I meant it. I always thought that she was the most attractive when she didn't try so hard to look nice."

"Yeah, that's what I mean," Harry said.

"Why are you bringing this up now?" he asked.

"I don't know," Harry said truthfully. "I reckon I'm seeing things a bit differently. I never really gave you any support when you were dating her. I don't think she's as thick as she acts."

"Well, thanks, I guess." Ron stared off again. "I think that's why Hermione is perfect." He licked his lips and the longing in his eyes came back. "She's the most gorgeous woman I've ever seen, and she doesn't need or use any of that stuff. She knows that she doesn't and that it's unnecessary, but when she does fix up it gets me every time. She can do both ends perfectly."

Harry watched Ron as he slowly turned into a salivating git. "I think you have drool on your chin."

"Oh, yeah?" Ron said, quickly wiping it away. "Cheers, mate."

"Any time," he said.

"So, what about you?" Ron asked. "It didn't seem that bad between you, Dean, and Ginny out there."

"No, it wasn't, but I'm still not sure. It's strange. Dean and I sort of talk, but it's like we're not really looking at each other when we do. I honestly don't know where they are or where we are," Harry said. "Who knows where we go from here."

"It doesn't matter. I'll be around, either way," Ron said.

It was another moment when Harry felt a mighty urge to tell Ron that he was thankful for their repaired friendship and that he'd be lost without it, but he simply couldn't find the right words. "Thanks, Ron," he said.

"What are you two talking about?" Hermione said as she and Ginny walked up to them.

"Grindylows and all their power and wonder," Ron smoothly replied.

Hermione looked between them and Harry gave her a slight nod. She eased a little. "All right. So, what's the plan?"

"We could stalk the Slytherns," Ron suggested.

"Or leave dungbombs around their benches in the Great Hall," Ginny said.

Harry shook his head at them. "It's starting to scare me how alike you two act."

"It would be charming if it wasn't so destructive," Hermione said. Ron and Ginny started to laugh.

"Let's just walk around the grounds until we come up with something," Harry said.

The four walked around many times before giving up and deciding to simply sit and talk. Harry didn't mind. Without secrets between them, it was easier to breathe and enjoy his time with him. He had almost forgotten how great the four of them could be together, and he wanted to spend the rest of his sixth year at Hogwarts finding it all again. However, as the day drew on Ron and Hermione had to patrol and Ginny wanted to go back inside and take a shower. Harry took a few minutes to bathe the peace and stillness before heading back inside for dinner.

He walked into the Great Hall and saw Dean sitting close to where he usually sat. He was alone and eating. Harry thought about his conversation with Ron and decided not to be a prick. They had already proven during the game that they could be around each other. He walked over and sat next to him at the bench. "Dean," he said.

Dean swallowed his bit of roast and nodded. "Hi." Harry felt as if it was enough. He started to make his plate and Dean went back to eating. "So— it was a really pathetic game today, yeah?" Harry had no choice but to speak.

"Just a bit. I was actually rather disappointed that it ended so soon. Seems like a bit of a waste," Harry said.

"That's what I thought right after it ended," Dean said. "Ravenclaw didn't get a chance to show how hard they can push it under pressure. Maybe it's a good thing that we didn't play against them."

Harry finally looked at him. "Why? You think that we would have lost?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe. I mean, it wouldn't have been as pitiful as Slythern losing today, but it could have been a possibility. We weren't really a solid team this year and especially when it counted."

Harry couldn't tell if Dean was being critical of him or not. He couldn't detect any sort of spite in his voice. "And what? Is that all my fault?"

"No. It's all of our fault, Harry," Dean said. "We were seven players and not one team for most of the year." He was looking at him as if he was trying to say something, but Harry couldn't tell what it was. All he knew was that now was the perfect time to reach out to him, even if he didn't necessarily want to.

"Even if you are right, it won't turn out this way next season," he said. "This summer I'm going to work on a new system, and when we come back I'll make sure we're ready. I'll be a better captain to you, and we'll all work on being a better team."

"What? You aren't holding tryouts next season?" Dean asked.

"Well, I'll have to for some positions but even with all that happened this year, I know who I can trust on the team," he explained. "There's no point in re-trying for certain positions."

"And what positions are those?" Dean asked.

Harry turned completely to him so he could have a real conversation with him. "Like yours. Dean, you've always been a skilled beater, and I'd like to keep you on the team. Bollocks to everything else. The position will be yours when you come back, if you want it."

"Is this some sort of--"

"It's not," Harry promptly added. "Trust me, I wouldn't risk the integrity of the team just to make you feel better." It came out as somewhat harsh, but it was honest. Harry was finished with lying to himself and to Dean to make things easier for them.

The curiosity and disbelief in Dean's features left for a moment and he smirked. Harry grinned as well. The fog between them lifted and things didn't feel so heavy around them. "Okay. I do want to play again next season, and I may be skilled, but I can definitely improve. I'll work on it this summer."

"That would be great," Harry said. "And I want to see what you've improved on."

He cleared his throat and looked down for a moment. "Um, Harry, I'm still not..."

"I know. This is about Quidditch," he said.

Dean nodded. "Seamus and I are going to do some traveling this summer, and I know that he's going to kick my arse back into shape. So, maybe when we get back here you and I canâ€¦try again. If you want to."

Harry really thought about what Dean was offering and what it would mean. "â€¦Yeah, that sounds good," he finally said. It was sincere. He was angry with Dean and he didn't trust him, but he



wanted to again. He truly wanted his friend back, but the question was still at the back of his mind. "What about Ginny?"

Dean's face hardened a little. "I think we both need a bit more time than that. I love her, but I honestly don't think that she's someone that I can have in my life right now. Maybe later onâ€¦!"

"I can respect that," Harry said. Dean went back to his dinner, and Harry turned straight in his seat. The fog once again returned and kept them at their distance.

"Is everything okay?" Seamus asked, sitting on the other side of Dean. He tapped Dean's shoulder.

Dean took a large bite of his roast. "We're fine." Seamus looked at Harry and he nodded and went back to his food. For the rest of the time they sat by each other, Harry and Dean didn't say a word to each other.

After dinner, Harry and Ginny took a walk around the castle. It was something that they found themselves doing almost every night. "So, are you going to tell me what happened between you and Dean at dinner?" Ginny said.

"You think something happened?" Harry asked.

She took his hand in hers and squeezed it. "I don't mean it in a bad way. I was just surprised to see you two sitting next to each other."

"It was fine. We talked about Quidditch," he said. Ginny looked at him with deep concern. "I'm being serious. We talked about the game, and we talked about the Gryffindor team next year. I told him that I wouldn't have tryouts for his position. He's a permanent player on my team."

"Really?" Ginny said in a bit of shock.

"I feel the same for your position and Ron's and Sarah's," Harry said. "I've got two really fast chasers, a highly strategic keeper, and a very skilled beater. It's not logical to hold tryouts when I know that I've already got the best."

"Well, thank you for that." She exhaled deeply. "That's nice to hear."

He pulled on her arm so she was closer to him. "Ginny, it's all right. We didn't argue or anything."

"I believe you," she said. "I guess it's out of habit now. I'm turning into my mum with all the worrying."

"I don't think you need to," he said with a laugh. "Dean and I have some issues, and I know we're both probably two swears away from another fight, but I don't know. I think when we come back things will be different. Today sort of proved that."

"I hope so. I would love for something to be salvaged from all this," she said. "I don't know if Dean and I will ever really be able to be friends again. At least, not in the way we used to be. I was talking to Ron about his situation with Lavender and Hermione, and it's different for him. I think things will be easier for him."

"Why do you say that?" Harry asked.

Ginny shrugged. "There was never anything major between them. Sure, Lavender has her feelings for him, but it just wasn't as complicated. There wasn't a huge mess that Ron created." She ran her fingers through her hair and focused on the floor. "This whole year has been a mess."

Harry stopped walking and put his hands on her upper arms. "Hey, not everything has been a mess. You're still here and so am I. That's not going to change for any reason. Remember when we said that?"

She put her hands on top of his. "Yes, and now you sound like Ron. He told me that no matter what mistakes I made or how guilty I still felt, you loved me and would be here because you care so much about me and because you're an amazing person."

"Ron said that about me?" Harry asked with a raised eyebrow.

She chuckled. "He did and he also told me never to repeat it because he'd just deny it or hex me into dozens of pieces or something like that."

"Now that sounds more like him," Harry said. "He's right, though. I promise."

Ginny reached up and wrapped her arms around his neck. "Harry, I just want to relax with you. Just for a moment, at least."

He hugged her waist and closed his eyes. Their closeness was so warm, and he felt completely safe with her. "We will. When we're not practicing or taking the piss out of Ron and Hermione or shagging, then we'll--"

"Sorry?" Ginny said, pulling away. "Do you want to repeat that last part?"

"Did you not understand me?" he asked.

"No, I understood," she said. "I just want to know why you're assuming that there will be any shagging going on."

"Come on, Ginny," he breathed. "Let's not be naïve here. It'll only be a matter of time before you're all over me on your bed or on my cot."

She hit his arm. "You're a prat."

"So you keep telling me," Harry said. He took her hand again, and they started walking down the corridor again. As they went further down the hall, Harry heard a faint laughter.

Ginny tugged on his arm. "Does that sound likeâ€!"

"Yeah, come on," he quietly said. They crept to the corner and peeked over. At the end of the hallway, Ron and Hermione were sitting on the floor against the wall. Her legs were over his, and they were both red in the face. Ron whispered something in her ear and the same faint laughter came out of Hermione. She then gasped and her eyes grew. Ron put his face in his hands and snickered a little louder.

"Aren't they supposed to be patrolling?" Ginny asked.

"They haven't done that in ages, Ginny. I think it's purely code now," Harry whispered. He couldn't help but smile at his two best friends.

"Interesting. Well, the code is broken tonight," she said. "Let's go."

"What? You want to disturb them?" Harry asked.

"Of course," she said. "One, I'm sure Ron would do the same to us and twoâ€\you lot will be seventh years next term. I won't have too many opportunities to annoy everyone."

"You don't annoy anyone," Harry said. He pulled her back and pressed her against the wall. He kissed her deeply for a moment and gripped her sides. He pulled away and put his forehead to hers. "Remember I said that, too."

"I will," she gently said. She touched his face and gave him a quick kiss before he moved away from her. They smirked and fixed their composure before walking over to Ron and Hermione. "Brilliant. I don't see a kit out."

Ron moved away from Hermione's ear. "What do you want?"

"To share the joke with you two, of course," Ginny said.

"We weren't joking about anything," Hermione immediately said.

"Is that so?" Harry asked as he and Ginny sat down in front of them.

Hermione was beyond flustered and giggly. She avoided his eyes and cleared her throat. "Yes. We're only taking a small break."

"Yeah, I'm sure you've gotten a lot of patrolling accomplished," Harry said.

"Don't be a prick. You have no idea how hard we work," Ron said.

"Or at least Hermione, anyway," Ginny said.

"Be nice, Ginny. Ron works hard," Hermione said. She pulled her legs off Ron and sat straighter.

"Thank you, Hermione," Ron said.

"I'm sorry, Ron. I'm sure you work very, very hard," Ginny said.

He shook his head at her. "You're a terrible liar."

"No, honestly, what were you two talking about?" Ginny asked.

"Nothing that concerns you. We were just discussing how I'll have to officially meet her parents some time this summer," Ron said. He gave Hermione a swift glance, and she winked at him. Harry knew them well enough to know that it wasn't true, but it was okay. Harry was accepting the idea that from here on out there would be things only between them. Ginny seemed skeptical of their story, so he decided to help them out.

"How will that work out?" he asked.

"Horrible, I reckon," Ron mumbled.

"No, it won't. I swear," Hermione said. "I'll be right there with you."

"She's right. I mean, you know all about fax machines and chainsaws. You'll be fine," Harry said.

Ron's eyes widened. "What? A fax machine? Chainsaws?" He looked at Ginny. "Are those like cars or something?"

"I have no idea," Ginny said.

Hermione hit Harry's arm. "Harry James Potter, don't scare him like that!"

"Scare me how?" Ron asked in a high-pitched voice. "What are they?" Harry started laughing but helped Hermione to explain the Muggle technology to Ron and Ginny. Later that night Harry and Ginny finally returned to the Common Room. They walked up the staircase to his room. She kissed him.

"I love you," she said.

"I love you, too. We had a good day," he said.

"Let's have tomorrow be just a good, yeah?" She gave him another kiss but pinched him very hard in the arm right in the middle of it.

"Ow!" Harry said, breaking away. "What was that for?"

"That was for worrying Ron earlier," she said with a slight frown. "I'm sure that he's nervous enough about meeting Hermione's parents. Leave my brother alone."

"Okay. I'm sorry." He rubbed his arm. "Shit, you're bloody rough."

"And there will be a lot more for you later," she said. She gave him more one gentle kiss before walking down the staircase. Harry bit his lip and watched her disappear before opening the door.

Seamus and Dean were talking on Dean's bed and looked up. "Hey, Harry," Seamus said.

"Hey," Harry said. He went to his bed and kicked his shoes off. He took off his glasses and rubbed his face. It had been such an easy and simple day, and he felt lucky. He got into bed and began to close his curtains.

"Goodnight, Harry," Dean said.

Harry looked at him and gave him a nod. "Night," he said before closing his curtains.

\*\*\*Ah, I love the smell of progress in the evening, lol. I got quite a few private requests to give Harry a "mellow" chapter because he's had such a long and crazy journey. So, this is my interpretation of that request. Things still aren't great and no one has forgotten what's happened this term, but progress will be made. Yeah, I think that sums it all up. Well, maybe one more thing. If anyone was wondering why there was so much Cho in this chapterâ€|maybe it's because I'm not finished with her yet in this storyâ€|Okay, one-one more thing. I sort of have something special planned for the next chapter, and I'm going to do my best to have it up soon. I know it'll be up sooner than this chapter was because I'm working on it now. I think you all will enjoy it. ;) Well, thanks for reading and REVIEW!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 54

Thanks for the reviews! After writing this chapter, I've decided that there will be three chapters left including this one. I know it seems sudden and possibly out of nowhere, but I wasn't sure of what I wanted until now. It's honestly a little jarring and sad for me. We've been going at this for so long and it seemed like no end was in sight for a while, lol, however, I think I got it to work out smoothly this way and I'm ready to move on to my next project(s).

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

â€|or maybe I can take him to a vintage arcade, Hermione thought. It would be refreshing, not too crowded, and probably something that Ron would enjoy. There were so many things that they could do in the Muggle World over their summer holiday, and she didn't know where to start.

"Are you finished?"

"Sorry?" Hermione said, looking up from her parchment.

Ron slightly grinned. "I asked if you're finished. I'm ready to move on to a new page."

"Oh, right." She rustled through the three piles and pulled out another blank certificate form. "You're going through these so fast. It's great."

"Thank you," he said, rubbing his eyes before writing new names in. Hermione studied him in all his quiet, unfastened, and studious glory. They were once again cramped in McGonagall's office working on projects. While everyone else got to enjoy the fresh air, the Prefects were indoors working overtime. She didn't mind the work, but parchment and ink was all she seemed to know anymore, and Ron was definitely a much-needed sight for sore eyes. She loved him in every way that she could get him, but she had to admit that when her boyfriend was hushed and scholarly, it did something magnificent to her.

"I think we'll be finished after this set," Hermione said. "There are corrections that the professors have to go over."

"Good, I'm hungry. I feel like we've been in here all day." Ron dropped his quill and stretched his long body.

"We pretty much have," she answered, stifling a yawn.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"Unfortunately. I had to do work for another class during my first one this morning. Exam season always does this to me." She let go of her quill as well and rolled her shoulders.

"I can work that kink out for you." He scooted his chair closer to hers and put his hands on her shoulders. His fingers kneaded into them, and Hermione automatically moaned.

"That feels so good, Ron," she sighed.

"Like I said, the kinks." He brushed her hair to one side of her neck and kissed under her earlobe.

Hermione shivered and moved away. "I didn't know you meant those kinds of kinks."

"You knew what I meant," he said.

She tapped his knee. "Actually, I thought you were being professional for once."

He rolled his eyes. "You think too highly of me."

She scooted her chair away from his and picked up her quill again. "We probably shouldn't get too close to each other."

"Why would you ever advise that?" Ron asked, looking put out.

"There's no need to get offended," she said. "You know how we are when we're close."

"What? Brilliant, sexy, stuck together like sticky gumdrop balls?" he asked with a smirk.

She put a hand on her hip. "I was going to say passionately conjoined. It's intense enough naturally, but I honestly think this room is an aphrodisiac. Every time we're in here, we're in heat."

"In heat? I was going to say randy, horny, or even addictively eager for each other's fluids." He took off his tie and bit the tip. "We're like exotic animals that are obsessed with one another's flesh. Here, this can be my leash."

Hermione pulled his tie out of his mouth and laughed so hard that she was sure she could be heard in the Slythern quarters. "You're a poet, sweetheart. Vulgar, but a poet nonetheless."

"Don't I know it?" He caressed her cheek and tucked hair behind her ear. "I love making you laugh, Hermione. It's such a gorgeous sound."

"You're sweet, and it's not that hard for you to make me laugh," she said, taking his hand. "You're really funny. It's one of your most attractive qualities, but honestly, do you understand what I mean?"

"Yeah, I understand." He studied the room. "I dunno. I think it's that this is McGonagall's office for me. It's like I have to do something wrong in here. Plus, this is such a big bloody desk." He wiggled his eyebrows, but she rolled her eyes.

"You're such a man," she said. "I don't know what it is for me."

"You could get expelled and that excites you. Don't deny it," Ron said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she mumbled.

"Yes, you do. You said it yourself. Bad is good for you, on occasion," he said.

She raised her chin and pretended not to hear him. "Let's get back to work."

"You're the boss," he said. They continued to work in a silence that was both comforting and revealing for Hermione. There weren't any questions buzzing through her mind, her stomach was not in knots of uncertainty, and she didn't feel as if she couldn't reach Ron. She glanced up at him from time and time, and he was almost completely focused on his task. He didn't seem troubled or weighted down by grief. He was okay, she was okay, and they were okay. It was all she had ever wanted for their relationship.

Later that evening the door opened and McGonagall walked through. "Ms, Granger, Mr. Weasley, where do we stand?" she asked.

"We're finished," Hermione said with pride. She stacked the parchments in neat piles.

"That's excellent, Ms. Granger," she said, looking at their work. "Mr. Weasley?"

"It wasn't a problem at all, Professor McGonagall," he answered.

McGonagall gave him a faint nod. "It's nice to hear that, Mr. Weasley. I'm glad that the both of you have been able to improve this year and especially you."

The tips of Ron's ears turned pink. Luckily for them, McGonagall's table was large enough to completely cover their lower halves because he gripped Hermione's upper thigh. "Hermione's been a big help," he said, smiling at her. "She's directed me down the right path, and she's been wonderful the whole way there." Hermione smiled back at him for a moment but had to look away before she told him that she loved him to pieces. She remembered where they were, and it wasn't appropriate to tell Ron how sweet he was.

"Thank you, Ron," she quietly said.

McGonagall must have sensed the pulsing charge between them because she cleared her throat. "Yes, well, I think that's all for tonight. You two can go back to your house. You've worked well."

Hermione slid Ron's hand off her leg, and they stood up. "Goodnight," they said together to her.

The moment they were out of her classroom and down the hall, Hermione hit Ron's arm. "What was that for?"

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Your behavior when McGonagall came in," she said. "She was right there. I know you don't care very much but still."

Ron frowned. "I wasn't trying to test her."

"Then what were you doing?" she asked.

"I was being serious." He took her hand and led her to the wall. Hermione put her back against it, and he outstretched his arm next to her head. He kept his focus on the floor. "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you. You know that." He spoke quietly and used his other hand to run his fingers across her stomach.

Hermione melted and her love for him grew and heated every part of her. Ron had no idea how special he was. She bent down a little and peeked up at him. "Ron." He looked up, and she stopped his hand. "You don't give yourself enough credit. You're not here because I made you do something. You can do anything and



everything you want because of you, Ron. That's how great you are. Remember that."

He gazed at her for a while but then shook his head. "How do you always do that?"

"Do what?" she asked.

"Make me want to kiss you so bloody badly all the time," he said.

She held on the sides of her skirt and licked her lips. "Books and cleverness, I guess." He abruptly kissed her on the mouth. He held her firmly, and Hermione lifted on her toes. The kiss didn't last long, but it was powerful. He parted from her and traced her mouth. She could tell that he wanted to say something, but the words weren't there. She didn't need to hear them, though. She could feel it. "Are you ready to keep walking?"

"Yeah," he whispered. He took her hand, and they walked down the corridor. "Are you hungry?"

"Not really. I think I might do some reading or some charts in the library for a while," she said. "Are you going to go to dinner?"

"Yes. I can't take it anymore," he said, patting his stomach. "I'll bring you something. You do need to eat again."

"Alright. I'll see you." She rose on her feet and kissed his cheek.

"That's all I get?" he asked.

"You just got a big one not too long ago," she said.

"But that was a teaser," he said. "I think for all the bragging I do for you to McGonagall, I deserve more."

"Bragging?" she asked.

"Like back at her office tonight and every time I see her," he explained. "I always talk about how much of a genius you are. When you're made Head Girl, it'll be because of me."

"Oh, and not by my own accord?" she asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Of course not," he cheeked.

"How very kind of you," she muttered. "Well, maybe later, and it depends on what you have in mind. We should get some sleep tonight."

"I could give your mouth a workout with a nice piece of meat," he said. "I'm talking about meat from the hall, of course."

She gasped and hit his arm several times. "That is absolutely horrible! You're better off asking the giant squid to tend to your meat or one of your roommates."

He pushed her hands away and stepped back. "Oi, woman, now you're just being unkind and violent!"

"And you're rude," she said, hitting him one more time.

He rubbed his neck and grinned. "So, I reckon that's a no?"

"Well...I didn't say that. I may give you an opportunity later to apologize and change my mind. I'll see you." She moved past him and lightly smacked his arse.

"Ah, so that's a yes!" he said. Hermione smirked but just kept walking. She went into the library, and she sat at her usual table and pulled out her books and notes. She honestly couldn't wait until she didn't have to study. The longer she worked, the more she thought about what activities she and Ron could enjoy. Instead of making charts for poisonous plants, she made lists of movies and plays she wanted to expose Ron to. She even thought of group activities she, Ron, Harry, and Ginny could all enjoy together.

"Hermione, I knew I'd find you here," Parvati said, rushing up to her table.

Hermione swiftly covered her plans with her books. She didn't want Parvati to know how girly and unfocused she had become for a moment. "Yes? Is something wrong?"

"No," she said with a laugh. "You really need to find some optimism in your life, Hermione. You're too negative and worrisome sometimes. I think it's because you're a Virgo. Professor Tre-"

"Moving along, Parvati," Hermione said.

"Oh, right." She shook her head. "I want to show you something that I think you'll like. It's in the room." She pulled her by the arm and barely gave Hermione any time to pack up her bag.

"Can't you tell me what it is?" Hermione asked as they went back to their room.

"You have to see it first," Parvati said. She opened the door and walked over to her bed. She picked up a dress and put it in front of her. It was pale yellow, tapered at the waist, strapless, and appeared to come right above the knees. "What do you think?"

"It's pretty," she said. "Where are you going to wear it?"

"That's the thing. I'm not," she said. "My mum sent this to Padma to wear at the seventh years' dance thing, but she already bought a dress. I'm not a fan of this color by itself, and I have no use for it."

"Okay," Hermione slowly said.

Parvati giggled. "Hermione, what are you going to wear to the dance?"

"What I wore last time," she said.

Parvati cringed and crinkled her nose. "I was afraid you'd say that." She handed the dress to her. "Wear this instead."

"What? No. I couldn't possibly wear your dress," she said.

"Yes, you possible can wear it," Parvati said. "I don't want it, but I have some shoes that will probably look all right with it."

Hermione tried to give it back. "Thank you, Parvati, but I can't accept this."

"Why? It's a dress, and you need one," she said, pushing it back toward her. "There's no way that I'll let you walk out and up to Ron in the same dress that you wore to the last dance. It's unheard of. Besides, it's cute and you like yellow, right?"

"I do butâ€¦I meanâ€¦it's strapless," she said.

Parvati rolled her eyes. "So? Padma told me all about the dance. This fits the dress code, and it's not like you don't have anything to keep it up." She frowned a little. "In fact, you have more to keep it up than Paddy or I do." Hermione blushed and examined the dress. She did want to wear it, and the pale yellow looked good in her hands. "Look, it will do Ron's head in if you show up in this instead of your other dress. He won't expect it, and he'll love it."

She looked at Parvati and sighed. "Will you help me with my hair?"

Parvati squeaked and jumped up and down. "Of course I will! Does this mean you'll wear it?"

"Yes, I'll wear it. It's beautiful. Thank you," she said. Parvati hugged her and squeaked again. Hermione couldn't help herself. She let out a giggle, too. She felt incredibly girly, but she actually didn't mind.

The next morning Hermione woke up in an excited mood, but it didn't last very long. End of term exams were close and in every class they reviewed and attempted to ram in as much information that their heads could hold in. By McGonagall's class, she was ready to take a nap but she knew that she still had a full night of work to do. She flipped through her workbook and yawned. She and her classmates were going over basic and advanced body transformations.

"Mione, watch this." Ron pointed his wand at his hand and motioned the tip in a clockwise direction. "Metimors mano," he said. His left hand shrunk.

"Ron, that's wonderful," Hermione said. "You understand now that it's all about proper wrist movement with these spells."

"I reckon I'm a bit better now than I was at the start of the term, yeah?" He took her hand and held it against his. "And I guess you haven't grown at all since the start of term."

She studied their joined hands. His pale and freckly skin against her tanner and clearer skin still looked amazing, and the wild fire in her stomach that she received from touching him was as hot as ever. The only difference was that now she didn't have to wish how his actual sized hand looked against hers. "In some ways I have."

Ron's expression changed, and he intertwined their fingers. "Same here." They both gazed at their laced hands for a moment before parting and getting back to work. After class, she and Ron met up with Harry and headed to their Common Room.

"Fucking hell, do you think if I cut my legs off I can skive work tonight?" Ron asked.

"You're better off getting rid of your arms," Harry said. "You'd still be able to write without legs."

"But I can't wank without my hands. I'd at least need to keep my left arm," Ron said.

"Your left?" Harry asked. "You're right-handed."

"It's the only thing I can't do with my right. I have to use my left hand or there's no point," Ron said.

"How did you even figure that out?" Harry asked.

"I don't really remember," Ron said. "I had to have been twelve or thirteen, I think. I guess I got bored of the same old thing with my right hand, so I switched to my left and it got the job done in ways I didn't know were possible."

Harry looked at him in pure awe. "Strange. I've never tried with my left hand before. I assumed your dominate hand was best."

"I reckon there's some sort of pre-life history between my left palm and my cock." Ron nudged him. "Try it sometime. It's un-bloody-believable, and I'd rather be able to wank than write any day."

"That's obvious. I mean, who wouldn't?" Harry asked.

"What's also obvious and un-bloody-believable is that you two boys have apparently forgotten that there's a lady in your company," Hermione said at full volume from behind them. Ron and Harry turned around and the three stopped walking. "Don't mind me," she stiffly said. "I'm just back here listening to the deterioration of the male species."

Harry laughed and Ron rubbed his neck. "Sorry, love."

"I guess we forgot you were behind us," Harry said.

"She is a wee bit small, isn't she?" Ron asked, bending a little so they were at eye level.

Hermione growled and hit both their arms. "I really should divorce you two as friends! You're uncouth neanderthals!"

Harry and Ron shared a look. "What does uncouth mean?" Harry asked.

"I tell you if you tell me what a neanderthal is," Ron answered.

Hermione threw up her hands. "That's it! I'm divorced from both of you."

"But you love us far too much to do that," Ron said with a snigger.

"And life would be boring without us," Harry added. Hermione semi-glared and shook her head at them.

"Hi, lot," Cho said, strolling up to them with even more books in her bag than Hermione had.

"Hi," Harry said.

"Are you here to gloat, again?" Ron asked.

"Ronald, not everything is about Quidditch," Hermione said.

He gawked at her. "I'm going to pretend that you didn't just spit utter nonsense."

"I'm not here for Quidditch," Cho said. "I want to ask you something, Harry."

"Um, okay," he said. He looked around a bit awkwardly. "Do you want to go somewhere?"

"No, it'll only take a second, and it's good that Hermione and Ron are here. They can clarify something for me," she said. "So, the dance, it's only for the seventh years, right?"

"Right," Ron said. "Well, it's for you lot and your dates and all the Prefects and their dates. It'll be a small crowd."

"And there's no restriction on who you can bring?" Cho asked.

"The only rule is that you can't bring more than one person," Hermione said, "but the year doesn't matter."

"Thanks for clearing that up." Cho nodded and turned back to Harry. "You heard them, so, I was wondering if you'd like to come with me to the dance."

"What?" Harry's green eyes grew twice their size, and he stuck his head out a little as if he couldn't hear her. Hermione snuck a glance at Ron. He was staring at Cho disbelievingly.

"You do know that he's dating my sister, right?" Ron asked.

Cho sighed. "Yes, Ron, I'm not thick."

"Why do you want to go with me anyway?" Harry asked. "I'm sure there's a line of blokes waiting to ask you."

"Thank you, I guess," Cho said with a curious look. "Listen, you're probably right and there are a few other people I'm considering, but you're at the top of my list."

"Why?" Ron asked. "He's not much to look at." He wiggled the frame of Harry's glasses and poked him in the arm. Harry slapped his hand away and shoved him.

"It's not like that," Cho said. "This will be my last time going to a school dance, and I'd like to go with a really good friend I care about." Her cheeks reddened somewhat. "I'm not trying to make any sort of last-minute attempt, and it's not as if I'm demanding we stay together the whole time. I only want to have fun like we did last time."

"That's nice," Hermione said. Having genuine fun at a school dance seemed like a far-fetched idea at times.

"And it's nothing serious," Cho continued. "This way Harry can go, and you two will be able to have fun with him. As far as Ginny, I do plan on talking to her about it, but I didn't want to until I knew if you were even interested. I'm not going to disrespect her and if there's any sort of weirdness then I'll ask someone else. I'm sorry if I made this way more awkward than it needs to be."

Harry scratched his head and glanced at Ron. He shrugged and nodded vaguely. "It's not a problem," Harry said. "I justâ€¦you know how much I love dancing."

"Think of it this way," Cho said, "it'll get you some more practice for next term."

Harry smiled a little. "Alright. I'll go with you. It's a great idea, but I want to talk to Ginny myself first."

"Sorted," she said. "We'll have to get together soon and work out details, but I have so much bloody work to do now. Thank you, Harry."

"Yeah," he said. Cho squeezed his hand before walking off.

"Blimey," Ron said. "Maybe she does fancy you."

"She doesn't," Harry said. "She wants us to go as friends, and she means that."

"I think it's sweet," Hermione said. "I was feeling rather badly because you wouldn't be able to go, but now we can all be there together."

"All of us but Ginny," Harry said with a bit of gloom in his voice.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'd add Ginny as my guest so you two could be together, but McGonagall already has my name card with Ron."

"It's fine," he said. "I'm gonna go find her. I'll see you two later."

"So, what do you really think?" Ron asked when Harry was out of sight.

"I don't know. Cho's popular so I'm sure she was asked a lot, but I think she loves Harry and she's going to miss him. Friends can love each other," she said. "I loved you before I wanted to date you."

He took her hand, and they started walking again. "I loved you, too, but the time between me only wanting to be your friend and then wanting to be your boyfriend was pretty short. I guess the same goes for you."

"What does that have to do with anything?" she asked.

"We're sort of abnormal, Hermione," he said with a smirk. "We've more or less been together since forever. I don't think we can be counted in the study."

"Either way, I think it will be fine. If Ginny does have an issue, then she'll be honest. She's bold, like you." Hermione pinched his side very hard.

"Ow!" he whined, letting go of her hand.

"That's for being vulgar in front of me earlier, Mr. Left-Hand-Only," she said. "Now, come on. We have work to do, and you're going to do it no matter what you cut off."

Hermione and Ron spent the rest of their evening working on their last minute projects for the dance and studying for their exams. By dinner they were finally finished and slumped up to Ron's room. Hermione was too tired to get food right away, and she was surprised that Ron felt the same way. They got into his bed and he closed the curtains around them. She rested her back against his headboard, and he lay at the opposite end and snuggled with her leg as if it was a pillow. He kissed her calf and, it made her smile.

"Is that your Hermione substitute?" she asked.

"Not exactly. Your leg is attached to you, so I've got the real thing. You know how much I love your legs." He closed his eyes and let out a heavy breath. She watched him and let her eyes

droop as the fatigue took its toll on her. Nothing in the world could have been as comfortable as lounging in Ron's bed as he hugged her thigh and drifted off to sleep. It was so simple and so perfect. She wanted it to continue into the summer and the next term and every year after they graduated from Hogwarts and formed a new life together.

"Do you think we'll always be like this?" she suddenly asked in a daze.

"What, knackered to the point of hysteria?" he said with his eyes still closed. "I bloody hope not."

"No," she gently said. "I mean, do you think that we'll always be in love like this?"

Ron opened his eyes and propped his head on his hand. "Of course, why would you ask?"

"I don't know," she said. "As people get older, things change. Feelings take new forms."

"Is that what you think will happen with us?" he asked.

She shook her head and lifted his pant leg so she could trace the freckles on his ankle. "Not at all but we're so different. I don't ever want that to become a problem for us. We've had so many of those already."

Ron sat up completely and moved next to her. "Hermione, you being so different from me is why I fell in love with you in the first place. I'm attracted to everything you are, and the things you do drive me mental in all the right ways. Now, I know you'll never admit it, but you must get off to myâ€¦what did you call it? Oh, right, my emotional range."

She bit her lip and ran her fingers through his silky hair. "Yes, it's not all bad."

"I also think that we have a lot more in common than we realize sometimes," he said. "We want the same things."

"We just want to get them in different ways." She let out a long breath and ran her finger down his nose and across his jaw line. "I hope we end up like your parents."

"My parents?" he asked.

"I see us so much like them," she said. "They're different and they argue, but they love each other more than anything. I know that. I always want us to be like them."

Ron's chest puffed out in what seemed to be pride. "I love how my parents are. They always find a way to make it work out."

"Exactly," she said.



"We're half way there, then. My mum and dad say that I act so much like him already," he said.

"You do. He's a good man, and so are you," she said.

He took their hands and laced them. "It's funny. You're worried about our future, and I'm more concerned with us now."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He rubbed his neck. "I worry that you'll wake up one day and realize what a tosser I am. You'll just get tired of me and my lack of focus. Then, you'll find some freckle free sod who's just as brilliant and into reading and learning as you are."

She touched his cheek. "Sweetheart."

He looked down and played with the edge of the pillow. "I know. It's stupid."

"I don't think it's stupid. Everyone has a fear like that," she said. "Sometimes I worry you'll realize how boring I am, and you'll get too annoyed of my nagging. You'll end up wanting some sexy girl who's just as into sports and is as fun as you are."

"I do have fun with you, Mione," Ron said, "and I would be the thickest knob in the world if I thought that there was a girl I could be more attracted to than you."

"You don't have to say that," she said.

"I may not have to, but it's the truth," he said. "Hermione, I know I take the piss but I don't care if you're a big sports fan or not. It doesn't matter to me, and I like teaching you about Quidditch and stuff. For once, I get to teach you. You have no idea what that means to me."

"You mean that?" she asked.

"Of course I do. Professor Ron Weasley doesn't need to lie about things like this." He leaned forward and kissed her cheek.

She put her forehead against his and held on to his shoulders. "Well, professor, you should know that you're not a tosser, and you're definitely brilliant. I get on you about school things because I know how smart you are, but it doesn't matter if you don't love it. It's not why I'm with you."

"That's good. I'll never want to sit around and read. That's for nutters," he said with a wink.

"I'll ignore your last statement," she said. "Besides, if we're being purely superficial, then I could never get tired of you. I happen to worship every freckle on your body."

His entire face flushed, and he licked his lips. "T-that's a lot of worshipping. I'm completely covered."

"I'm a very capable woman." She took his hand and kissed his fingers. "Like these freckles and these freckles, oh, these as well." She kissed every finger and grinned at him.

Ron's shoulders slumped and he stared at her with heavy lids and distant eyes. "Bloody dammit, Hermione, you're doing it again. I want to kiss you so badly."

"Don't hold back," she whispered. He kissed her, and Hermione sighed and let his tongue take control. Her confidence in them grew, and she hoped that his did as well.

Ron broke away and held her. She hugged his stomach, and he ran his hands up and down her arms. "If you're being purely superficial, then I guess I can be a total bloke right now."

"Do I even want to hear this?" she asked.

"Probably not," he breathed, "but I think I get off to you nagging me. Somehow, it's one of the sexiest things in the world. I even like you hitting me all the time. I'll walk away sometimes and I realize that I'm harder than all bloody hell."

"Ronald Weasley!" she said, poking his stomach.

"What? Am I being vulgar again or uncouth?" he asked.

"No, you're just taking the fun out of it now!" she said. "If you enjoy it, then you'll never learn. I'll have to stop and think of something else, unless this is part of your scheme to get me to stop?"

He shrugged. "I dunno. It could be. Next time you attack me, grab my prick afterwards and feel for yourself."

"You're awful," she said. "Come on, let's get under the blanket." They settled against his mattress and moaned in the comfortable feeling that was only brought on by lying down.

"Quick nap before dinner?" he asked.

"Yes, please." She kissed his cheek. "I will find the time someday to kiss every one of your freckles."

"Good luck. I've got some in strange places." He yawned noisily. "I love you."

"I love you, too," she said. She put her back to Ron's stomach and closed her eyes with a wide smile.

The day of the dance finally came. All afternoon Hermione and the other Prefects went over the itinerary and set up the Great Hall. Ron wanted to leave so they could get ready, but she wanted to stay to help rearrange and go over everything for the hundredth time. McGonagall had to practically throw her out. "Do you want me to meet you here?" he asked when they made it to the stairs leading to their bedrooms.

"No, go down to the hall. I might be a while. You know, my hair is a nightmare," she said. She still hadn't told him that she was wearing a different dress, and she needed time to possibly come back to her senses and wear her other dress.

He rolled his eyes. "Whatever you do will be fine, I'm sure. I think it looks great down."

"Thank you for the input," she said.

"Anytime. See you soon." He started walking but he stopped. "There isn't a final list for dates, is there?"

"For the Prefects there is, but things happen and people change dates all the time," she said. "So, I don't think there's one final list. The teachers want to keep this casual. Why?"

"No reason," he quickly said before going up to his room. Hermione was curious, but she knew that she didn't have time to be. Before she opened the door to her own room, she took a deep breath. She had no idea what she was in store for.

"Your hair really doesn't want to cooperate," Parvati said sometime later as she stuck another pin in it.

"I told you that it's a nightmare. I really should wear it all down," Hermione said. She hissed as Parvati pulled on her hair.

"No, an updo is required for this." Parvati took a step back and looked at her hair. "Let me go find Michelle."

"Who's that?" Hermione asked in nervousness.

"She's a fifth year, and her hair is a lot like yours. I know she has the right pins for this. Put your dress on, and I'll be right back." Parvati let out a frustrated sigh and hurried out of the room.

Hermione decided to obey her word. Parvati was trying so hard and was putting in a lot more effort than she would have. She took off her robe and eased into her dress and heels. She looked at herself in the mirror. Surprisingly, the dress fit her nicely. It hugged her waist and gave a nice plush curve to her bust and bum. However, it didn't seem to be too much or tacky. Her skin looked good against the pale yellow, and it made the brownness of her eyes stand out. The only problem was her hair. It was in a somewhat curly wrapped braid, but strands kept sticking out and falling out of place.

She checked her watch and was sure that Ron was already at the hall waiting for her. If Parvati didn't hurry, then she would go as she was. The door finally opened. Hermione turned to her. "Parvati I think- oh." Lavender stopped at the door. "Sorry, I thought you were Parvati."

"No, it's only me." She closed the door and flopped on her bed. She snatched a magazine from her bag and started flipping through it.

"Did you see happen to see Parvati on your way up here?" Hermione asked.

Lavender shook her head and didn't look up. "No." There was no point in continuing. Hermione went back to the mirror and applied her light makeup in silence. She then took her earrings off the table and put them on. "You shouldn't wear those earrings."

Hermione stopped. It had been so quiet for so long that she almost forgot that she wasn't alone in the room. "Sorry?"

Lavender sat up and jerked her head. "Those earrings, you shouldn't wear them. They're wrong for those shoes."

Hermione looked at her shoes and then at her earrings. She honestly couldn't tell. "They go fine."

"No, they don't," Lavender practically snapped. "You can't mix those different styles. The shoes are far too classy casual for those earrings. They clash horribly."

"Well, this is the only pair I have that work at all, so, it will just have to do," Hermione snapped back. For all she knew the earrings did clash with her shoes, but Lavender was most likely just trying to make her feel bad. While they had been doing better at being civil toward each other, Hermione knew that complicated problems didn't magically disappear.

Lavender sighed heavily and got out of bed. She opened her jewelry box on her side table and walked to her. "Here," she said, holding out a pair of long golden earrings. "These will look a lot better. You need long earrings with this style of strapless, and they actually go with yellow." Hermione merely stared at her. She wasn't sure if she was imagining it all or not. Lavender flipped her hair. "They're not jinxed. Do you want to look good or not?" She offered them to her again and Hermione took them.

She put them on and almost didn't want to admit to herself that they looked a lot better. It was an area where Lavender was well beyond her. "Thank you. They're nice."

Lavender nodded but didn't seem pleased. "Yes, that's one disaster avoided. The other is your hair."

"Parvati went to get pins," Hermione said.

"That was her first mistake. With hair like yours and a dress like this, it shouldn't all be pinned up. Give me your comb," she ordered.

Hermione didn't know what to do. She wasn't sure if she wanted Lavender to touch her hair, but she couldn't wait on Parvati any longer and she did want to look good. She reluctantly handed it to her. "She said an updo was vital."

"She's wrong. I'm always the one doing her hair, so I don't know where her authorization comes from." Lavender took most of the pins out. "Patty's hair is long and straight all the time, in all conditions. She doesn't get that frizzy hair like yours needs to breathe."

"That's an impolite way to put it," Hermione coldly said.

"It's the truth." Lavender combed her hair out and didn't hesitate to excessively tug on the strands. She took the wrapped braids from the front and tied them behind her head with a pin so most of her hair was down but tamed and out of her face. "There. See? Now, the earrings show and your neck and collarbone are displayed. That's always a good thing."

Hermione examined her reflection and was very happy with what she saw. "Honestly, thank you, Lavender. I like this a lot better." Hermione even grinned a little. "You really know about these things." Once more, Lavender didn't smile or appear pleased at all. She simply went back to her bed and back to her magazine. Hermione applied lotion to her hands and peeked at Lavender in the mirror. It was peculiar. She was getting poshed up for a dance, and Lavender was reading in bed wearing jeans and a t-shirt.

She looked up and Hermione looked away and pretended to be busy with the items in her purse. "I could have gone to this dance, you know?" Lavender said. "Cormac originally asked me if I wanted to be his date, but I turned him down."

Hermione didn't know if Lavender was trying to lead her anywhere, but she kept Ron in mind and decided to try. "Why is that?"

"Because I don't like him," Lavender said. "He's kind of a wanker."

Hermione snickered at her bluntness. "It's good to know not every girl swoons over him."

"I certainly don't, and how could I go knowing that you'd be there with Ron," she said.

"I don't want to start this with you, Lavender," Hermione said. "It was my mistake for asking."

"I'm not starting anything," Lavender said. "I'm being honest. Ron's going to be the best-looking bloke there, and I couldn't handle that along with being Cormac's date."

Her statement went right through Hermione and into her chest. "I know what you mean."

Lavender peered at her hands and nodded. "Good because regardless of what you think, I'm not like Cormac and we're not good together. I love-I fancy guys like Ron. It makes me angry when people say or think that I should just forget Ron and date Cormac or his type."

"How do you think I felt when people would say those things to me about Harry? Like you used to," Hermione said. "I've never been interested in him, and I definitely didn't sneak up on you and decide that I wanted Ron, regardless of what you think."

"I'm not stupid, Hermione," Lavender said. "I've always known that you wanted Ron, but it sure as hell seemed like you snuck up on me."

"I could say the same for you about a lot of things," Hermione said. She felt irritation prick her skin, but she refused to let it fester. "I guess-I guess we can both be wrong this time."

"My feelings for Ron were never wrong," Lavender said.

"I'm not saying that they were," Hermione said, "and you know what?"

Lavender narrowed her eyes and set her jaw. "What?"

"I think that you not being Cormac's date tonight makes you a stronger and smarter person than me in a way," Hermione said. "I went with Cormac to the last dance and belittled myself because I couldn't handle Ron being there with you. I went for all the wrong reasons, and you're not going for all the right ones."

Lavender's posture eased, and she looked taken aback. "Thanks." Hermione nodded and they turned away from each other. Once again it was silent, but Hermione didn't feel on edge about it. In fact, it might have been the first time all year that she felt relaxed around Lavender.

Not too long after, the door opened and Parvati at last came rushing in. "Hermione, I found the pins! I'm sorry I took so long. Someone wanted advice on makeup."

"I don't think we need them anymore," Hermione said.

"Wow, that looks so much better than what I was trying to do," Parvati said, touching her hair. "I didn't know you had it in you."

"I don't. Lavender did it. She gave me these earrings, too," she said.

Parvati's eyes widened. "Really?" She looked back at Lavender, but she just shrugged and went back to flipping her pages. Parvati gave Lavender an affectionate expression before turning back to Hermione. "Well, that's great. Let's finish up so you can go. I still can't believe the dance is before everything else."

"It's so the seventh years can have some fun before NEWTs, and the actual graduation ceremony is what's important, so that's last," Hermione said. She finished getting ready, and she and Parvati went over every part of her from head to toe one last time. Hermione stuck her wand in the side of her purse and wiped the last bit of excess lip-gloss from the corners of her mouth. "I have never felt so made up before."

"It's all a part of being a woman. We talked about this," Parvati said. She put her hands together and truly appeared moved. "You're completely stunning and no one is going to recognize you."

"Is that a compliment?" Hermione asked.

"In this case it is. Ron is going to lose his mind," Parvati said.

"I hope so." Hermione felt the nervous flies swarm in her stomach. She couldn't wait to see his face. "Okay, I should go. I really need to get down there." She gave Parvati a hug. "Thank you so much for helping me."

"Not a problem. It's why I'm here," she said.

Hermione looked over her shoulder at Lavender who was still nose deep in her magazine. "Lavender, thank you. I'll take good care of your earrings."

"Please do." She looked up. "You really do look pretty. Ronâ€¦he'll lose his mind like Parvati said." She smiled and went back to her pages. Parvati winked at Hermione in approval.

"Don't wait up," Hermione said. She left the room and slowly walked to the doors of the Great Hall. She could hear chatter and music as she approached the entryway. She walked in and beamed. Everything looked wonderful. The lights weren't too bright. The cream and blue scheme they had decided on for the tablecloths and decorations were great. The food and drink tables stationed around the hall were orderly and full and appetizing. The seventh years, their dates, and mostly all the Prefects were already in sight. She looked around for her blazing redhead.

"Ms. Granger," McGonagall said, "You look lovely."

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall," Hermione said. She instinctively pulled up her dress but McGonagall held up a hand.

"That won't be necessary," she said. "The dress is charming. Everyone loves what you and the other Prefects have done. Go enjoy yourself." She smiled. "Mr. Weasley is at the end table across the room with Mr. Potter and the others."

"Thank you," she said again. She pushed her hair off her shoulders and walked over to the table. Sure enough, she saw Ron's head full of bright ginger hair and Harry's mop of coal locks. They, along with Cho, Seamus, and Hannah were at a table talking and laughing.

Cho was the first to look up. "Wow, Hermione, you look incredible." Everyone else looked up.

"I love that color," Hannah said.

"Thank you," Hermione said. All the blokes stared at her with slightly hung jaws. Her cheeks burned and she wanted to pull her dress up again, but she knew that she wasn't showing anything. She cleared her throat.

"Sweet Merlin," Ron said in a gasp.

"Hermioneâ€¦ you'reâ€¦" Harry added.

"Fucking bloody hell," Seamus said, giving her a once over.

Hermione chuckled nervously. "Thank you, I think."

"Come on, Seam," Hannah said. "Let's dance before you forget who you came with." She pulled him away and to the dance floor.

Harry nudged Ron roughly. "Oi, Ron, you're drooling."

He blinked several times, wiped his mouth, and stood up. He took her hands and pulled her off a little to the side. "You look very handsome," she said. "I'll never get enough of seeing you in these robes."

Ron shook his head and rubbed his neck. "I didn't know you were going to wear this."

"Neither did I. It's Parvati's, but she wanted me to wear it tonight. Do you like it?" she asked.

He frowned, almost as if he was trying to remember an answer to a test question. "I-I, wow, I don't know what to say. You look, bloody hell, Hermione. You're the most beautiful person I've ever seen. I don't know how I'm going to last the whole night."

"So, that's a yes?" she asked.

"That's a fucking yes." He touched her shoulders then ran a finger across her upper chest. "I'm the luckiest person in here. I could have sworn this dance was a gift for the seventh years and not for me."

"Ron," she said.

"I'm serious." He took her hand and put it against his chest.

She was startled by the speed of his heartbeat. "Are you okay?"

"You're making me like this," he said, his eyes gigantic. "I told you, you have no idea what you do to me."

"There goes that poetry again," she said.

"You bring that out of me, too. Come on," he said. He took her hand and took her over to the table. "Make room for my date. For my un-bloody-believe date." He sat down and Hermione sat next to him.

"Are you going to be like this all night?" Harry asked.



He propped his chin on his hand and stared unabashed at Hermione.  
"Without question."

Cho stifled her laughter and shook her head. "Before you came, Hermione, I was telling Ron how brilliant all this is."

"I'm glad you think you," she said in relief. "Have you talked to some of your friends about it?"

"You don't have to worry. We all love it. You lot did a really fantastic job," Cho said.

"Cheers. We put a lot of effort into it. Seriously," Ron said. "I don't know if I've ever put so much energy into something before."

"Well, I thank you for that, Ron," Cho said. She tapped Harry's shoulder and he groaned.

"Oh, I know what that means," he said.

"Precisely! Let's go dance!" Cho pulled Harry to his feet.

"Save me," he said to them with a grin.

"Can't do that, Harry," Hermione said.

"Right. You know how Tornado fans are," Ron said.

"A right side better than Chudley Canons extremists, I do believe," Cho said. She pulled Harry to the dance floor, and Hermione and Ron laughed as they watched Harry clumsily dance with her.

"This is wicked. I wish I had a camera," Ron said. "I could take pictures of Harry the Git and Hermione the Lovely."

She gently snorted. "Hermione the Lovely?"

He blushed and rubbed his neck. "I'm sorry. I can't control any of my thoughts. You just look so bloody incredible."

"Thank you. I'm glad you like it," she said.

"I don't. I fucking love it. You're driving me bloody mad, and you better feel lucky that I'm a gentleman tonight," he said.

"Why is that?" she asked. "Can things not happen if you're only a gentleman?"

"Hmm," he said, stroking his chin. "I reckon I could still get what I want."

She leaned over to him and gave him her best expression of seduction. "What about what I want?"

His breathing hitched. "It's yours. I don't have my tie, but we can use something else as a leash."

She gently moaned. She wanted to kiss him, but she wouldn't start something that couldn't be finished. "What I want doesn't require a leash."

"That's fine," he said. "Just tell me what it does require. Whatever you need, I'm your man."

She looked around. "Well, as my man, how about you get me some punch."

He hit his fist against the table. "You're such a bloody tease."

"Be a gentleman, Ronald," she cheeked. He stuck out his tongue and led her over to the refreshment table. They grinned at each other and he poured them drinks.

"Granger. Weasley."

They turned around to Cormac. Ron set their cups down and put his hands on her waist. "McLaggen," he said.

Hermione slightly pushed back into him to let him know to stay calm. Cormac gave her a once over, and she felt his eyes undress her and scan over her entire body. She was reminded of his hands and his mouth and had Ron not been holding her, she might have shivered and felt unsafe. "I just want to say that it looks nice in here. Granger, I'm sure you were the leader in all this."

"Actually, all the Prefects had assigned jobs, and Ron's load was almost as heavy as mine," she said, "but I'm glad you like it. We want all of you to enjoy tonight."

He didn't seem happy. "Yes, that's the idea. It's my last time doing this so."

"You should probably enjoy it with your friends, yeah?" Ron said. He encased his arms completely around Hermione's stomach and held her tighter.

Cormac's nostrils flared. "Right." He poured himself some punch and all of a sudden smirked. "It's the last time I'll probably see Cho like this. I should congratulate her again on beating Slytherin for the cup. They were the best team this year with the best players."

"Cormac," Hermione said with a sigh. She knew that he was trying to stir Ron up, and she could feel Ron's muscles tighten behind her.

"No, he's right," Ron said. "Go and congratulate her. She's over there dancing with Harry. Hermione, we should get on the floor sometime, too." He kissed under her ear, and his fingers moved and tickled her stomach. Hermione laughed in surprise, and Cormac slammed his drink down and stormed off.

She squirmed out of his embrace. "Ron, that was very mature and clever."

"What?" he said with a shrug. "I told you that I'm a gentleman tonight. I have some tact. I just hate digging it out and using it."

There were many ways to respond to his statement, but she decided to go with the easiest and most honest. "I love you."

"I love you, too. Cormac's a prick. I won't let him ruin tonight," he said.

Hermione thought about Cormac and her thoughts turned to Lavender. "You should know that Lavender helped me get ready. It was really nice of her. She fixed my hair and gave me these earrings to wear."

He nodded. "I know. I've seen her wear them before."

"And you weren't going to say anything?" she asked.

"I figured you'd tell me when you felt comfortable," he said. "Besides, tonight is about us. For once, it should only be about us having fun."

She smiled. "Then let's have fun." She and Ron went to the main floor and danced with their friends. She and Ron tried to control their snickering as Seamus and Hannah took over the entire floor and Harry struggled to keep up with Cho during the fast songs. It was delightful. Her mind was clear, her heart was racing in excitement, and she was with Ron. It was everything she had hoped for.

A song finally ended and Hermione and Ron returned to their table. She fanned herself and dabbed her neck with a table napkin. "I don't think I can do that again in these shoes."

Ron took a huge gulp of his drink and ran a hand through his hair. "I won't ask you to. Bloody hell." He looked around the hall. "Ah, Harry owes me."

"Why?" she asked.

"I bet him money that Seamus and Hannah would be in a corner snogging at the half way point of the night. He said that they would leave early to shag outside. Look." He pointed and Hermione followed his eyes. Sure enough, the couple was all over each other hunched in a corner.

"I hope they remember to be safe," she said.

"What? You're not going to break them up?" he asked.

"Not tonight," she said. "Everyone deserves some fun."

"You're too kind," he said.

"I know," she answered.

Harry slugged over to them. He sat and took his glasses off to swipe the sweat off his brow with his sleeve. He took his robe off as well. "I'm retired from the floor."

"No one blames you, mate. You owe me, too," Ron said, handing him his cup and a table napkin.

"Yeah, yeah, I saw them. I'll give you your money. Cheers," Harry said, gulping the drink down.

"Are you having a good time?" Hermione asked. Harry was flushed, and his hair was all over the place. She couldn't help but notice how much older and handsome he looked this way. It was dashing and not his usual aimless tousel.

"I am," he said. "We're having a really good time, and Cho finally let me have a break so she could spend some time with her friends." He smiled but it quickly faded.

"But?" Ron said.

He shrugged. "Cho's fine, but I wish Ginny was here. I want to be here with her."

"Sorry, Harry," Hermione said, feeling bad for him. Ron checked his watch. "Are you waiting on something? You've been checking your watch all night."

"Don't worry about it," he said, getting up. He stood in front of her. "If I ask you to do something nicely, then will you do it?"

"Depends," she said apprehensively. "What is it?"

He looked around. "I need you to hit me, please."

"Excuse me?" she asked.

"Just on the arm or something," he said.

She shared a look with Harry. "Why would I do that?"

"Yeah, Ron, we all know you're a bloody freak but--"

"Piss off, Harry," Ron said. "Really, Hermione, hit me."

She searched his eyes for humor, but she was sure that he was serious in his request. "I'm not going to hit you, Ron. Stop acting mental."

"But," he said. He closed his eyes and sighed. "Alright, fine. I didn't want to tell you, but I let a seventh year spike one of the punch bowls."

She gaped at him. "You're joking."

"No, I'm not," he said. "It's the one next to the dip tray near the door, and it's got some whiskey in it. I let him do it an hour ago."

She shot up. "Ronald Weasley!" She hit his arm. "Why would you do that? Which bowl and which student?"

"I'm not going to tell you. You'll ruin everything," he said.

She hit him again. "How dare you!"

Ron pushed her hand away and took a step back. His frown morphed into a grin. "I can always count on you, love. Thanks."

"W-what?" she asked in bewilderment.

"I didn't honestly let anyone spike anything. I enjoy having you as my girlfriend. Like I said, I just needed you to hit me. I'll be back," he said. He stormed off and left the hall.

"What was that about?" Harry asked.

Hermione sat back down in confusion. "I have absolutely no idea. Should I go after him?"

Harry rested his elbows back on the table. "I don't think so. Prats always find their way back home."

She sat back as well and watched everyone on the dance floor. "So, are you really having a good time?"

"Yeah. Before I left Ginny told me not to mope, but I can't really help but to mope a little. I do want to be here, though," he said. "What about you?"

"I'm having a wonderful time," she said. "I love being out in the open here with Ron. I don't have to hide anything."

He grinned. "That's great. You really do look beautiful."

"Thank you." She touched the edges of the earrings that dangled and hit her cheeks. "Lavender fixed my hair and gave me these to wear."

"Yeah?" he said. "How did that happen?"

"Out of nowhere. It was a bit strange and I could tell that she was angry, but she was really sweet as well," she said.

"Dean wasn't in the room while we all got ready," Harry said. "I reckon it was awkward for him, but Neville's with him. He should be all right."

"I think so, too. He'll be here next year, and I'm sure he'll have his own date." She fanned herself again and rubbed her sore ankles.

"I know I'll be here with Ginny next year," he said. "I'll get one real dance in with her before I graduate."

"I thought I told you not to mope," Ginny's voice said.

Hermione looked up and Ron and Ginny were both smiling at them. "Ginny," Harry breathed, standing up. Hermione stood up as well. Ginny was dressed up, but she didn't know how or why she was there. Harry took her hands. "What are you doing here?"

"She has to clean the floors the Muggle way, of course," Ron said. "What do you think the dress is for? She can buff better in it."

"Ron, don't be mean," Ginny said. "I'm here for you, Harry."

"But-but how?" Harry said.

"Yes, how?" Hermione asked, looking around for professors.

Ginny looked at Ron, and he shrugged sheepishly. "Let's be frank. I couldn't possibly let Harry be here the whole night without Ginny. Cho's decent, but she's not my sister."

Harry beamed at him and held Ginny tightly. "How did you get her in?"

"With Hermione's help," Ron said.

"Pardon?" Hermione said.

"Hypothetically, let's say that you and I had a fight, Hermione," Ron said. "Let's also say that I hypothetically told McGonagall that we're no longer dates and I wanted to invite my sister at the last minute. The policy states that she can't turn her away but bollocks to Merlin!" Ginny burst into laughter at his words, and he winked at her and gently tugged on a piece of her hair. "But bollocks to Merlin, you and I just made up at this exact moment. No matter, Ginny is already here and so is Harry so why not let her stay?" he said. "Ginny's technically my date now, but we can skip the formalities."

"That's why you wanted Hermione to hit you," Harry said. "Evidence and all."

"Spot on, mate," Ron said.

"Oh, Ronald Weasley," Hermione said. She was overwhelmed by how crafty and well executed his scheme had been.

"He's a sneaky, conniving prat," Harry said.

"He's also brilliant," Ginny said. "He told me earlier today to get ready just in case this worked, and here I am."

Harry wrapped his arms around her and kissed her. "I'm so happy that you're here."

She touched his cheek. "Aww, did you miss me that much?"

"Don't make me prove it to you. I don't think you'll be able to handle it," he said.

Ron cleared his throat. "Don't test my kindness."

"You brought them together, Ron. Let them be," Hermione. Ron opened his mouth but another song came on. It was mildly slow.

"Let me go tell Cho you're here, then I'll take you to the floor," Harry said to Ginny.

"Hold on," Ron said. "She's technically my date, so, I should get the first dance with her."

"You want to dance with me, in public?" Ginny asked in amazement.

Ron straightened his robes and cleared his throat again. "I don't know if Hermione's told you, but I'm a gentleman tonight." He held out his hand to her. "Shall we, Ginevra?"

Ginny laughed again and took his hand. "I guess we can show everyone how Weasleys put on a good show, Ronald."

"You look gorgeous, little sister," he said.

"Oh, Ron, stop it. You're too much," Hermione almost whimpered. Ron's sweetness was driving her mental and was turning her on a bit too much.

"Yeah, Ron. You're making me look like a tit," Harry said. "Um, do you want to dance, Hermione?"

"Sure," she said distractedly.

"You better watch those hands, Harry," Ron said as he walked to the main floor with Ginny. Hermione put a hand to her mouth and wished that she had a camera as well. Watching Ron and Ginny dance together practically put tears in her eyes. They were such amazing and beautiful people, and she loved them both so much.

"You ready?" Harry asked.

"Let's go." She took his hand and walked with him to the floor. She placed her hands on his shoulders and he kept his on her sides. "You look a lot happier now."

"Why wouldn't I be?" Harry looked over at Ron and Ginny. "She's here now. I can't believe Ron did this for us."

"I can. You know that no matter what he says or does, he wants you two to be together," she said.

"I know. I reckon there's still room for him to surprise me, though," he said.

She looked at them as well. "Me, too." She let out a content breath. "I'm glad you're here and that we're able to dance together. I don't think we have before."

"I don't think we've ever had a chance to." He smirked. "Don't take this the wrong way, but I think if I was ever going to fancy, then it would be tonight. I mean it would wear off most likely after this song, but right now would work."

She chuckled. "If there was ever going to be a time when I could see past your obstinacy and find some morsel of attraction, then I guess it would be now, too. However, I think it faded already."

"That's okay," he said. "My attention is over there dancing with your boyfriend, anyway."

"Well, it's good to know that even as your best friend I can't keep your attention," she said.

"I've only got room for one person at a time," he teased.

"I should step on your foot and leave you here," she said. She laughed and moved a bit closer to him. "I mean it, though. I'm glad you're here, and I'm glad you're having a good time. Your happiness means the world to me." She hugged him and he held her back.

"Thank you," he whispered. "I am happy, Hermione. We both are. We're here with the best bloody people in the world, and they're dancing together. How lucky did we get, eh? Can you imagine? Me, lucky with something." She sniffed her emotion away and held him. She didn't care what people might have thought. Harry was her best friend, and she would never apologize for loving him unconditionally.

For the rest of the night, Hermione was able to completely enjoy herself. She liked watching Harry with Ginny, and Ginny didn't seem to mind at all when Harry danced with Cho again. Hermione repeatedly hit Ron and Seamus' arms when they teased Harry about being the stud of the dance. Nevertheless, the night kept going and the time at the party was almost over.

The last slow came on and Hermione stood up from their table. "Can you do it?"

"Of course," Ron said. "It's our last one."

"Mr. Potter," Ginny said.

He stood as well and helped her up. "Last one, babe."

"It's nice that we can end the dance together this time," Ginny said.

"Yeah, it is." Harry looked at Ron tenderly. "Thanks again for this, Ron. Being here with her means a lot to me. You're the best for doing this."



Ron rubbed his neck and shrugged. "Come on, mate, you know it was nothing, but I probably would've done a lot more to get her here with you." He and Harry shared a look that Hermione didn't quite understand, but she had an idea of what they were saying to each other.

She and Ron went out to the dance floor, and he put his hands low on her hips. She put hers around his neck. He held her securely, and they swayed to the slow music. She looked up into his light and open blue eyes. "Here we are," she said. "Finally."

He smiled and held her even closer. "You're right. We're actually getting one." She rested her head against his chest and closed her eyes. She listened to the strong and steady rhythm of his heart and let him lead her through the dance. His warm and sweet smell of apples was all around her and his hands were in control yet gentle. He kissed the top of her head and moved her with grace. She couldn't believe it. She was at long last getting what she had wanted since she was fourteen. She was dancing with Ron, they were in love, and they were a couple. The realization and the emotion swelled inside her.

"Finally," she said in a somewhat shaky voice.

"Look at me," he gently said. "It's okay. I'm right here with you, and I'm not going to let you go."

"I know," she breathed. "It's just a little overwhelming."

"I can feel it. It feels really bloody good, too," he said. He suddenly chuckled.

"What?" she asked.

"Nothing," he casually said. "It's just that you told me that you were nothing like the ballerina in the music box I got you, but you're in this amazing dress, you look so bloody elegant, you're dancing beautifully. Seems like the perfect match to me. Only, I've got the real thing in my arms right now."

Her cheeks burned again, and she felt tears in her eyes. "I can be your ballerina. I'll be whatever you want me to be tonight."

"Just be you," he said. The music moved into a crescendo, and he pulled her close. "I wouldn't leave your side right now if my life depended on it. I am so in love with you, and I will be for the rest of my life and every life after that." He outstretched his arm and lifted his hand. Hermione spun around in place while holding his hand. He brought her close again and kissed her ear. "I'm going to dance this last song as best as I can to show you how much you mean to me, and before I let you go to sleep tonight, I'm going to make the sweetest love to you that I possibly can to show you exactly what you've been doing to me all night."

"Make love, is that its proper term?" she asked as heat rose to fire in her stomach and groin.

"In this case it is," he said in a low voice. "It's the only way to describe what I'm going to do to you."

"You promise?" she asked in a shuddering breath. She pulled away from him. She knew that it would be strange if she let the tears fall, but she had to. The emotion was too much. "Because I want that so much. I'll always want it and everything with you. I love you."

He spun her around again and held her. She gave him a small kiss before he let her go. They were in their own world, and she never wanted to leave. She would never have to. The magic of the music, the lights, and love overtook the both of them and they were somehow reborn in the moment as a couple. She knew that the end of term and the start of summer would take their relationship to another level. The end of the song came finally, and she had to detach herself a bit. She took a step back and gave him a curtsy. Ron then took her hand and kissed it with a bow.

"Look at us. We're total professionals," he said.

She smiled. "You're a knight, Ron. You know that. Today, tomorrow, and fifty years down the line you'll always be one." They gazed at each other and only took their eyes off each other and moved back to their table when they heard McGonagall's address the hall and the seventh years.

"Do you want to leave?" he whispered in her ear.

"Shouldn't we stay for this?" she asked.

"It's for the seventh years. It's not like we won't hear it next year," he said.

She opened her mouth but realized that she had nothing to say in retort. "I guess you're right." She tapped Ginny's shoulder. "Ron and I are going to head out."

"Okay. Be safe," she said with a grin.

Hermione smiled as well and tapped the back of Harry's shoulder. "Harry, we're leaving."

"All right. Have a good time and be safe," he said.

Cho turned to her as well. "Harry and Ginny are right. Safety first every time."

"You all are horrible, but thanks for the advice," she said.

Ron leaned over the table. "Look, lot, Hermione and I are always safe and we don't need you gits to remind us to be. Besides, your teasing sound a lot like jealousy. I'm the one that gets to walk out of here with her and none of you get to."

"Of course, Cho and I are jealous of that," Ginny said. "We want to be the ones who get to shag her."

"Wellâ€¦," Ron started with a sly grin. Hermione pulled on his sleeve and pulled him away from them.

"You're too much," she said when they were safely out of the hall.

"I've heard that already tonight," he said. "Did you have a good time?"

"It will most likely be the highlight of my sixth year," she answered. "Like what you did for them. You really are the best."

"It wasn't that big of a deal," he said. "It was for Harry and Ginny, so it wasn't an issue at all. I'd do anything for those prats, and I even love them when they're not trying to drive me mental with all their snogging."

"You're such a gentleman," she said.

"I told you I was." He took her hand and kissed it. "I also told you that I would show you what you've done to me tonight."

"Where are we going to go?" she asked.

"Follow me. You'll be fine in this dress outside, right?" he said.

"Ron, we can't go outside to do that," she said. "We're in fact supposed to search the grounds and find people who are."

"Then we'll be ten steps ahead of the assignment. Come on." He led her and they quickly ran outside.

"Ron, I can't run in these shoes," she whined. She stopped and took them off.

"Here, get on my back," he said.

"No," she flatly said. "I'm not doing that and especially in this dress. I can't believe that you'd even-ah!" She was suddenly looking at the ground and her feet were in the air. Once again, Ron had her over his shoulder but this time she didn't mind. She started laughing and put a hand to her chest to keep herself in her dress.

They went near a tree, and he put her back on her feet. "See, it's a lot faster and easier when you don't resist me."

"I'm not resisting you," she said. She put her back against the tree and dropped her heels. Ron ran up and kissed her roughly. She helped him get out of his cloak, and she put Lavender's earrings in her purse. He laid his cloak in the grass along with his dress shirt. She got on her knees and moved over it. She laid back and helped him unfasten his belt. As he pulled his trousers down, she took her wand that was sticking out of her purse and casted the verbal spell on her stomach. "Okay."

He looked her over in a loving way and unlike when Cormac had, she felt safe and beautiful. "How are you even more spectacular in the dark?" he asked. "The moonlight must be doing something to your skin."

She smiled. The light was reflecting off his skin and eyes beautifully as well, and his muscles were firm and sexy beneath his undershirt but she was out of words to describe what she felt. All she had was her body. "Ron, you've already sweet talked your way into my knickers tonight. So, keep to what you promised."

His eyes widened. "You naughty woman." He leaned over and licked the plush of her breasts. She moaned and jerked. "Just to correct you," he mumbled against her skin, "I haven't talked my way into your knickers yet." He pushed her dress up her thighs, and she lifted her hips so he could take her knickers off. He slowly pulled them away and ran his nails up her inner thighs.

"Oh, oh," she whimpered as her legs shook.

"Now you can use that expression," he said with a smirk.

She rose on her elbows. They were outside enjoying the fresh air but somehow he was still able to make her sweat and feel lightheaded. "Do I need to get the leash?"

"That won't be necessary, Ms. Granger. I won't keep you waiting any longer." He positioned himself and closed his mouth over hers as he moved into her. They both moaned in a high-pitched and yearning way as the sheer ecstasy of their joined parts electrified their bodies. Hermione squeezed his arms, trembled, gasped, and cried out as Ron kept to his word and made commanding yet sweet love to her. They snogged heavily and Hermione had no choice but to let the pins out of her hair as Ron moved her up and down with every thrust of his muscle into her.

She knew that she was sweating off her makeup and perfume, and she knew that shagging her boyfriend outside after a dance was irresponsible and not what Head Girls were supposed to do. In spite of this, it didn't bother her at all. She felt girly and womanly and mischievous and intelligent and completely in love.

She also felt that it would be for the best if she never gave the dress back to Parvati.

\*\*\* Ahhhh, Ron/Hermione makes me believe that anything is possible. I bloody adore them so intensely. I know that I talk all the time about how devoted to Ron I am, but I love Hermione so much as well. She's such an amazing character. So, I had to make the dance really mushy and fluffy for them and make it happy for everyone else. I think things coming full circle, and I think even in the real world it happens. I also feel like people's actions mean so much more than their words, no matter what. Well, I hope you lot enjoyed this! I sure did. Thanks for reading and review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 55

Thanks for the reviews! They are simply extraordinary. Now, you probably all want to kill me for taking so long. It's well deserved. So, go aheadâ€¦ I just keep changing these chapters because I'm a lunatic with endings. This is the first really long story I've written and it's taking some adjusting to. Anyway, I do want to remind everyone that this is the second to last chapter. I knowâ€¦weird, yet it is. :(

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Harry nearly limped out of the greenhouse with Hermione and Ron. It had been another grueling review day, which for Sprout's class meant pruning, plucking, breaking, and everything else that involved getting uncomfortably hot and sweaty with plants. He was dirty and sticky, and he wanted to pass out for the rest of the night. "That was like a nightmare I couldn't wake up from," he said.

"At least the final exam is soon. We'll have a break for a while," Hermione said. She was just as grimy as he was, but of course she didn't complain.

Ron snorted and yanked off his tie. He used it to wipe dirt off his forehead. "Right. That makes it all better. I'm gonna shower and lay down."

Hermione touched her ear and looked at him intensely. "Ronald, we have things to do for McGonagall."

"What else is new?" he asked. "The term's too close to being over for me to care about responsibilities anymore. I gave all I had left to the dance. I deserve a break."

She looked like she wanted to yell, but she merely rubbed her lips together. "So, you're skiving?"

"Tell McGonagall I got sick or something," he said with a shrug. "I'm just too bloody tired."

Hermione once again looked like she wanted to yell, but instead she rustled through her bag and handed him her notes. "Alright. Fine. At least copy the notes from today before you go to sleep. Make some sort of progress in your sluggish life."

He took them with a smile. "I will. Thanks." She smiled a little as well and nodded. "I'll make it up to you. I promise." He brushed her pinkie with his thumb before nodding to Harry. "Tell the mates to keep it down when they come in the room."

"Sure thing," Harry said. "I can't believe you let him go," he added to Hermione when Ron was out of sight.

"Neither can I but he's a big boy. It's not worth arguing over. Not today." Hermione readjusted her bag, and they started walking again. Harry watched her. Her brow was tensed in what was most

likely either concern or slight disapproval, but her mouth was still relaxed with a delicate grin. Ever since the dance, she and Ron had been a bit more polite and patient with each other. Harry actually found it somewhat bizarre to watch them stop bickering and find common ground so immediately.

"Are you growing soft, too?" he asked. "I swear Hogwarts has never been quieter. Ron's not constantly on my back about Ginny, and you're not constantly on his about everything."

"Ha, ha. You're the wittiest man I know," Hermione said. "Wait, let's sit for a second." She sat at a bench just inside the archway, and he sat next to her. She took her hair down and rubbed her scalp. "I will say this, he's not the only one feeling exhausted." She tied it again, and Harry noticed the dirt on her shirt collar and how filthy her fingernails were.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm fine," she said. She looked at him. "I'm being serious. I'm exhausted but no more than usual. I'm in a good mood, and I've been in a good mood. You don't have to worry."

"I'm only checking." He shuffled his feet and felt a little like a tit. He knew that Hermione was fine but out of habit he had to ask. He still wasn't completely used to things being fine for them. It was incredible yet a bit strange. "When will you be able to get back to Ron's house after term is over?"

"I don't know," she said. "I'd like to get there right away, but I also want to spend some time with my parents. There's so much that I haven't told my mum about this year."

"That's a good idea," he said. "You should talk to them while you have them. I hope that I don't have to be away for too long. I want term to end and holiday to begin in one nice motion. It probably won't happen though."

Hermione slid over closer to him and put her hand on his. "You shouldn't talk that way. Things will be fine, and your holiday will be great. We have so much to look forward to. So, look to it." She smiled and squeezed his hand. He squeezed it back. He didn't know where he'd be without Hermione. He most likely would have lost his mind months ago if it wasn't for her. He wasn't only eager to spend the summer flirting and snogging Ginny or playing Quidditch with Ron. He was also excited about spending time with Hermione without all the drama from school hanging over them.

"You're really smart, you know it?" he said.

She sat up a little straighter and grinned. "Thank you, but I don't have to be for this. I just know you. You'll be okay. We both will."

"I know we will," he said softly, as a comforting warmth came over him. He had never felt closer to her than when they danced together the night of the graduation ball. She had looked so

pretty, and they had both been so content and open. He had danced and held on to her in a way that he hoped told her how much he cared about her and how her role as his sister went so much deeper than that.

Hermione suddenly groaned and stretched as she rubbed her shoulders. "I'm sorry. I'm starting to cramp. I always do around this time."

"Maybe you should see the nurse," he said.

"It's all right. I always get it worked out," she said with a slight smirk. "Well, I should get some work done before my shift tonight. I need to recopy my potion notes."

"Can I join you? I sorta got off topic with my notes the other day," he said. He reached into his bag and handed them to her.

She looked them over. "Oh, I don't think brands of beater bats will be on the final exam, Harry."

"Do you see my problem?" he asked.

She rolled her eyes and stood. "Boys. All right, come on. Let's get you sorted." They went to the library and Hermione was tolerant with him as she went through his dismal excuse for notes. He didn't mind her nagging too much. He remembered when they'd always meet in the library to plan in hushed voices. It was nothing like that now, and neither he nor Hermione stayed in the library for very long. They didn't admit it, but he knew that they were both as tired and thinned out as Ron was. Ron was just the only one out of them who didn't mind admitting it.

Harry took a much-needed shower and packed a small dinner from the hall. His heart started to beat a little faster as he made his way outside. It always did when he had a dinner date. It was another thing that he'd never admit out loud. Harry walked to the Quidditch pitch and over to the benches of the Gryffindor section. He saw blazing red hair, and his heartbeat forgot about beating too fast and simply skipped an entire beat when she was right in front of him. "What are you doing out here?"

Ginny rested back on her palms and crossed her legs. "I'm waiting for a guy."

"Mind if I sit with you until he gets here?" he asked.

She patted the blanket that she was sitting on. "Not at all. He usually shows up to important things late."

Harry sat next to her and could already feel his body throb for her. "I reckon he always has a good reason."

She moved her finger over his mouth and moved his bottom lip down a little. "Like what?"

"Like bringing you food." He took the napkins out of his bag and laid out their dinner.

"Brilliant." She moaned as she helped unwrap the chicken legs.

"What? Do I not get a thanks?" he asked with a grin.

"I'll find a way to. I'm sure." She moved closer to him, and they ate and talked about their days. Harry quickly forgot about his horrible day of schoolwork as Ginny laughed and smirked at him in the confident and faintly mischievous way that she always did.

"That was so good, babe. Thank you," Ginny said sometime later, moving their trash out of the way and laying her head against his chest.

Harry kissed the top of her head and held her closely. "I wish I could say that I made it myself."

"You'll get a chance to when we get back to my house. I'm sure you can whip up something," she said.

"Shouldn't you cook for me?" he asked.

She lifted her head and raised an eyebrow. "Why'd you say that?"

"Calm down," he breathed. "I only mean that I'll be the guest. You should accommodate me."

"Harry, please. You've been in my house more than Charlie probably has. You're no guest, but you are dessert." She kissed his neck and started nibbling on it.

He moaned softly and closed his eyes. His hold on her tightened, and he shivered as she bit him. He tugged on her hair to move her mouth away. He touched her freckly cheek, and he loved the way the light from their wands made the brownness of her eyes so much richer. "You'll get sick of me over holiday. I don't know how I'm going to keep my hands off you."

Her cheeks flushed. "I highly doubt that I'll get sick of you. You'll end up getting tired of me. If not you, then at least Ron and Hermione."

"I'm sure they'll be too busy doing whatever it is that they do to notice us much," he said.

"I hope so. You're their mate, but you're my boyfriend and I want you all to myself this time," she said.

"I reckon that's fair," he said. "I feel the same way. Make sure to tell your brothers that so they'll let me get near you."

"Don't worry about them," she said. "I'll handle it. The only thing you'll have to do is show up."

He put his face to hers and got close to her mouth. "Easy enough." He kissed her and pulled on her shirt. She understood and got into his lap. They were able to hold each other closer as they snogged. His heart beat incredibly fast and hard as the



thrill and love flooded and blended together like it always did when he touched her.

She pulled away and gave him the blazing look that always made him feel like he could do anything. "I love you."

"I love you, too," he said. She lay back against his chest, and he held her and kissed the top of her head. He closed his eyes and felt like he was someone else with a different life. It was a freeness that he craved.

"Harry?" she whispered.

"Hmm?" he said.

"Do you think Sirius would've liked us being together?" she asked.

He opened his eyes and sat up. "What'd you mean?"

She sat up as well. "You two were obviously close, and he had a really good relationship with Hermione because she helped rescue him and all. I think about that sometimes and if he'd be happy or more disappointed that you didn't end up with her instead."

Harry stared at her and easily saw the concern. It didn't look right on her. "Ginny, I don't think Sirius would've cared who I date and if he knew how much you mean to me, then I'm sure he'd be happy for us. He liked you a lot. He enjoyed all of your family." He hadn't expected to talk about Sirius and feelings and memories of him blossomed inside of him.

"Right," she mumbled. "It's just..." She rubbed her forehead and shook her head. "Ignore me. I'm mental."

"Oi, you don't have to be that way." He tucked hair behind her ear. "I've got the person I want. Hermione isn't the one sitting in my lap right now because she's not it for me. You are. It's that simple. You know this."

"I know," she said. "It's silly. Everyone in my family loves you, and I'd like to think that your family would love me, too."

"Well, Sirius would be more than happy for us. The Dursleys—they hate everything magical so that's a losing battle and my parents." He stopped talking for a moment and swallowed the emotion. "They'd love you and what we have. I'm sure they'd find it sweet and maybe a little too familiar."

Ginny chuckled. "What's familiar about two blokes with black hair and glasses going after two ginger girls?"

He joined her in the laughter and looked up at the darkening sky. "Yeah, my parents would be proud that I followed in their footsteps, I reckon. I'm sure Sirius and dad would go on for ages about it." The emotion shot right up to his eyes but he took his glasses off, shut his eyes tightly, and pinched the bridge of his nose before it came out of him.

Ginny rubbed his arms. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," he said. "I like talking about them and especially with you. It's just a lot."

"It means the world to me that you open up about them to me," she said. "I know it must get hard."

He put his glasses back on and stared into her beautiful face. He knew without a doubt that his parents would have loved Ginny. There was no way that they could ever be able to deny her when she made him feel so bloody good and blessed to be alive. "It's getting easier, and you're a big help."

"It's why I'm here," she said, running her fingers through his hair. "I'm here for you, Harry. I'm your girlfriend and you're friend and I want to help you."

"You do," he said. "I don't know how to begin to describe all that you've done for me. I wish I could."

"It's all right," she said. "I'm sure someday you'll find the words."

He took her hand and moved his finger over her freckly knuckles. "You'll give me the time to figure it out? It could take a really long time."

"I don't plan on going anywhere," she said. "Never again." They stared at each other and Harry was captivated by how beautiful she was. His body pulsed and pulled toward her and he knew that nothing, not even the threat of death, would ever keep him from her. It was easy to think it but finding the words was so much harder.

Ginny lifted his bangs traced his scar. He watched her and stayed as still as possible. People had touched his scar before and every time it felt like someone was stripping his naked. He hated it, but somehow Ginny's touch wasn't painful. In fact, it felt good. She then leaned forward and gently kissed it. He closed his eyes and trembled. He couldn't believe it or her. "That doesn't bother you?" he asked her.

She pulled away and her face was slightly red. "No, it doesn't. You're so gorgeous, Harry, and you're the strongest person I know. Sirius, your parents, my parents, Ron, Hermione, me—we're all proud of you. Your parents and Sirius are so incredibly proud of you."

The emotion felt like it was swelling up his face, and he didn't want to hold it back anymore. He blinked and felt relief as the wetness squeaked its way out. He sniffed and rubbed his eyes, but he didn't feel ashamed. He felt stronger for letting it go. "I hope so. It's always been for them and for you lot." He pulled on her arms and kissed her again. Ginny held on to him tightly, and he didn't let go. He would never let her go again.

Harry tossed the bludger up and hit it hard with his bat. It zoomed and swirled down to the other end of the grass. Ron wound up his arm and started running backwards. He jumped and hit the ball with his bat. It came zooming back toward Harry, but his bat didn't get enough air to touch it. It fell to the ground, and Ron gave a holler. "Bloody yes! That's another point for me!" he said.

"That one shouldn't count," Harry said, rolling the ball over to him.

Ron grabbed it. "Why's that?"

"Because! You're taller than me. You can make it go to places that I can't reach," he said.

"Sounds like an excuse, tosspot!" Ron said.

"I'd rather be a tosspot than a twat!" Harry said. "Pitch the damn bludger!" To Harry, what they were playing was a bit like tennis, only the ball was a deactivated and re-jinxed bludger and they used bats instead of rackets.

"Fine. Fourteen to ten. Game point." Ron wound up his arm and tossed the bludger in the air. He hit it with his bat, and it came right at Harry. Harry tried to swing his bat a little faster so he'd get nice air on it, but it went right past him and felt to the ground. "Fifteen! I win!"

"Fuck!" Harry groaned, dropping his bat. He could hear Ron's laughter as he jogged over to him.

"Sorry, mate," he said, patting his shoulder. "You played well. Ten's a decent score."

"Whatever. Winner gets to return the supplies," Harry said. Ron rolled his eyes and took the equipment bag. They walked off the pitch and sat under the shade of a tree, and Harry leaned against it.

"I reckon losing can be exhausting," Ron said.

Harry kicked his leg. "Piss off."

Ron pulled the towel out of the bag and rubbed it over his hair and face. "I'm glad we got to do this today."

"So am I," Harry said. "All the studying did my head in."

"You have no idea, mate. It's nice to just bloody enjoy something without having to worry about coursework or anything else." Ron outstretched his arm and frowned as he rubbed his skin. "Bollocks. I'm already starting to burn. It must be a record."

Harry wanted to laugh but he respected gingers far too much to take the piss. "Did you put on the stuff that Hermione made for you? I overheard her instructing you about some sort of sun cream."

"No. It smells weird," he said.

"That's a good reason," Harry said. "A weird smell is definitely not worth keeping your skin from peeling off."

"It's not like that. I have extremely sensitive skin, alright?" He rubbed his neck. "Ever since I was little, mum's made me this lotion stuff to keep it healthy. It's made with apples and some other stuff that I can't remember, and it reacts badly with whatever is in the cream. I just don't have the heart to tell Hermione. She was all proud and cute when she gave it to me."

"How romantic," Harry cheeked, batting his eyelashes.

"Go. Toss. Yourself," Ron muttered.

"Look, I'm sure Hermione can tweak the cream or something if you tell what's in the lotion," Harry said. "Where is she anyway?"

Ron's expression automatically changed to the goofy-prat look. "I dunno. She said that she had some work to do, so she's either helping someone with something or she's being brilliant. Probably both at the same time."

"Sounds like Hermione." Harry leaned against the tree again, and Ron rested his head on his hand and closed his eyes. Harry could see where the skin was turning pink on his nose, cheek, and arm. "Ron."

"Yep?" Ron said.

"Thanks again for getting Ginny into the dance," he said.

Ron smiled. "How many times are you going to thank me for that?"

"I don't know," Harry said. "Until I can find some way to return the favor." He racked his brain. "How about we pick a day this summer and go to a Quidditch match or something?"

Ron's eyes widened. "Are you serious? We don't have to. It's not like I'm demanding anything in return."

"But I want to," he said. "It'd be nice to go to a match and actually enjoy the whole thing. Besides, I've got money that I have no real use for. I might as well use it for Quidditch."

"That's brilliant, Harry, thank you!" Ron said. "Fucking hell. I can't wait. If you're getting the tickets, then the least I can do is treat us to a pub afterwards. We'll be properly pissed by the time we get back to my house."

"Then we'll only have to avoid your mum and Ginny and Hermione," Harry said.

Ron cringed. "Good point. We'll stay at Fred and George's flat that night."

Harry laughed. "That's better." He looked at Ron and could tell that he was planning the whole day out in his mind as he grinned at the grass. Harry felt better as well. He wanted to see a match with Ron, but he was also glad that he could do something to make his mate happy. Harry had no words to describe his appreciation of Ron or what it had meant for Ron to bring Ginny along as his date so Harry could be with her. Ron was the bloody best.

Ron looked at him and a bit of his grin faded. "You can invite Ginny if you want. I know she'll want to go, and I could ask Hermione."

"Oh." Harry felt guilty because he hadn't even considered asking either of them. "Well, um, I could but I reckon it should just be us two. We'd probably be able to get into more trouble if it's only us going."

"Yeah?" Ron said, his grin fully returning. "Cool. I don't think Hermione would have too much fun anyway. It can just be something for us."

"It should be," Harry said. "We rarely get to do anything fun."

"Today was good," Ron said.

"Okay. We rarely get to do anything fun that doesn't involve me losing," Harry corrected.

"You've got another point there." Ron moved his wand between his fingers and avoided his eyes. "Since we're talking about the dance, it was nice seeing you happy with Ginny. You're always doing stuff for me and for other people. It was good to do something for you, for once."

"Not for once," Harry said. "You always do stuff for me, Ron." He cheeks felt hot, and he started to yank out blades of grass. Things were always too hard to say. They had so many hardships over term, but they had found their way back. Harry had his brother again, but he didn't know how to say it. "I'm just a knob because I don't know how to say things when they really matter. I'm no good with saying thank you or talking about what I feel or you knowâ€¦telling people I love them and things like that." He pulled out more handfuls of grass and thought his ears would melt off. He peeked up and Ron was still grinning at him.

"It's all right," he said. "You don't have to worry about saying that stuff with me. I know you do."

Some of Harry's uncomfortable feeling disappeared. Ron never pushed him or pushed things between them. He knew Harry's limitations and somehow he knew exactly when to keep going and when to back off. It was only one of the scores of reasons why Ron was his best mate and forever would be. "Thanks," Harry said.

They were quiet for a while but randomly Ron stood up. "Let's go."

"Where are we going?" Harry asked.

"I reckon we can give it one more go," he said, shaking the equipment bag. "You might be able to redeem yourself."

Harry stood up without another thought. "You're not going to let me win, are you?"

"I'd never," Ron said. "I'd let you break your kneecaps and cry all the way to the hospital wing before I'd do that."

"Good. I want my win this round to be on my own accord," Harry said.

"Your win? Ha, we'll see. Let's race there. Winner gets first toss." Ron tagged him and sprinted away.

"Oi!" Harry said, chasing after him. "No fair! Your legs are longer!"

After Harry lost the second round, both figured that it was time to head inside. Ron swore that he wouldn't say another word until he got a nap in, so Harry decided to head to the library. As much as he didn't want to, he had to check out some books on facial transformations for his final exam. He had no idea what he was looking for as he scanned row after row of books. Hermione always made it look so easy, like picking jam for bread.

His patience grew thin and he picked up the first two books that looked heavy. He reckoned that the thicker the books, the better the information would be. He looked for a table where he could skim them and his eyes settled on Cho. She was sitting alone and was flipping through a book herself. She had to know what book he would need. He walked over to her. "Cho?"

She looked up and let out a sigh. "Hi, Harry."

"Is this a bad time?" he asked.

"No. It's not. I'm sorry." She rubbed her eyes and pulled the chair out next to her. "You can sit down. I've just been studying all day, and it's sucking out all my energy."

"Sounds awful," he said, sitting down. "I'll make this fast. I need a good book on facial transformations. Will any of these work?"

She thumbed through them. "They'll both on transformations, so they'll both work. However, I've checked this one from Howard out before, and it's really systematic. I'd go with it."

"Cheers. I'll let you get back," he said.

"Hold on. Since you're here, I should tell you. I was going to hold out a bit longer, but I can't do it." She smiled widely.

"Uh-oh," he said.

"It's not bad. I promise." She took a deep breath. "Well, a while back I applied to a few summer Quidditch camps. They're nothing fancy. You get to train and work with professional players and you can play and have scouts come watch youâ€¦"

Harry tried to hide his excitement as she spoke. He knew where she was going but he wanted to play along. "And this involves you because?"

She quietly squealed and clapped her hands. "I've been selected to play!"

"Bloody hell, Cho, that's fantastic," he said, squeezing her upper arm.

"I honestly didn't expect to hear from anyone so soon, but I got the letter this morning," she said. "I can't believe I'm going. It's making it really harder to focus on school."

"I can imagine. It's hard for me to focus, and I'm not going anywhere over the summer," he said. "Wow, you're really going to train with professionals. What did your parents say?"

"When I told them I was applying, they didn't seem too happy, but they'll have to be happy for me now. Even if they aren't, I'm still going." Cho flipped absentmindedly through her book like she couldn't care less about what it was saying. "Oh, Harry, you have no idea how much this means to me."

"I think I do. You love Quidditch, and you're an amazing player. I'm really proud of you. You deserve this. I knew something like this would happen for you," he said.

"If I ever get to play a real game, then I'll send tickets for you and Ron and Ginny and Hermione," she said. "We'll have to keep in touch. I'd love to keep you current on this."

"I'd like that, and I'd love to hear about it," he said. He smiled at her and she smiled back. He was going to miss her next term and though he had loved being with Ginny at the dance, his time with Cho had been good as well. Not everything that had happened that year had been corrupted or a mistake. He was thankful for what he'd been through because he didn't think he'd ever find a true friendship with Cho otherwise. Harry kept his word and left her to her studies.

He then went up to his room to wake Ron up and make him study with him, but only Dean was inside. "Where's Ron?" Harry asked, tossing his book on his bed.

Dean took down his football poster and rolled it up. "He was asleep but Hermione came in, whispered something in his ear, and the bloke was as alert as I've ever seen them. They left about ten minutes ago."

"Of course." Harry lay back on his bed. He couldn't wait until Ginny was a sixth year and wouldn't have to be tied down to studying for OWLs all the time.

"Ginny came looking for you," Dean said.

Harry shot up. Sometimes, it seemed like Dean could read his mind or at least had some sort of censor for whenever Harry thought about Ginny. "She did?"

"That was about five minutes ago," he said. "She said that she's done studying and will be back later."

"Okay, thanks." Harry studied Dean's face. He didn't look happy at all. "Um—"

"We got into an argument," Dean quickly said. "Ginny and me." Harry didn't know what he was supposed to say. He was in a terrible position between the two of them. He merely shrugged. "I honestly don't know what about," Dean added. "I tried and I think she tried, but it went quiet for too long and we got angry."

"Angry?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, angry," Dean said. "It was weird. It was like we knew we were going to argue the second we looked at each other."

"It's like you said, you both need some time," Harry said.

"I know. It's what Lavender told me and when I sort of talked to Ron about it, he said the same thing," he said.

"You and Ron talk about Ginny?" Harry asked.

"Yes, Harry. I reckon I'm still allowed to, correct?" he asked.

"I'm not going to do this with you, Dean," Harry said. "I don't want to be the next person you argue with."

"I'm not trying to argue, Harry," Dean said. "I'm trying to say that I still have a place."

"I'm not saying that you don't. I also sort of understand where you are right now," Harry said.

"Do you?" he asked skeptically.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yes, Dean, I understand. It really bloody awful right now."

"Thanks for the encouraging words," Dean said. He shook his head and cleared his throat. "Okay, I'm sorry. I just hate the reality of how she and I are going to leave this term. It's unreal."

Harry could relate to things feeling unreal. He never imagined that he'd be boarding the train with Ginny at his arm and Ron and Hermione snogging like prats behind them. Well, he might have imagined the latter happening but not the former. "It'll get better," Harry said. "I know Ginny and I think I still know you. You two will find some sort of way to work it out, and I wouldn't mind the peace either." Dean didn't say anything, only continued



to pack up some of his things. "You know, Ginny told me that you talked to her that day in Hogsmeade."

Dean stopped. "She did? I told her not to."

"Why?" Harry asked.

"I didn't want you throwing anything in my face again in case it worked out," Dean said.

"Well, it did and I didn't," he said.

Dean nodded. "No, you didn't. Thanks for that."

Harry wanted to thank him for speaking to Ginny though he knew it probably killed him, but he knew that it wouldn't have been what Dean wanted to hear and especially now. "Yeah. Uh, I got a really good book on facial transformations. I was gonna try to make a study outline for McGonagall's exam."

Dean looked at him apprehensively for a moment. "â€|Okay, cool. I've got some notes. Maybe we can make something up."

"I'd like that." Harry got his materials and made a space on the floor. Dean sat in front of him with his stuff. They didn't talk about Quidditch or Ginny or their friendship or anything besides the exam as they worked, and it was exactly how they both wanted it.

Harry packed up his books as fast as he could to get out of McGonagall's class. It had been another horrible day of review, and he could still feel her eyes as she scowled at him during his transformations. "Potter, great display of your talents today," Draco said. "No wonder your name is constantly in the papers."

Pansy laughed and touched his shoulder. "Good one, babe."

"Fuck off. I don't need you two today," Harry said.

"Everyone doing all right?" Ron asked as he and Hermione walked over to him.

"What are you, Weasley, his bodyguard?" Pansy asked.

"Come on, Harry. Ron. We're all done here," Hermione said, pulling on Ron's arm and nudging her head to the door.

"Yes, listen to Granger. She's the boss. It's pathetic that neither of you can do anything yourselves," Draco said. Ron glared at him and Harry and Hermione shared a look and got ready to hold him back. Harry didn't know what had happened to him, but Draco's taunts barely registered to him anymore. The same couldn't be said about Ron.

"I managed to kick your arse all by myself. Do you need a reminder?" Ron asked.

"Don't," Hermione ordered. She held on to Ron's arm and pulled him away.

Ron gave Draco the finger and grabbed himself at the same time. "My bollocks haven't been kicked in. Can you say the same, Malfoy?"

"Ronald Weasley!" Hermione said when they were safely out of the classroom.

"What? The prick deserved it," Ron said. "I could have done a lot worse."

Hermione rubbed her temple. "McGonagall could've seen you. I can't believe—" She sighed. "Never mind. We're here to talk to Harry, right?"

"Yeah, talk to Harry," Ron mumbled, watching Draco and Pansy carefully as they walk down the hall.

"What's going on?" Harry asked.

"Do you still know the password taps for the Quidditch shed?" Hermione asked.

"I used them the other day so Ron and I could get the old equipment," Harry said. "Why?"

"Hermione and I have patrolling tonight and part of our area is searching the grounds near the pitch," Ron said. "If we hurry with our wing sweep, then we should have time to get a game in outside."

"You want to play outside?" He gawked at Hermione. "After hours?"

She put her hands on her hips. "Don't look so surprised. I can break a rule every once in a while. More to the point." She touched Ron's hand and looked up at him affectionately. "Ron's plan is so sound and brilliant. He's a genius."

"I learn from the best," he said, looking down at her. He smirked. "And I reckon what I gave you right after we made the plan was a big help. Have I ever told you that you're sweeter than a strawberry?"

She hit his arm and she turned crimson. "Ronald Weasley, don't be vulgar!"

"Listen to her," Harry said dully. "I don't want nor do I need details."

They both stopped grinning at each other and looked at him. "Sorry, mate," Ron said. "Tell Ginny about this and go to the library after you eat dinner. We'll meet you there when we're done."

"Fine. Can I leave so I can make myself throw up now?" Harry asked.

"Yes, you may and don't forget to bring your brooms," Hermione said. She took Ron's arm again. "You ready?"

"Born ready, love." He kissed the top of her head. "See you later, Harry."

"Be safe," he called as his two best friends walked down the hall.

During dinner all Harry and Ginny could talk about was how they were going to pull off getting outside. "I can't believe Hermione wants to do this," Ginny said for the fifth time. "She's been with Ron for far too long."

"I know. It's a little scary how normal she acts sometimes," Harry said.

"Normal. Good word choice," Ginny said. "I can say the same for Ron. Every so often it looks like he actually tries to think before he speaks. That's even scarier."

"I reckon love and constant shagging does that to people," Harry said. "You start to become like the other person."

"I don't know. We have love and plenty of shags, but I don't stare at the floor when I walk or twitch in my sleep," she teased.

"Is that so?" he said. "Then it can't be true because I don't laugh like a little piglet."

Ginny gasped and turned bright red. "You prat."

"Call this my free pass," he said.

She frowned and shook her head. "You're one lucky man."

"This is something I've learned over the years." He checked his watch. "I'm going to get my broom. I don't know how fast they're going to run through the patrolling."

"I'll meet you there. I'm going to finish up," she said.

He kissed her and she punched his arm. "Ow! Fucking hell. You can't punch me when I'm snogging you."

"I don't laugh like a little piglet," she said.

He rolled his eyes and laughed. "If you say so." He hurried to his room and opened the door. "Whoa, lock the door next time!" Harry said, shielding his eyes.

"Shut up, Harry. It's just a bit of cock," Seamus said.

"Exactly my point," Harry said. "It is safe now?"

"Yes. I'm put away," he said.

Harry slowly removed his hand and Seamus' boxers and jeans were back on. "Sorry."

"I'm not complaining," Seamus said with a smug grin.

Harry gave him a once over. "Was she just here?"

"You might find out one day that sex can replace basic needs like food and water and sleep," Seamus said.

Harry shook his head and went over to his bed. "I'll keep that in mind."

"The new bathroom password is soapsuds. It got changed tonight, and it's the last one for the year," Seamus said.

"Thanks. I'm sure Ron would've forgot to tell me tonight," Harry said, grabbing his broom. "What are your plans now?"

"Dean's forcing me to study with him," Seamus said. "We're going to use the notes you two made together. Like you and him at the same time. Made. Together."

"It wasn't a big deal," Harry said.

"I think it is," he said seriously. "Stuff like this means a lot to me, Harry. Dean won't say it, but it means a lot to him, too."

Harry smiled. "Same here. I'm trying."

"That's good," Seamus said. "The air in this room will be clear next term, and we'll all start acting like mates again and not shit wanks."

"With your help," Harry said.

"I'm not just a fucker, Harry. I've got a couple of things up my sleeve," Seamus said.

"I know you do, and thanks for everything," Harry said. He walked over and shook his hand. "I'm looking forward to it."

Harry joined Ginny and waited for Ron and Hermione by the library doors like they were told to. Ginny kept looking around and bouncing on her heels like Ron did when he was anxious or impatient about something. "They'll be here," Harry reassured.

"I got that the first time you told me," she said. "I hope they didn't get distracted and forget about us. My record is clean, and I want it to stay that way."

"I can't say the same thing," Harry said. "By the way, Seamus gave me the new password to the Prefects' bathroom. It's soapsuds."

"Hmm, nice timing. We'll probably need to get cleaned up after we play," she said.

"What an intelligent thing to say. You should have been in Ravenclaw." Harry moved closer beside her, and she rested her head against his arm. "I don't like being here when I don't have to."

"It's why I'm two seconds away from leaving," Ginny mumbled. "I see books and I automatically think about McGonagall's exam."

He laced their fingers together. "I reckon that's for everyone. I spent way to long making a study outline for her class." He thought about what he wanted to say next and decided to give it a try. "With Dean, no less."

"You studied with Dean?" Ginny asked in an almost awestruck voice. "That's great."

"Yeah, it wasn't too bad," he said proudly. "It was the night you came up to the room to look for me."

"Oh," she said slowly. "Did he tell you that we got into a fight?"

"Almost as soon as I walked in the door," he said. "I haven't said anything because I know that keeping your business with him away from our business is the only way to make this work out for the three of us."

"I really appreciate that," she said. She ran her fingers through her hair and let out a long breath. "I don't know why we fought. My best guess is that we didn't know what to say to each other and arguing was all we had. It was stupid."

"It'll get better. That's what I told him, and I believe it," he said. "He cares about you, Ginny, and he's a decent guy outside of it all."

"I know he is," she said. "He's a great guy."

"Then trust me. We're all trying and things will work out," he said.

She looked at him and smirked. "Where did all this optimism come from?"

"Hermione. She's got enough of it for everyone in the whole bloody school," he said.

"Then she needs to get here soon so I can ask for some." She hugged his arm and leaned against it again. "I'd like to have something with Dean again. At the dance, I saw how okay you were with Cho. It was sort of beautiful."

"Not as beautiful as it was being with you," he said.

"Smooth, but I'm not looking for a compliment," she said. "I mean it. It was nice, and I didn't really expect it to be."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, I told her and everyone that I was fine with you being her date, but a part of me really wasn't," she said.

He pulled away so he could look at her. "Why didn't you say something? I wouldn't have gone."

"That's my point," she said. "I didn't want to be selfish. I know you would've changed your mind if I told you it made me feel a little off, and I didn't want that. I trust you and I know how much you mean to her. I'm sure she means something to you, too."

"She's a good friend," he said.

"She is and she's kind. I knew I could be mature about the whole thing so I kept my mouth shut," she said. "I'm glad that I did. You looked like you had fun and it's all I wanted. Seeing you sincerely happy is the best thing in the world for me."

"It got better when you showed up," he said, rubbing her knee. "I never thought that I'd get another dance with you. It was perfect."

"And it was all thanks to Ron," she said with a chuckle. "Gods, my brother can be all right, yeah?"

"On occasion," Harry said. "Seeing you two dance was a highlight for everyone. I think you brought Hermione to tears."

"Leave us alone," she said. "We've had a lot of practice. Mum made us dance together all the time when we were little." She tucked a piece of hair behind her ear and looked sheepish. "I always fussed but I didn't mind it. I don't mind it now, either. I love Ron so much, and I never want him to change for anyone. Not even Hermione." She suddenly sat a little straighter and hardened her face. "Don't tell him I said that, though. I'll deny it."

"This conversation never happened," he said. He heard footsteps and when he looked straight ahead, he saw Ron and Hermione galloping toward them.

Ron reached them first. "Sorry. It took Mione some time to realize that you can't be both speedy and thorough."

"Ah, is that what kept you?" Ginny asked sarcastically. "We thought it was something else."

"I'm sorry. Why are you here?" Ron asked.

"Now, about outside," Hermione said, putting a hand to her chest and trying to catch her breath. "We can't get too high in the air, so it might be better if we just pass back and forth and what have you. Also, if we can keep it under an hour we won't have any problems."

"I brought my cloak," Harry said.

"That's excellent, Harry," Hermione said. She looked around. "This will be okay. This will be okay."

"It'll be more than okay," Ron said. "I'm not letting you back out now. We made a deal on the couch, remember?" He blushed and grinned and she flushed just as hard.

"Right?" she said.

"We should probably get it to," Harry said. Ron and Hermione once again looked away from each other and led the way. Harry was pleased with himself. He was getting better at stopping them, and he was sure that one day they'd understand that nobody wanted to see them all over each other.

As soon as the four made it outside, they practically sprinted over to the Quidditch shed. Ron kept nudging Harry's back as he tried and failed to put in the correct combination of taps. On his third try he got it open and he and Ron pulled out a quaffle and a practice broom for Hermione. "How should we do teams?" Harry asked.

"Boy, girl. Boy, girl. It'll be fair that way," Ron said.

"Fair?" Hermione asked, putting a hand on her hip. "What does fair mean?" Ron rubbed his neck, and Harry pretended to be fascinated with the handle on his Firebolt.

"I think fair means that each bloke gets a girl because we're more level headed. Right?" Ginny asked.

"Oh, yeah, o-of course," Ron said. Hermione and Ginny continued to stare angrily at him.

"All right. All right," Harry said. "Hermione, you should be my partner. I'm the best player out here, and you're the least experienced. It's the only way to make this truly fair, and it'll give Ginny a chance to beat me."

"Excuse me?" Ginny said.

"How rude. I don't want to be your partner or Ron's," Hermione said. "Ginny, I'm with you."

"Smartest thing I've heard all day," Ginny said, shaking her head at him and Ron. "Come on, Hermione. Let me give you a few pointers." She took Hermione's arm and walked away.

Ron let out a low whistle. "Thanks for that."

"We're definitely even now," Harry said.

Ron gently passed his broom between his hands. "You and Ginny been okay lately? I haven't asked in a while."

"We're fine. Great, actually," he said with a smile. "What about you and Hermione?"

"Ridiculously great," he said. "I'll probably have some making up to do tonight to make it great again, but I don't mind. It's all a part of the game."

"What game?" Harry asked.

"Mine and Hermione's game," he said. "It'sâ€¦hard to explain."

"Say no more," Harry said. "Hey, has there been a new password set for the bathroom?"

Ron turned his eyes away from him and shook his head. "No, it hasn't changed," he said, rubbing his neck.

"Mmm, okay," Harry said, grinning.

"We're ready for you," Ginny said, glaring at them along with Hermione. Harry and Ron gave each other a nod and put their game faces on.

For the remainder of their time, the four of them played and tried their best not to get caught. Harry attempted to keep his laughter back whenever Hermione went for the quaffle, and Ginny had no problem playing rough against him. She was a fantastic player but it wasn't enough. He and Ron easily won but somehow it was never about the game. They eventually stopped playing and simply sat in the grass and tossed the quaffle to each other as they talked about final exams and what was to come over the summer holiday. Harry could have stayed out all night with them, but Hermione's need to rebel wore off and she demanded that they go back inside. They hurried back to the shed, and on the first try Harry was able to lock it back.

"Of course, when it doesn't matter you can get it open," Ron said.

"Piss off," Harry said. He looked at Ginny and wiped her forehead with the back of his hand. "You could use some cold water on you."

"Do you know where I can get some?" she said.

"In the lake, Ginny," Ron said. "Why don't you run off and jump in alone."

"Oh, Ronald Weasley," Hermione said. She touched his shoulder. "I could use some cold water, too. I get flushed when I lose at something."

"It was a fluke," Ginny said.

Neither Ron nor Hermione seemed to be listening. "It doesn't mean that I don't love you," Ron said to her. "I may have demolished you, but you're still my favorite person."

"Is that so?" she asked.



"Do they ever stop?" Ginny whispered in Harry's ear.

"No. They could go probably another ten lines before it turns into something more." He loved the way some strands of her hair stuck to her skin. It was so vividly red. "Fucking hell."

"What?" Ginny said.

"I almost don't want you to clean up," he said. "You're bloody incredible like this."

"There's more than one way to see me wet and heated like this, love," she said.

Harry bit his lip and placed his hand on her arse. He pushed her against him. "You'll have to prove it to me." He kissed her and Ginny faintly moaned.

"We should probably get back before we get caught!" Ron just about screamed.

Harry broke away from her. Ron was frowning at them with his arms crossed, but Hermione was beaming. "What?" Ginny said. "You didn't seem to mind thirty seconds ago."

"That was different," Ron said.

"It doesn't matter. We're all going in," Hermione said. She pulled on Ron's hand and once again led them. "The new password is soapsuds, you two."

"Hermione!" Ron said.

"Thank you, best friend," Harry said. "I was told by some git that there wasn't a new one set yet."

"Sod off. The both of you," Ron said.

"Stop talking like that, Ron," Hermione said. "You're always telling someone toâ€¦sod off or go wank or what hand to use. Is that all boys think about?"

"Why do you think they love Quidditch so much, Hermione?" Ginny asked. "They get to grip and play with bats and brooms and balls all day."

"Oi!" Ron said.

"That's offensive," Harry said, "and uncouth."

"Yeah, we're not Neanderthals," Ron said with a laugh.

Hermione threw up her hands and walked faster. Ginny let go of Harry's hand and caught up to her. Ron and Harry kept laughing and complimented each other on their brilliancy. Unfortunately, their ploy was the last straw, and they ended up taking showers alone. Both Hermione and Ginny had decided that they did no longer deserve cold water with them. Though, after repeated

apologizes and five minutes alone with Ron, some of Hermione's rebellion returned and she allowed Ginny and herself to sleep in their room. Harry closed the curtains tightly around him and Ginny and held her.

He moved hair off her neck and kissed it. "You still mad?"

"I'm better," she said, pushing against him. "Besides you being an arsehole, I had another good day."

"Me, too," he said. "I love you so much, Ginny."

"I love you, too, Harry," she said, facing him. "I love you more than anything." He kissed her and moved his hand to her thigh. They kept kissing and kept moving until they were in a wave of heat and pressure and nothing around them existed anymore.

One of the things he loved about Ginny was that she made him feel like he was someone else living a different life, but for once he didn't want to be anyone else. He had Ron, Hermione, and Ginny.

He was fine with just being Harry.

\*\*\* There were so many ways that I wrote this chapter before this one fell into place. For Harry's last chapter, I didn't want something over the top. His story has been so drama filled and intense and I know that the one thing Harry wants is normalcy. To him, a day like this would be perfect, being with his friends and being with Ginny. He appreciates the small things, and I love how this fits that. Everything isn't perfect but they're normal and manageable. It's Harry. \*love\* . Well, thanks for reading and I truly appreciate all of you who stick around. I know I've said this before but I REALLY mean that the next (and last) chapter won't be too far away. It'll be here sooner than you think, actually. Thanks for reading and review!

CHEERS!

## CHAPTER 56

Thanks for the reviews! They were amazing, of course. Well, I don't know what to sayâ€¦this is the last chapter of Written in the Sand. It's been a long time coming, but it had to happen some day. I just want to give a HUGE thanks to all the reviews and all the kind words and all the pm's over the past couple of years or so. It's meant so much to me. I've learned a lot about myself and about writing through the course of this story, and I really feel like I've grown in my abilities. Writing this and reading everyone's opinions has really helped me out with my next set of projects that I'm adding to my page. So, keep an eye out for more of my works. They're coming soon, and please know that I wouldn't have gotten here without you lot. I'm throwing out virtual hugs and kisses and love. So, without further ado, I'm Rose and this is the final chapter and like it should be, it's Hermione's. :)

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter

Exam week finally came and any time that Hermione wasn't taking a test, she was studying for one or restudying for one. She wanted to excel in every subject, and she wanted to exit her sixth year with the same concentration that she had entered it with. Her lapses in between were long forgotten, and she was a stronger and more focused student. She had to be. She finished her Potions exam early, and Professor Slughorn let her leave. She walked a ways down the hall and leaned her back against the wall. She let out a contented breath and reviewed her test in her head. There had only been a few questions that she had trouble with. She reached into her bag and took out one of her potion books to see what she may have answered wrong.

It wasn't too long after when students started leaving the class. She put her book away and saw Ron come out of the classroom. She started to walk toward him but stopped. Lavender was close behind and she tapped his shoulder. He turned to her and they started talking. Hermione gave them their space. It didn't last long. Lavender looked to giggle and she touched Ron's elbow and waved to him before taking off. Ron looked around and spotted her. He smiled and paced over to her.

"There you are," he said. "I reckon it went well considering you were one of the first finished."

"It wasn't too bad," she said. "There were a few I wasn't confident about, but I'm trying not to worry about it."

"Good for you. You're finally learning to be more human," he said with a wink.

"Very funny," she said. "I saw you and Lavender talking."

"She wanted to know what I got for the multiple choice question about dragonfly wings," he said.

"It was the second one," Hermione said.

He groaned. "Shit. She and I both chose the third one. Oh well, you can't win them all."

"I wish my attitude about these tests was as liberal as yours," she said.

"You should try it," he said. "We talked a bit before class, too. Lavender really wants to find some middle ground. I told her I did as well."

"It can be something for you two to work on this summer," she said sincerely. "Maybe letter exchanges or something."

"What are you talking about?" he asked. "I was going to invite her over so she could braid your hair and do your nails. She's really good at that stuff." She hit his arm, and he took it and pulled her a little closer to him. "If you want to touch me, then there are less violent ways of doing so." He moved his grip down her arm, and she felt his eyes lock on her and hold her in place. The electricity charged between them, and her arm burned where he

was holding on to it. Ron's touches were still so commanding and even in a hallway full of people, he knew how to make it seem like they were the only two in the world. She wanted to say something, but Harry's loud throat clearing interrupted her thoughts and their moment.

"We're in public, mates," he said lifelessly. "There has to be some sort of boundary. At least for the public's sake."

Hermione got out of his grip and found her composure again. "Sorry, Harry." Harry looked disgusted but she could see the humor in his features as well. He didn't fool her as easily as he thought he did.

"How many times have I told you not to apologize to him?" Ron asked. "What took you?"

"Slughorn," Harry breathed. "Another speech about possibly making his shelf."

"What a twat," Ron said. "He still didn't get my name today. He called me Rupert for the second time. I have a cousin named Rupert, and I'm nothing like the bloke."

"I don't think it's personal, Ron. He's a bit out there, and I'm sure he doesn't remember half his students' names," Hermione assured. "We should all go the library and study for McGonagall's test." Ron and Harry grumbled, but she held up her hands. "I mean it. It's important."

"So is eating," Ron said.

"So is eating with Ginny," Harry added.

"I'm sorryâ€¦you did have with in there somewhere, right?" Ron asked.

Harry smirked and shrugged. "I dunno. I could've said eating Ginny. Works well for me both ways."

"Git! You can't say that to me," Ron said. "Mione, throw him in detention!"

"She's not Head Girl yet and even if she was, she'd never throw me in detention. Isn't that right, Hermione?" Harry asked.

"We all know that she'll end up Head Girl, and she would do it! If you bothered me enough, then she'd have to. It's the principle of things because I'm her man," Ron said. "Right, Hermione?"

Hermione massaged her temples and counted to three in her head. "If you two boys don't hush up and follow me to the library, then detention will be the last worry on your minds. I will make sure that neither of you ever get to enjoy any sort of eating of any sort of thing for months. Do I make myself clear?"

They exchanged an expression of horror. "Yes, ma'am," they said together.

"Then follow me quietly," she said. She led the way to the library in an undisturbed silence and with a confidence in her step. However, Hermione couldn't make them study for as long as she wanted to because she and Ron had their last official Prefect meeting to go to. Ron mumbled an apology, and she gladly accepted it as they walked into the classroom. She sat across from him, instead of beside him, like she had ever since they started dating. She told him it was because she wanted to set an example, but the truth was that there was only so much temptation she could handle.

She got out her quill and parchment and prepared herself for McGonagall. Ron hunched his shoulders and frowned at the table as if it had spat on his favorite Chudley Canons shirt. She lightly kicked his foot and told him with her eyes that he needed to pay attention. He sat up straighter and she told herself that it was the last bit of attention she'd give him for the rest of the meeting.

"You all have worked so hard to make this ceremony happen," McGonagall said, later that evening. "Myself and the other staff are very pleased with the work you've done for the seventh years on top of your regular duties. I think it's a clear reflection of the dignity and intelligence that Prefects at this school possess."

Hermione continued to write down everything McGonagall said, almost to the letter. She had declared herself the official note taker months ago, and she took her job seriously. Nothing distracted her when it came to listening to McGonagall's speeches. A flash of red got into her line of vision, and she automatically peeked up. Ron was grinning at her. He quickly waved. She glimpsed around and carefully waved at him with her quill. She wanted to get back to work, but Ron's grin was a little too sweet and his eyes were a little too fixated. He bit his lip and raised an eyebrow. She tried not to blush, and she finally looked away. She didn't have time for their game and especially not in front of their entire Prefect section.

"Unfortunately," McGonagall continued, "the actual ceremony is for the seventh years and their families only. Nonetheless, please understand that your work will not go unnoticed. We plan to have an itinerary sheet, and we've included your names and the jobs that you completed." Hermione raised her hand, and she heard Pansy's usual cough whenever she asked a question. "Yes, Ms. Granger?"

"What would you like for us to do to help keep the school in order during the ceremony?" she asked.

"Well, Ms. Granger, along with everyone's usual professionalism when the families arrive, we have devised a patrolling schedule for the whole day," McGonagall said. "We will be using the Quidditch pitch for most of the afternoon, and in the evening we'll come back to the Great Hall. So, making sure that these areas are clear at the scheduled times will be your biggest responsibility that day."

"Certainly, Professor McGonagall." Hermione wrote in big and bold letters to make a timetable for when they would shift people out after a reasonable dinner time. She stopped writing and found Ron staring at her. She enlarged her eyes to get him to stop, but he only loosened his tie and slipped the end across his lips for a second. She looked away once more. She knew that her cheeks were pink, and she could feel the heat crawling up her thighs, but she ignored it. Ron played dirty, but she could rise to his challenge.

"I'd also like to note that while all of your efforts have been greatly appreciated," McGonagall said, "there is one student who I think deserves additional recognition, Ms. Granger?"

Hermione moved her eyes from Ron's seduction and sat a little straighter. "Yes?"

"I was saying that you deserved additional recognition for your efforts this year," she said. "You have gone above and beyond your own duties while guiding the others. You should be very proud of yourself."

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall," she said. "I'm grateful for the recognition, but it was a team effort."

"You don't have to be modest, Hermione," Ron said. "You've been a fantastic leader, and you deserve the extra attention. You've earned it for a long time coming." He lounged back in his seat and started to clap. She enlarged her eyes again, but it was too late. Everyone joined him and very soon it became a sort of symphony from everyone but Draco and Pansy. The pinkness had to all over her face, and Ron motioned his hand for her to rise. She shook her head frantically.

"Yes, Ms. Granger, if you have something to say," McGonagall said.

"Iâ€¦I guess." She rubbed her hands against her skirt and stood up. Ron looked like he wanted to laugh, but he held it back. He licked his lips and roamed his eyes up her body. She wiggled her legs together and tore her eyes away. She cleared her throat as everyone stared at her. "Thank you all for the applause. It's always been my goal to make our jobs run smoothly and with honor. I have worked hard, but so has everyone here. It's why we were chosen in the first place, and it's been a pleasure working with all of you."

"It's been a pleasure working with you, too," Ron said. He swiftly looked around. "And everyone else," he added, almost like an afterthought. "Just so much pleasure." He shot his eyes back to her and sucked on his lip.

"Thank you for that addition, Mr. Weasley," McGonagall said, giving him a look.

"Anytime," he said. Hermione sat back down, and McGonagall continued with the meeting. Ron winked at her and listened to

McGonagall as if nothing had happened. She attempted to go back to writing, but it was useless. She watched Ron and felt a twinge of aggravation but an even bigger heap of love. She knew that he had deliberately driven her mental, but in a way what he had done was romantic and brave. Ron always found a way to surprise her and make her love him more.

After the meeting, Hermione wanted to get to Ron as fast as she could so she could hit him and possibly kiss him for being so random and teasing, but McGonagall tapped her shoulder and gestured her to the side. For a moment Hermione was worried that she had caught on to what had happened between her and Ron during her speech.

"Ms, Granger," she started.

Hermione braced herself. "Yes?"

McGonagall didn't seem upset all. In fact, she seemed more relaxed than she had during the meeting. "Mr. Weasley's methods may have been a little unorthodox, but he had the right idea tonight. You have been a terrific leader this term and every term that you've been Prefect. I'm very pleased with your performance as a Prefect and as a student, and I'm especially proud of your accomplishments."

Hermione's chest inflated a little, and she gripped her schoolbag very hard. "That means a lot, Professor McGonagall. I know I had my moments this term, but I swear that it was never my intention to get off track."

"I understand, Ms. Granger," McGonagall said. "I've always expected more from you because I know you can be the best and soar above any sort of obstacle. You're an exceptionally bright young woman, and I want you to reach your full potential. I know you can."

"Thank you," Hermione said. "I know I can, too."

"I'm telling you this not only because I mean it but because I think you should know how I feel going into the holiday." McGonagall looked around for a moment. "I know it's early to officially say this but don't be too surprised if you receive an extra letter this summer from me."

Hermione's heart skipped a beat, and she instantly felt lightheaded. "You meanâ€¦?"

"I think it's safe to unofficially congratulate you on making Head Girl next term. You've earned it," she said.

Hermione put a hand to her chest and felt tightness in her eyes. She couldn't believe it. She almost wanted to skip through summer so she could get her badge. "T-thank you so much, Professor McGonagall."

"You're welcome," she said, "but it's still off the record. I know you'll tell Mr. Weasley and Mr. Potter but keep it quiet outside of that."

"Of course." Hermione wasn't crying, but she wiped her eyes anyway.

"Alright, I'll let you go," she said.

"Right. I have hall duty tonight." Hermione readjusted her bag on her shoulder. She didn't know how she was going to manage to patrol the whole night with the news on her shoulders.

"Keep up the good work, Hermione," McGonagall said.

Whenever McGonagall used her first name, she always listened a bit closer and more carefully. "I will, Professor McGonagall. Thank you and goodnight." She left the room, and Ron was against the wall waiting for her.

"What was that about?" he asked.

Hermione pointed her chin and started to walk. She didn't know where to begin and her knees were shaky. "Well, McGonagall just more or less told me that I'll be made Head Girl next term."

Ron took her arm to stop her. "Are you serious?" She nodded and bounced a little. He pulled her into a hug. "That's excellent, love."

She held him back and let her few joyful tears roll down her cheeks. "I did it, Ron!"

"Oh, Hermione." He pulled away and gave her a hard and fast kiss. "I knew it would happen."

"I honestly can't believe it," she said with a sniff.

He wiped right under her eyes with his thumbs. "You can. You're the bloody best and the position wasn't made for anyone else in our year. You're so amazing, Hermione, and you were born to lead this school." He took her hand and kissed it. "I'm so bloody proud of you. You deserve this so much."

"Thank you," she said. "I'm proud of myself."

"You should be proud of me, too. I think my last compliment took her over the edge," he said. Hermione suddenly remembered what he had put her through, and she hit his arm. "Ow! What was that for?"

"For testing me in front of everyone," she said.

He rubbed his arm. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't act cute with me. You're a real piece of work. You were all sexy and seductive. The rule is that you're not allowed to do



that stuff with your mouth and your hands while we're in mixed company."

He snorted but quickly put his hands up. "I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself. You're incredible when you're taking notes and acting like the perfect Prefect. I had to do something, or I would've exploded."

"That's not a good enough reason," she said.

"Fine," he breathed. "I won't be sexy and seductive while we're in mixed company. Bugger, I reckon that means that I can't be myself then, yeah?"

She shook her head. "You're too much."

"And you're future Head Girl." He took her bag off her shoulder and put it over his. "I can at least take your bag, Head Girl."

"I like the way that sounds." She poked his side and the two started their patrol. They kept nudging each other and walking ahead of each other. She probably should've been more concentrated on her task, but her spirit was too high. She would be Head Girl and she would lead the school, but it wasn't the only cause of her bliss. She nudged Ron again and moved out of the way so he couldn't reach her. Harmless flirting while patrolling always put her in a good state.

"So, I reckon I know what the best part about you being Head Girl will be," Ron said after some time.

"What? Having the extra responsibly and authority or having this go on my record?" she asked.

He crinkled his nose. "Are you mental? None of that stuff. The best part will be that you get your own room with your own private toilet. Seventh year has never looked so appealing."

"Pardon me, but what does my room have anything to do with you?" She acted naive but inside her heart was bursting with anticipation. Yes, she was excited about having her own space to study and sleep, but she would be thick if she thought that Ron wouldn't be there many nights in her bed and against the wall and on her desk and in the shower and even on the floor.

"Now who's acting cute?" he asked. "I'll get dirty just so you can wash me in your shower."

"Wow, that's thoughtful," she said.

"Yeah, and a nice whomping before bed," he said. "I'm ready for that, love. We can go to sleep shagging and wake up shagging."

"Is that all you're thinking about?" she asked. "Is my badge only about us having more sex?"

He scratched his head. "What'd you think all the hard work was adding up to?"

"Ronald Weasley," she said.

"I'm just taking the piss," he said with a laugh. "It's not just about sex. I'm excited to see the badge on you. I want to pin it myself. I'll be able to see you strut around and tell people the rules. It'll be wicked and not much different from what you do now so..."

She nudged him again. "I'll have to be strict and especially on you, Harry, and Ginny. I don't want anyone to think that I'm playing favorites."

"You wont be?" he asked, looking a bit put out.

"Don't worry," she assured. "You'll be my favorite. It just can't be out loud."

"I can live with that," Ron said. "Mmm, that's bloody sexy. You'll really be able to punish me then and throw me in detention. Actually, don't play favorites. Be tough on me. I can say that I'm dating the Head Girl, and she's not afraid to enforce the rules. Fucking hell, can we start tonight?"

"You're mad, Ron," she said. "I think you need help."

"Probably." He stopped and gripped her shoulders, and he led her backwards until she hit a wall.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

He traced her mouth before moving his hands down her chest and gripping her sides. "I'm showing you how proud I am of you." He moved his hand back and forth across her stomach. He even unfastened the last button of her shirt.

She put her hand on his and felt the heat on her thighs and in her lower stomach. "I appreciate it, but maybe we shouldn't here."

"Why not?" he asked. He moved his hand down to her leg, and he looked around before moving it up her thigh.

She whimpered faintly and shook. She opened her legs but pushed him away at the same time. "I-I'm sure there's a good reason."

"Fair enough. I'll stop when you tell me what it is." He moved against her and put his hands on her hips again. She closed her eyes. She could feel how hard he was, and the pressure felt good. "Got that reason?" he asked. She shook her head. "I'm glad because this is the last real patrol of the year, and the last time I'll probably be patrolling with you. We should make it count by doing something improper."

She put her hands on his shoulders. Ron was staring at her with hungry eyes, and she wanted to feed him his craving. It would be the only way to cure her own. "We already did something improper when we played Quidditch outside with Harry and Ginny."

He unfastened the second to last button on her shirt and placed his hand against her stomach. It made her quiver and burn. "That doesn't count," he said. "That was sort of improper with our mates. I mean us and us alone doing something really improper." He kissed her and pushed up and into her. They both gasped and she went up the wall a bit. He moaned and sucked on her bottom lip before letting it go. "I want you so bloody badly right now."

"You do?" she asked, moving her hands down his back. The heat started to engulf her, and she wanted to hear and feel more.

"I do," he said. "I already wanted you, but now you're my Head Girl. It's making me so fucking hard thinking about it. Can you feel it?"

Her hips gave a natural push against his so she could feel the pressure again. "Yes. I can feel it."

He kissed her again and his hands glided up to her chest. He squeezed her breasts. "You're so deliciously gifted, Hermione. You drive me mental." He started to snog her, and Hermione dug her fingers into his lower back. She wanted him and everything he had for her, but they couldn't do it against the wall.

She reluctantly broke away. "Not here," she whispered against his mouth.

"I know." He took her hand and ran. She had no idea where they were going, but she could hardly care. She was foggy and damp all over. Ron opened up what looked to be a broom cupboard and shuffled them inside. She had no time to do anything more than light her wand. He dropped their bags and pushed her against the wall. He held her arms against it and snogged her roughly.

She dropped her wand. "Hmm, Ron," she panted as his tongue slipped in and out of her mouth. The space was cramped and hot, and it only made the situation more desperate and it made their bodies fuse together.

"We'veâ€¦beenâ€¦so busy," he said, licking to her neck. "I haven't been able to kiss you, touch you, or taste you like this all day. My body was aching. It's another reason why I was mental at the meeting."

"You don't have to explain it, sweetheart. I felt it, too." She tugged on his hair and hissed when he bit her close to her collarbone. "I just have more restraint."

Ron pulled away. He was flushed and rather damp himself. "Not tonight you don't. I had you, and I have you now. I won, and I always do."

"Excuse me?" she asked, slightly coming out of her daze.

"I said that I win." He kept unbuttoning her shirt until she was completely exposed to him. His eyes wandered around her chest and

stomach, but she didn't feel inadequate anymore. Her body wasn't going to change, and Ron enjoyed what she had.

"How exactly do you always win?" she asked. He bent down and kissed her upper chest. She whimpered and jerked as his tongue grazed the outline of her breasts. It slipped under her bra, and she let out a choked cry as he moved the material to the side and sucked on her peaking flesh. He gave the same attention to the one before pulling away.

"Easily," he said in a husky voice. "When I gave you one so you'd let us sneak out to play Quidditch, we both knew that you were going to say yes regardless if I got between your legs or not. As for tonight and being in this closet, we both know that I had you the moment you noticed me staring at the meeting." He smirked and rubbed her bottom lip. "Face it, you're great at a lot of things, but this is one area where I beat you. I told you. I don't hold back." Ron looked at her playfully and with seduction. He had played his card and had played it well. Hermione almost wanted to tell him that he was right so she could feel his mouth again, but she had gone through too much and was still too thrilled about her new position to let anyone say that she couldn't win. Even if he had beaten her, she'd never tell him. She would always rise to his challenge.

She put her hands against his chest and shoved him rather harshly so that he slammed into the opposite wall. "I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but you don't actually win anything. The true winner has and will always be me."

"Is that so?" he asked. His voice was higher and a bit unstable. She could tell that her force turned him on, and she would use it to her advantage.

She put a finger to her lips. "Just listen. I've always gone easy on you because I value your effort, but I'm soon to be Head Girl. I can't play nice anymore." She unfastened his tie completely and yanked it off. She bit the edge and put it around her neck instead. She let it settled right between her breasts, and Ron swallowed hard.

"Fucking hell," he gasped.

"You should probably watch your mouth," she said. "I don't think I'll tolerate much of your swearing next year. Do you understand?" She kissed him but pushed him away just as he kissed her back. "Do you?"

"Yes. I understand," he said. His chest heaved and he looked a little shaken up.

"Good. Now, about your statement, I think you should take it back," she said. "I think you should say that I win."

"No, and I don't care what you do to me. I win," he said. "I always have you."

"Is that right?" She got on her knees in front of him. "We'll have to see about that." Ron's eyes grew. They were so big and blue and pure desire glowed from them. Hermione could practically smell Ron's need through his skin. She nonchalantly unbuckled and unzipped his trousers. She touched his lump underneath his boxers, and she tried not to make her want seem obvious. "I think the first new lesson I'll be teaching you is about manners and who wins here."

"Okay," he wheezed. "I'm listening."

She eased him out of the front opening of his boxers, and Ron sucked in air and trembled. She held the solid and warm muscle in her hand. "I think this is proof right here that I win, is it not?" Ron didn't answer. He only jerked again. "I guess I'll have to take the lesson a bit further."

She dragged her tongue down the side of his muscle before easing the tip into her mouth. She sucked it slowly and inched more in. She moaned and kept her eyes on him. Ron let out a shallow pant and closed his eyes. His stomach flinched and his hand moved to her hair. He gently combed it back and tugged on the strands. "Hermione," he moaned. She sucked him harder but barely moved up the muscle. He opened his eyes, as his breathing got more erratic. "Mmm, Mione, that feels so good. More. Please."

Hearing him beg so politely made her feel like her skin would melt off. She was on fire and the pressure pounded against her, but she was also gaining the control back. She complied and eased more into her mouth and kept going until most of it was in. She then made one long stroke of the length. Ron groaned and banged his head against the wall.

If her mouth wasn't preoccupied, then she would have smiled but instead she looked up at him and batted her eyelashes. He rolled his eyes. "Alright. Yes, you win and I lose." Feeling pleased with herself, she sucked him faster and he squirmed and made noises, letting her know that he was close. She gripped around his base and got herself ready, but he moved her away and pulled out of her. "Wait, stop, I'm almost there," he said breathlessly.

She wiped her mouth and stared at him in confusion. "Then why should we stop?"

Ron helped her to her feet. "Believe me, I want this, but there's no way you should be on your knees tonight. I would be the worst boyfriend in the world if I let the future Head Girl suck me off in some mangy cupboard."

She put a hand on her hip. "You'd rather I suck you off in your bed or something?"

"That's not what I mean," he said, putting himself away and fastening his trousers. "This isn't the right activity for a night like tonight."

"For heaven's sake, Ron." Hermione fastened her shirt as well and looked around. "We can't do anything else in here. It's too small."

"Then let's go somewhere else," he said. "I'm sure you have a place."

She wanted to tell him that they really needed to get a move on and that the cupboard would have to do, but her senses came back. "Follow me." She peeked outside to make sure the area was safe before pushing him out and leading him down the corridor. She wrapped her hand around the doorknob to the abandoned classroom and looked around before leading them in. Once again, she had no time to react. Ron pressed his lips against hers. She moaned and took his bottom lip between hers. She nibbled on it, and Ron held on to her waist. He guided her back against the door and when Hermione let her hand drop, it hit the doorknob and she winced.

"I'm sorry," Ron said against her mouth.

"It's not your fault." She pushed her body off the door, never breaking the kiss, and moved them back until he tripped against the teacher's desk and sat down. It was easier for her to snog him this way, and she began to burn again. She finally stopped. "Maybe we should part for a moment so I can put up some charms." Ron let her go and nodded. He stayed on the edge and stared at her as she put up a locking and silencing charm and put the protection spell on herself.

He smirked at her and she grinned back. They were both flushed, charged, and disheveled like they had been in an argument but it was far from that. They were both in need of each other and a mutual euphoria and anticipation came over them. She felt daring and untouchable as he stared her down, and she wanted to take him there and truly show him that she could play on his level. She shifted over to the old bookshelf and stood in front of it. "Are you gonna fuck me here?" she asked.

Ron's jaw dropped. "W-what?"

She blushed and fought off the slight discomfort she felt at using the word. She pointed to the shelf behind her. "Well, this is technically a bookshelf, and you said that fucking is the only word to describe what can happen against it. So, are you going to?"

Ron gaped at her in shock for a while and said nothing. He seemed honestly speechless. He shook his head slightly and stood up. "Yeah, I am." He slowly walked over to her, and she put one of her feet on the ledge. He brushed a lock of hair from her shoulder and leaned forward to run his lips over her neck. She moaned as he put his firm body against hers and ran his hands up her thighs. "I'm gonna fuck you right here, and I'm going to keep fucking you until cum screaming my name."

"Ron," she whimpered, closing her eyes. She balled her fists and forced herself not to have a heart attack.

He tugged on her collar and she opened her eyes. "You got it?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes. Sir." He reached under her skirt and pulled down her knickers. She decided not to test him anymore. He unfastened his trousers and didn't take his eyes off her. She kept hers on his as well and wrapped her arms around his neck. He lifted one of her legs, and she lifted the other onto the lowest shelf. She let out a shaky breath and he kissed her forehead. He lifted her completely, and she clamped her thighs to his sides.

"Remember what I said," he whispered against her ear before kissing it. She tangled her fingers in his hair as a response. Holding himself, he covered her mouth with his own and guided himself into her. They moaned in unison as he filled her, and his penetration sent a wave of arousal through her. She felt on fire, and she arched against him.

"Yes," she said as he pushed into her deeply and with heavy force. Pleasure seared through her, and she felt as though she was about to explode into flames. She could feel every inch of his muscle as it moved in and out of her, and her hips bucked against him as each thrust slammed her back against the bookcase. It was loud and she didn't know how sturdy the old shelf was, but she didn't care. The only thing that existed for her at that moment was the two of them locked in lust and passion.

Ron's hands moved under her and cupped her arse, and he lifted her, allowing him to go into her more deeply. She clung to him, her arms around his neck as he began to ram into her. The pleasure built inside her with each stroke, and her breathing grew more ragged. Soft moans spilled from her lips while deep groans tumbled from his. Ron must have sensed that she was close because he broke away from her mouth and started sucking on her neck.

"Damn it, Hermione. You're bloody incredible," he said. Her fingers dug into his scalp as ecstasy rippled through her body. Ron's thrusting and his nibbling on her neck tensed her in heat, and she clutched at his muscle. "Give it to me," he demanded as he tore his lips from her neck. His fingers dug into her arse cheeks as he groaned loudly and thrust harder. He hit something deep and powerful inside her and a surge flooded through her. Everything disappeared for a breathless moment as the pressure exploded inside her.

"Yes, Ron! Ron! Oh, Ron!" she screamed. She jerked and clawed at him and the white-hot light and pleasure took over her. Ron's own sensations released and he jolted against her and heaved a final heavy thrust into her. They both lost themselves in each other as their climaxes overtook them and gradually died out.

Time froze as he lay his face in the crook of her neck and their hearts beat together as the sharp pleasure faded, leaving a warm satisfaction in its place. Hermione held on to his neck tighter and kept adjusting. She opened her eyes and looked around her. The classroom looked the same as it had all term. So many conversations and tears and shouts and laughs and secrets had

been shared in the room. She closed her eyes and kissed the top of his head. So much had changed and for the better. That, along with the heat of what they had done, overwhelmed her.

"I love you," she said.

He lifted his head from her neck. "I love you, too. You're good at following my orders and swearing. You should do both more often."

"Don't press your luck," she breathed. She brushed hair off his sweaty forehead and ran her finger down his flushed face.

"Will you at least admit that what we just did is the only way it could've been done?" he asked.

She would let him have it. She was too worn out to disagree. "Sure. It was." He kissed her again and eased out of her. They pulled away from each other and fixed their clothing. She handed him back his tie.

"Thanks," he said. "So, who won in here?"

She thought about it. "Let's just call it a tie and do the last of our patrol. I feel guilty enough. It was worth it, but I still have standards."

"I'll get that out of you one way or another," he said.

They went back to patrolling, but she had to admit that she had nothing left to give. She had been thoroughly worked, and all she wanted to do was rest. She and Ron eventually walked hand-in-hand back to his room when their shift was over. They stopped when they reached his door, and she felt like it was finally safe to let him go. Hermione held on to the sides of her skirt. She didn't know what to say. She was still tingly and slightly mental from their activities, and she was still adjusting to the idea of becoming Head Girl. It was all so much.

Ron rubbed his neck. "Do you want to sleep with me?"

"I think I already did that," she said.

"Cheeky," he said, "but you know what I mean."

"I don't know. I've been awfully indulgent lately with the rule," she said. She was extremely tired and nothing sounded more appealing than snuggling up next to Ron, but she wasn't sure how many more rules she could break and how many more times she could be bad before setting a record.

"It's just been for us and the prats," Ron said.

"I believe Harry and Ginny are their names," she said.

"See? You knew whom I meant," he said. "Look, it's the last night I'll ask. I promise. We'll just go in there and go straight to sleep. No side chatting and no more shagging."



"Are we so bad that we have to promise each other that?" she asked, feeling proud of the fact.

"I told you. We have major addictions," he said, "but I'll do everything in my power to keep us in order."

"You really mean it?" he asked.

"You can count on me," he said. "I just want to hold you. Is that so bad?" He looked at her with his huge and gorgeous blue eyes and she melted. He had her. Ron always had her like he had said, but her weakness for him wasn't something that she was ashamed of. Ron was the only person she trusted enough to give in to so extremely.

"No. That's not so bad," she said. "You know, I get that during the meeting you were trying to get to me, but I actually found it a little romantic. You saying all that in front of everyone was sweet and brave." She got on her toes and kissed him. "It's one of the sweetest things you've ever done."

He put his hands on her lower back to help her stay in place. "What can I say? I'm a man of many talents. Besides, it wasn't a big deal. I'd stand on top of the Astronomy Tower and tell everyone how unbelievable you are. You know I would."

"Yes, but let's not try it," she said. She gave him one more kiss before letting him go. "See what it's like in there."

"Okay." He put his hand on the knob and looked back at her. "If you think that what I did tonight was good, then just wait."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Don't worry about it. Trust me," he said. Thankfully, the other boys were either out of the room or had their curtains closed. Hermione quickly snuck in and jumped into Ron's bed. He shut the curtains around them, and she stripped out of her clothes.

"I do have my shirt in here, right?" she asked.

"Yep. You left it the last time." Ron reached under the bed and handed the orange Canons shirt to her. He started to change as well and she watched him. His long and milk body was so attractive and wonderful, and it still made her hot and weak in the knees.

He caught her watching him. "Remember the agreement."

"Right. The agreement." She finished changing and only looked at his freckly thighs once more before they got under his covers.

"Goodnight, Ron," she said.

He kissed the back of her head. "Night, Hermione. I'm glad we agreed that I won."

"Excuse me?" She turned and faced him. "I thought we agreed that it was a tie? If we're going back on that, then I won. I had you in the cupboard, and I took you in the classroom. You didn't see any of that coming."

"But you did cum. In fact, you came screaming my name like I told you to, remember?" he said.

"That's unfair," she said. "What was I supposed to do?"

"Not let me win but you did. I won this, too," he said. "I got you to sleep with me."

She hit his bare chest. "You're horrible. I should just go back right now."

"You're not going anywhere," he said. He started tickling her and she grabbed on to his wrists and giggled.

"Stop that! We have to sleep. The agreement," she said.

"Bollocks. Like that was ever going to happen," he said. He started ticking her again and she covered her mouth as she squealed. She would regret not getting a complete night's sleep, but she wouldn't worry about it now. Sometimes it was best just to let things go and enjoy the moment.

The rest of Hermione's exam week went by a lot slower than she would have liked, and the extra studying for McGonagall's exam had not been in vain because her exam proved to be difficult. All she could think during it and for the rest of the term was being Head Girl and enjoying her seventh year with her friends. Even on the night of the seventh years' graduation ceremony, she was distracted by what was to come. She checked her watch as she patrolled the corridors by the Great Hall. There was still so much time to go and she had nothing to do. She searched around the clear hallway and gathered that it would be all right if she grabbed a book from her room. She hurried there and as soon as she made it to the door, Lavender was already opening it.

She turned around. "What are you doing there, Hermione? Don't you have patrolling tonight?"

"I just want to get a book to read while I monitor," she said. She went over to her bed and pulled out her book trunk. She was thankful that she didn't have to read another textbook, and she picked up *The Scarlet Letter* in excitement. It was one of her favorites.

"Cool...um, can we talk before you go back downstairs?" Lavender asked.

Hermione sat on her bed and clutched her book. "Sure." Lavender gave her a small smile and sat next to her. Ever since helping her get ready for the dance, Lavender had been a bit more talkative to her. She still gave her snide comments, but Hermione felt as if they were almost at the same level they used to be before Lavender dated Ron.

"I want you to know that I plan on keeping in touch with Ronnie," Lavender said. "I'm going to write to him over the summer." She watched her as if she expected Hermione to burst into tears or possibly even slap her.

"That's nice," Hermione said.

She raised an eyebrow. "You really think so? I don't believe you."

"What? Are you looking for my approval?" Hermione asked.

"No. I don't need your approval at all, but I also don't want you to think that I'm starting anything," she said. "It's why I'm telling you."

Hermione wanted to snap at her and tell her that she was obviously trying to start a fight, but she counted in her head. It wouldn't always be this way and she kept telling herself that until her irritation subsided. "Lavender, have I given you an indication that I think that's what you're doing? I'm not in charge of you or Ron. If you want to keep in touch, then go ahead."

"I will," she said. "I want to be Ronnie's friend."

"Then be his friend," Hermione said. "He wants to be on good terms again as well, and I'm not going to get in the way."

"Good," she said. "That's really all I wanted to say."

Hermione considered getting up, but she had something that she wanted to discuss as well. "Lavender, I think we should talk about where this leave us."

Lavender looked at her apprehensively. "There's an us?"

"I don't know. I think so," Hermione said honestly. "I don't really think that we can pretend the other doesn't exist anymore."

"We've never been good mates, Hermione," Lavender said. "I know Parvati wants to believe that we can all go shopping together, but I don't feel the same way." Lavender may have been a lot of things, but Hermione did admire her boldness and how she was finally refusing to act fake around her.

"We don't have to act like we're something that we're not," Hermione said. "You being Ron's friend and me being his girlfriend doesn't mean that you and I have to be best friends. I think as long as we can reach some sort of understanding, then we won't have to argue to any further extent. We can be mature women, and we can be honest women."

"Mature and honest. That sounds super." Lavender flipped her hair and played with the bracelet on her wrist. She looked like she

wanted to say something, but she kept flicking the charms instead.

"Lavender," Hermione said. "Is there something you want to say?"

"Be quiet, Hermione!" she snapped.

"Fine. I have patrolling to do." Hermione stood and Lavender pulled on her shirtsleeve.

"Wait. Wait a minute." She pouted a little. "Oh, I was going to write this to Ronnie in a letter, but I guess I'll be a mature and honest woman if I just tell you now." She let out a sharp breath. "Hermione, I-I'm the one who told McGonagall that you and Ronnie were being disruptive that time in class. I don't know if you remember!"

"I certainly do remember," Hermione shot. "It caused some issues for Ron and I, and it didn't help my situation with McGonagall. Nice work."

"Don't say it like that," Lavender said. "You have no idea how upset I was when I saw you two all over each other--"

"Like you and Ron always were in every class all the time?" Hermione asked. "Why are you telling me this now?" She knew that she had been right, and she couldn't wait to tell Ron.

Lavender rolled her eyes. "To go along with your mature and honest idea. Anyway, it wasn't exactly the same thing, was it? You two were different, and it did my head in. I was right behind you, and I had to do something."

"I don't know how you truly expect to move on from this with that attitude," Hermione said. "You can't retaliate every time Ron and I are enjoying each other."

"Don't go there with me. Iâ€¦I got over it, okay?" she said. "I'm not going to apologize, but I want to set things straight. You don't know what it was like for me, Hermione."

"I don't?" she asked.

"No, you don't," she said gently. "Even when Ronnie and I were dating, I sat behind you two and watched you flirt. I watched him smile and talk to you so passionately just like he was doing with you in class that day." Lavender rubbed her finger over the L charm on her bracelet. "All I ever did was protect what I had with him and seeing you two that day really made me realize that it wasn't much to begin with. It was shit."

All Hermione had ever wanted was for Lavender to accept that Ron wasn't the person for her, and hearing and seeing her begin to understand it was both a relief and also a little heartrending. "I don't think it's exactly like that, Lavender."

"I'm a big girl, Hermione. I can take it." She flipped her hair again. "It's not your business butâ€¦I wanted him to be my first."

That's how serious I was. We had an opportunity to one time, but all he could think about was you. I always had a feeling, but I knew for sure then."

The night of the Christmas dance was one night that Hermione had buried into the back of her mind. She didn't want to think or talk about it, and she definitely didn't want to tell her that she had seen them that night. "Lavenderâ€¦!"

"All I'm trying to say is that you have no idea how much he loves you, but I think I always did," Lavender said. "That's the difference between us, and it's why you don't understand. Everyone saw it but you." Hermione couldn't help herself. She smiled and the sickness she felt disappeared. It had been what Dean, Harry, Ginny, and even Mrs. Weasley had said. Ron had always told her that he loved her more than anything, but how far back his feelings originated from touched her deeply. She still couldn't believe how blind she had been for so long. Lavender didn't seem nearly as happy about the revelation as she was. She had to focus.

"I don't think it was just about me," Hermione said.

"You weren't there," Lavender said. "You don't have to treat me like I'm thick."

"I'm not, and it doesn't matter if I wasn't there," Hermione said. "I'm not denying why he didn't want to, but I know it's not as simple as you think. Ron's a good guy. We both know that. He cared about you, and he didn't have sex with you because he didn't want to hurt you. It was about you as well. I mean, would you have honestly wanted your first time be with a guy who was just trying to appease you and wasn't completely there emotionally?"

Lavender frowned and tensed her brow like she usually did when she was thinking hard about something. "I guess I never thought about it like that."

"Have you ever given him a proper chance to explain?" she asked.

She shook her head. "No. We both just sort have forgotten about it."

"It might be something worth discussing with him," she said. "He puts more thought into things than people give him credit for."

"And he never told you about it?" Lavender asked.

"He mentioned one time to me that you two almost got serious, but that was all," Hermione said. "It's your business with him, so talk to him about it if it's still bothering you."

"I might," she said. "Thanks. I hope you're right about Ronnie's feelings. It sounds enough like him."

"It is him. I have to go." Hermione got up and went to the door. She turned back around. "Lavender, what color would you say his eyelashes are?"

She shrugged. "Duh, red. Like his hair."

Hermione gave her a nod. "Alright." She gripped the knob again. "If you really want to start over with Ron, then you should probably start calling him by his actual name. Ron works just fine for him, and he likes it best." She walked out of the room and went back downstairs to her assigned section.

When she turned down the corridor leading to the Great Hall, a flash of red made her heart skip a beat. Ron was sitting on a bench and when she got to him, he clicked his teeth with his tongue. "You haven't been guarding your post. Naughty."

"And apparently nor have you," she said, sitting next to him.

"I have a good reason," he said. "No one's around. I'm bored, and I want to see what you're up to."

"I guess I have good reason, too," she said. "I'm bored, so I got a book. You can go back now."

"No. I think I'll stay here. I like the company better." He leaned back and looked at her slyly. She wanted to tell him that they each had a different and important responsibility, but it truly didn't matter to her at the moment.

"Fine. You can stay," she said.

"Really? That's all you're going to give me?" he asked.

She considered telling him all about her conversation with Lavender. She wanted to tell him that she understood and cherished his love for her, and that she had been right about who told. However, being right wasn't important to her and her talk with Lavender had been something private between them. She wanted it to stay that way. "That's all," she finally said. "That, and you might want to find something to do. I'm going to read."

He leaned his shoulder against the wall so that he was Quidditch facing her. "Will you read to me?"

"My book?" she asked. "You want me to read The Scarlet Letter to you?"

"Uh-huh," he said.

She gave him a look. "You don't know anything about this book. It's a Muggle novel."

"Sorted. You know how much I love Muggles." He took her hand and kissed her knuckles.

She watched his full and supple lips press down on her hand, and she gave the slightest shiver. "You'll probably think it's boring."

"I don't care," he said. "I like listening to you."

"Since when do you do that?" she asked.

"Always," he answered. "I told you. You don't notice it, but you always have my attention. I'd love to hear you read the scarlet jumper."

"Letter," she corrected.

"Whatever," he murmured. "I'm all yours."

His words meant so much more than he'd ever realize and once more there was no point in pretending that she hadn't already given in. "Alright. Let's begin." She took out her bookmark and found the passage where she had left off. She glanced up and Ron was still looking at her. His crystal blue eyes were stuck on her, and she knew that she had him.

"I'm all yours," he said quietly again.

She gripped her book. "I know you are, Ron, and I love you so much for it."

"I love you, too." He leaned forward and kissed her before taking his place.

"Mmm, you taste really sweet," she said.

"It's my sugar quill." Ron pulled the wrapped candy piece out of his pocket and began to suck on it. Hermione tucked her bottom lip in her mouth for a moment to savor the taste of him. She moved a little closer, and he rested his hand on her knee. She looked at his lashes that were in fact golden and not red, and the tiny fact brought her so much clarity and reassurance. She and Ron were meant to be. It was as simple as that.

She licked her lips and began. "When the young womanâ€”the mother of this childâ€”stood fully revealed before the crowdâ€”"

"Alright, I think we should make a pile for things you're taking back and things that can be put in the bin now." Hermione surveyed Ron and Harry's beds and all the mess that was scattered. There were clothes and papers and miscellaneous items that she didn't want to know about all around them. She put her weight against Harry's bedpost and shook her head at the madness of it all.

"Mione, it's all going back in the trunk," Ron said. He flopped on his bed and started pulling things out of his school bag and dumping them into his trunk.

"He's right. We'll have all summer to look through this rubbish and decide what we're keeping." Harry sat as well and dug around

in his trunk. "Brilliant. I knew I brought extra quills!" Hermione closed her eyes and counted in her head. She told herself that Ron and Harry waiting until the last night of the term to pack was fine.

"Can we at least get all your clothes together?" She kicked a crusted sock away from her. "It's disgusting the way you keep your dirty linens out in the open."

"We're blokes," Ron said.

"And what does that mean? Is decency reserved for females?" she asked.

"Just about," Harry said. "Come on, Hermione. It's fine. We'll get it done. Just sit down."

She moved pairs of jeans out of the way and sat next to him. "I only want everything to go smoothly in the morning."

"They will. I promise," Harry said. "We go through this each term and each term we get it done, yeah?"

"I guess," she said. She looked at Ron. "Do you promise as well?"

He rolled his eyes. "Yes, my lady, I promise." He delicately put his glass chess set back into its case, and he grinned at her while he did it.

"What about you, Hermione?" Harry asked.

"Sorry?" she said, pulling her eyes away from Ron and their moment.

"She's been packed since last October," Ron cheeked.

"Hush it," she said. "There's nothing wrong with getting things done early. I'll have you know that I packed throughout the week. As a result, I can peacefully go to bed tonight."

"We'll be going to bed peacefully, too," Harry said with a grin.

"Why is that?" she asked, eyeing him. Harry looked down and shrugged.

"He's going to bed peacefully because after tonight we'll be able to wake up whenever we want to. Right, Harry?" Ron said, throwing a crumpled piece of parchment at him.

Harry cleared his throat. "Yes. That's what I mean."

She crossed her arms. "I know you two are lying, but I'll let it go for the last time. I mean it. Next term there will be no more of this."

"We know. Bloody hell, you've been threatening us all week," Harry said with a laugh.



She hit his arm. "They aren't threats. If I'm really going to be Head Girl, then I'll have to be more authoritative. I honestly won't be able to be so lenient."

"Lenient? Is that what you've been?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, mate. This is the easygoing version of Hermione. What we'll get next term will be the finished model," Ron said.

"Then I better bring back something to protect my bollocks," Harry said.

"Make it two," Ron added. "You might need one for your arse as well. Hermione plays for blood." They burst into laughter and Hermione hit Harry's arm again and threw a shirt at Ron. They continued to laugh and she glared.

"Maybe I should just leave!" she shot. "I can terrorize my new best friends when I find them."

"Hermione, you know we're just taking the piss," Harry said, clutching his stomach from all the laughter.

"Hush it!" she said.

"No, honestly. We're sorry," Ron said. "There's absolutely nothing wrong with you. You're perfect."

"Could've fooled me," she said.

Harry touched her shoulder. "Really. We're prats, so don't listen to us. You've been great this year, and we appreciate you keeping us all in line."

"Of course we do. She's the reason we hopefully passed our exams, and the reason we'll be able to leave tomorrow," Ron said. He smiled at her. "If it wasn't for you, then I'm sure Harry and I would've gotten expelled for taking up on our plan to tie Malfoy to the Whomping Willow, or at least burying Snape under it. You save our arses every year."

"Don't try to talk your way out of this." Hermione waved a hand in indifference, but she was sure that her cheeks were pink.

"We're not," Harry said. "We're being honest. We're a handful, but you put up with it. Thanks for always being so great to us."

"Harry," she said.

"Oi, don't be smooth talking my girlfriend," Ron said. "I should be the one to tell her that she's brilliant and that her sticking around all this time makes us the luckiest blokes in the world."

"Ron," she whispered. She looked between them. They were obviously trying to get back on her good side, but their words touched her nonetheless. "You two are my best friends. Nothing I do for us is a chore. I'd do anything to keep us like this. I never want us fighting or not being best friends ever again." She

let out a heavy breath as she thought about their year and all the heartache they had gone through.

"Hey." Ron got on the floor and shuffled over to her. He rested his arms on her legs and looked up at her. "We're fine. The three of us are okay, and we're going to be from now on. No more bullshit." Ron's eyes darted to Harry as his last words came out and Harry nodded.

"No more bullshit," Harry repeated. "It's over, and you don't have to worry, Hermione."

"I'll try not to, but you know me," she said. She took Harry's hand and Ron's. "I love you two more than anything else in my life."

"We love you, too." Ron kissed her and Harry pulled his hand away.

"And there it goes," he sighed.

"What are you on about now?" Ron said.

"That! That snog," he said with a frown. "Up until now we had a nice trio friendship thing going on, but the kiss ruined everything. I can't be a part of that."

"We can still threesome, Harry," she said. The moment she got the word out, she gasped and slapped a hand over her mouth.

Ron's jaw dropped, and Harry's eyes grew. "Hermione—"

"No! I didn't mean it like that!" she said.

"You naughty little witch," Ron said, shaking his head. "I should've known—"

"You don't know anything!" she said with a groan. "I just mean that the three of us can still have this moment—without it—"

Harry grinned. "Hermione, I appreciate the offer, but I'll have to decline."

"Don't make me sick, Harry," Ron said. "Like she or I would ever want to threesome with you."

"I don't want to threesome at all!" Hermione said. It was a statement that she never thought in a million years she'd have to make. They didn't seem to be listening to her.

"Trust me, neither of you are at the top of my list. Sorry, but Ginny and I could do a lot better if we were ever into that sort of thing," Harry said.

"Git! You leave Ginny as far away from the word threesome as possible!" Ron said.

"Boys," Hermione said.

"Oh, so, you can but she can't?" Harry said. "I'm sure she'd love to hear that."

"Don't tell her. She'll end up doing it then send me the pictures of it just to spite me," Ron said. "You knowâ€¦if Hermione and I ever did do anything like that, it'd have to be with another girl. It's the only way I'd accept it, and I'd mostly be watching anyway."

"Of course," Harry said. "What bloke would want it any other way?"

"Ronald Bilius Weasley and Harry James Potter!" Hermione stood up. She huffed and shook her head at them. "You two are the mostâ€¦"

"Neanderthal?" Ron asked.

"Uncouth?" Harry added.

"Vulgar?" Ron tried.

"Juvenile?" Harry said.

They were smirking at her smugly, and Hermione glared again. She couldn't let them win. She picked up Harry's pillow. "No. How about depraved for you." She hit him in the back of the head with it.

"Ow!" Harry said.

She then walked over to Ron. "And despicable for you." She hit him as well then dropped the pillow.

"Ow!" Ron said, rubbing his head.

She pretended to wipe dirt off her hands. "How's that, boys?" Ron and Harry looked at each other and nodded. They both picked up a pillow and crept toward her. She backed up and held out her hands. "Now, now, boys. I was merely getting even. There's no reason to-ah!" She ducked right as Ron's pillow was swung at her.

For the rest of the time that they were supposed to be packing, Ron and Harry chased her around the room and hit her with their pillows. She yelped and they snickered as they continuously fought against each other with the cushioned weapons. Hermione hadn't laughed so much in her life, and it only stopped when Neville, Seamus, and Dean came back and found Hermione on the floor and Ron and Harry holding her arms down on either side of her. With the three of them panting and sweating and holding pillows, their conversation from before had apparently come back to haunt them. Ron rambled something about wanting to clean his broom outside, and Hermione went with him. She gave Harry a look of sympathy as they left him to explain.

"Do you think they'll believe him?" Hermione asked as she and Ron held hands and strolled around the grounds.

"Sure thing," he said, "but I reckon Seamus will try to make up something. He's been going on about trio love for years. The bloke is ridiculous."

"I don't deserve it, but you and Harry certainly do. All that threesome stuff was rude," she said.

He snaked his arm around her waist. "Aww, we were just having a go at you. Harry's smart enough to know that he's not allowed to even breathe another woman's name, and you know that my body only works for you." He kissed the top of her head, and she felt a little better.

"Two females my bum," she said. "I told you about that fantasy."

"I'm sorry, love," he said. "You're just so cute when you're distraught. I swear that I'll curse the limbs off anyone who ever tries to touch you, man or woman. It's you and me only."

She kept up her stern face, but she did believe him. "Well, you're lucky that I'm not as low as you are. I could tell you some ideas for you and Har--"

"Stop right there," Ron said. "Let's not ruin sex for me by bringing stuff like that into the conversation. You win, okay?"

"Good," she said, feeling accomplished. "So, where are we going? You can clean your broom anywhere."

He stopped walking and let go of her hand. "Alright, I sorta lied to you. I'm not going to clean my broom. It's not why we're out here."

"Then why are we out here?" she asked.

He spun his broom between his hands. "We're taking a fly."

"What? No, we're not," Hermione said.

"We are. You promised me," he said.

"When did I ever promise that?" she asked.

"When we were on my couch," he said. "The night it took every bit of my strength not to put my hand down your knickers."

She blushed. "Ronald Weasley." Whenever she thought about that night, she couldn't help but flush all over. It was still one of the most intense moments of her life. "First, I never agreed to anything that night. Second, even if I did, I already played Quidditch. You can't say that I didn't."

"I know and you were great, but this is different," he said.

"It's always different for you," she said with an eye roll.

"It really is different. I want to take you for a fly, that's all. No games. No teasing. Just you and me." He ran his fingers through her hair.

She closed her eyes. Ron's touches burned her, and she knew that they always would. They were too powerful to ever fade. "I don't know."

"I think you do," he said. "It's our last night here. Tomorrow we'll be gone, and we won't get this opportunity again. Just have one fly with me over the property. Like I said then, I'll protect you. I promise." He held out his hand but they both knew that he didn't have to. She would always go with him.

She took his hand, and he mounted his broom. She got behind him and held on to his stomach. "Flying scares me, Ron."

"I know, but you're always safe with me." He pushed off and Hermione shut her eyes and squeezed him. She felt the air on her skin and through her hair, but she kept her head buried against Ron's back. "It's all right, love. You can look. I know your eyes are shut. We're not going that fast."

She cracked open one eye and looked at the blotch of green and brown under her feet. Her heart was racing and she was nervous, but she was alive. "We're okay?"

"We're great," he said. "And we're almost there." He dipped down and Hermione shut her eyes again. Suddenly, the wind stopped and she felt them touch the grass. She peeked again. They were on the ground again and near the side entrance where they usually left to get to Hagrid's. Ron poked her. "You can let go. You survived."

Hermione let him go and stepped down. She straightened her clothes and rolled back her shoulders. "Yes. Right."

He chuckled. "You're so bloody gorgeous, Hermione." He took her hand and led her over to a tree. He sat down and took his bag off his shoulder.

"I take it that there not broom polish in there," she said.

"Clever woman," he said. She sat next to him, and he pulled out her music box and her bear.

"Those are mine." She snatched up the bear. "What are you doing with my Weasley?"

"I told you that I had something sweet planned," he said. "Thank Parvati for the props."

She kissed the brown bear and outlined the W on his jumper. The day of the tulips, the meal, the words, and the lovemaking blended and filled up her body. "I didn't actually think that you had something planned. I thought maybe you had just said that toâ€¦"

"I wouldn't do that," he said seriously. He lit his wand and sat it next to them for more light. "I mean what I say to you, and I like doing things like this for you, Hermione. I have it in me." He took out a yellow tulip on a small stem from his bag. "I put a protection charm on it to keep it fresh."

"Oh, sweetheart," she said.

"Come here," he said. She moved a little closer, and he put the flower behind her ear. He tucked more hair behind it as well. "There." He gave her a once over and rubbed his neck. "There goes the breathing thing again."

She kissed her bear and carefully touched the flower. "You're too much, Ron. You're everything and you win. This is the best way to spend our last night here. How'd you know?"

He took her hands and traced the lines on her palms. "I don't know. The other day I was watching you eat lunch and this idea popped in my head. I reckon I was in a good mood. It was nice to see youâ€¦"

"Eating?" she asked.

"Probably sounds weird but it was. You were eating, and you were healthy. You weren't in some hospital bed." He shook and started rubbing his fingertips into her hands very hard.

"Ron, I'm never going to be that way again," she said.

"It still doesn't change anything. What I saw." He looked down. "I can't live without you, Hermione. I know people say that to each other all of the time. Merlin knows how many times I've heard Seamus talk like that about Hannah, but I really mean it." He looked up at her. "I'm always going to take care of you and help you to take care of yourself. If for nothing else, then I'll do it because I want to be able to live." Ron never ceased to amaze her. Less than an hour ago he had been vulgar and teasing about threesomes. Now, he was opening his heart to her and giving her a loving intensity that made her weak yet stronger at the same time.

"Ron, you have my word. I'll stay okay. I swear." It was her turn to take his hands. She moved her fingers over his freckly fingers. "I can't live without you either. You and Harry laugh about it, but I keep things in order and on time so I don't lose them. I'm sometimes overcautious about us only because I can't lose you. If I ever had to again, then I don't know if I could handle it." They were quiet for a while as the pressure of the moment fell upon them.

"Do you think we've really changed?" he asked. "Are we different people from when term started, you think?"

"I do. I think we've changed a lot. That fight we had, when you found out about my game with Harry." Hermione almost winced at the memory. It was such a dark place, but she'd never let herself

truly forget. She had learned from it. "I think it broke something in the both of us, and something better grew out of it."

"I guess that's good," he said quietly.

She rubbed over the slight callus on his hand and was attracted to its roughness. Ron was a rough bloke, but he was also gentle and sensitive. His duality was his greatest quality. "You know, Ron, I promise that I'm never going to miss another one of your birthdays. I've wanted to tell you that for ages. I always want to wake you up and tell you to open your presents."

"Then I reckon I'll always tell you to go away and let me sleep for another ten minutes," he said. "Lay back with me." He opened his legs and she rested against his chest. He wrapped his arms around her, and she put her arms on top of his. They intertwined their fingers, and it was perfect. Ron was holding her. She was holding Ron. It was simple, but it had so much history and struggle and emotion behind it.

"I think something we can both agree on is that we'll be together for whatever happens or doesn't happen next. We'll always be together for it, right?" She tilted her body so she could look up at him.

"Right," he said. "I've got you now." He bent down and she rose up so their mouths connected. They parted their lips, and Hermione moved her tongue all around his. He tasted so good and felt so incredibly.

She licked his bottom lip and gave it a nip before breaking away. She felt a little dizzy. "Your lips are so soft, Ron. Have I ever told you that?"

"Maybe once or twice," he said. He brought her hand to his mouth and kissed her fingertips. "I think we also had a conversation about what was soft on you." He put her pointer finger to his mouth and sucked it.

She whimpered and pushed it in further in for a moment before pulling it out. "You're bad."

"And you're good," he said. "You're just so bloody good." He gazed at her powerfully. "You know that I want you, don't you?"

"Yes," she said. "I want you, too."

He squeezed her inner thigh, making her jump and gasp. "Yeah, I reckon you do, but tonight I'm actually going to suggest that we don't shag."

"You?" she asked in amazement. "Did I hit you too hard with the pillow?"

"Ah, you do have jokes," he said, pinching her. "Honestly, it's not why we're here. I brought you out here so we could spend our last night like this. Us just being together. I mean I love us

having sex and all, but it's not always about that. I hate those blokes who just expect it as some sort of reward or something when they're nice to their girlfriends."

Hermione was at a loss for words. If Ron wasn't a knight, then she didn't know who was. She put her hand on his cheek and caressed it. "You're perfect, Ron. I'll hex anyone into a million tiny pieces if they tell you differently."

He raised his eyebrow. "Really? Hmm, that means a lot. I also reckon that I'm a bad influence on you." He kissed her tenderly and adjusted the tulip on her ear. Hermione took her place back against his chest, and she opened the music box. She closed her eyes and put her hands back on his as he held her and swayed them a little. It was almost like they were dancing, and it made Hermione quietly moan. Ron held her tighter. He smelled good and with a hint of apples. She could feel the strong rhythm of his heart against her back and his chin rested on the side of her head, almost like added security. She felt absolutely safe and peaceful and in love.

The next morning Hermione woke up extremely early. The last day of the term always had her stomach in knots. She got dressed and checked over everything as inaudibly as she could, for her two roommates were still asleep. When she was sure that she was ready, she went down to breakfast. It was usually near empty at this time and especially on the last day. She walked into the hall and looked around at the mostly empty benches. The Gryffindor table had a somewhat tall and small bloke slumping over a bowl of cereal. She walked over to the mass of dark, messy hair and tapped his shoulder. "Long night?"

Harry jumped and dropped his spoon. "Don't do that, Hermione, and it was."

"I figured this much." She sat next to him and lifted his head. His face was pale, but his eyes were as large and brilliantly green as ever. "How much did you all have?"

"Nope. I'm not saying anything. I don't care what mind tricks you have ready." He took another bite of cereal. "Besides, I'm fine."

"I'm glad you are. It means that there won't be any surprises today," she said.

Harry yawned. "Can't be. We're finally leaving this place. It's about time!" He raised his fist, and it made her laugh.

"You're mad, Harry," she said.

"So was leaving me last night to explain to everyone why Ron and I had you pinned to the floor," he said. "Seamus wouldn't stop with his ideas about what the three of us were doing."

"Ron warned me that he might do that," she said.



"Compared to some of his other material, he was pretty tame last night," he said. "I reckon he was on good behavior so Ron wouldn't hit him again."

"Again?" she said.

"Shit," he said, rubbing his eyes. "Well, whatever. Ron deserves it for leaving me alone to explain everything. You see, he punched Seamus once for bringing you into a conversation."

She gaped at him. "What was it about?"

"Let's just say that you would think it's depraved banter," he said. "It's how he got the black eye."

"Ronald Weasley!" she said, looking around as if she would find him.

"It's fine. It was a long time ago. Anyway, you can't get mad at him. Last night turned out all right, yeah?" he asked. "He told me what he had planned."

"It was beautiful," she said in an airy breath. "I had such a great time."

"Brilliant. It should always be that way. I don't want to have to kick his arse for not making things special for you." Harry took another bite of his cereal. Hermione felt a strong urge of admiration, so she leaned forward and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "What was that for?" he asked, touching his cheek.

She rubbed his arm. "Because even when you're hung over you're amazing. Those things I said last night, I meant it all."

"So did I," he said. "Even a few months ago I didn't know where the hell we'd all end up, but here we are."

"It's all I've been thinking about," she said. "Leaving today really marks something. More than it has previously." She poured herself some juice and noticed a slight red mark under Harry's earlobe. "You and Ginny have a good time last night?"

"We made room for some mild entertainment," he said.

"As long as you were safe, I'm happy for you," she said. "You have no idea how happy I am for you and Ginny and for how things worked out."

"Thanks," he said. "It wasn't even too bad with Dean last night. We got on all right."

"I'm glad," she said. "If there can be some hope for Lavender, then I'm sure there can be hope for Dean. He's a great guy."

Harry nodded. "Look, I wanted to say this last night, but I didn't think that it was right to in front of Ron. It's a horrible thing to say, but I think that everything we did with

the game or whatever needed to happen. I'm grateful that it happened."

Her appreciation for Harry grew. Sometimes they knew each other so well, and their minds interlocked to form the same thoughts and feelings. "So am I, and I'm glad that I did it all with you." She took his hand. "I haven't forgotten what we've been through together. It means so much to me that we're sitting here together right now. This will always be something that we have together."

He gave her hand a squeeze "I reckon this wasn't just about you and Ron or me and Ginny."

"No, it's about us, too," she said. She gazed at Harry and she could tell that he wanted to say something more, but instead he pulled his hand away and slid a jar over to her.

"Here. I know you like the strawberry marmalade best," he said.

"You're so kind," she said.

"Don't act so shocked," he said. "Ron's not the only one who can do nice things for you. It took a lot to get the jar to you." She rolled her eyes, and he continued to pretend that he wasn't hungover.

After breakfast, Hermione went up to her room to get her things. It was finally time for the students to board. She opened the curtains on her bed and stripped the mattress. "I've been looking all over for you," Parvati said, rushing into the room.

"Sorry. I've been wondering about," she said. "I'm usually like this the last day."

"I know, Hermione," Parvati said. "We've been roommates for five years." She handed her a slip of paper. "It's my home address. You should write to me and let me know when you'd like to do something."

"You want to do something over the holiday?" Hermione asked.

"It's what friends do," she said, "and you'll definitely need to get away from the boys every now and again. We'll have a girls' day out. You should bring Ginny, and I'll bring Padma. Possibly even Lavender if things go okay, and we can have a sleepover at my house afterward."

She actually did want to spend time with Parvati, and the idea of spending an entire day and night with only girls was both uncharted and pleasant. "That sounds lovely. I think I could use a few girls' day."

"Even if Lavender is invited?" Parvati asked.

"Yes, even so," Hermione said. "It'll hopefully do some good."

Parvati giggled and jumped. "That's excellent! I can't wait. Please, be sure to write me."

"I will. I'll give you my address, too, and Ron's as well. It's where I usually spend most of the summer," Hermione said. She reached into her schoolbag for paper and wrote it down. "We should've exchanged addresses years ago, but that's my fault. I'm sorry that I wasn't always so open-minded to you. You're a great friend, Parvati, and you've done a lot for me this year."

"It's forgiven and forgotten," Parvati said, waving a hand. "I try not to dwell on things. Padma jokes that I'm a lot smarter than I look. Well, I need to go find Blaise." She gave Hermione a big hug. "I'll see you on the train. I'm sure you'll be patrolling."

"Most likely," she said, hugging her back. "I'll see you out there."

Parvati gave her a once over. "You should change into the white skirt. Leave sixth year with a bang, yeah?"

"What's wrong with my jeans?" she asked.

"Nothing but it's a pretty day and you look pretty in it," Parvati said. "Showing some skin doesn't take away any integrity. You can still be you and want to dress up a bit every once in a while. Trust me or at least think about it." She left the room and Hermione looked at herself in Lavender's full-length mirror. She didn't see anything wrong with her jeans, but sometimes she had to accept that she didn't know everything. She liked the skirt, and she believed in Parvati's words. She opened her trunk and took out the folded skirt. She could still be her and change her ways a little.

Hermione took her schoolbag and travel-on luggage downstairs. There were students everywhere, and she needed to make it to the Great Hall. She dropped her bag, and when she stood up again she bumped into Dean. "Dean," she said, touching her head.

"Sorry." He rubbed his forehead and chuckled. "You okay?"

"I'm fine," she said. "Have you seen Ron?"

"I think he's upstairs looking for something that he forgot to pack. Harry's helping him," he said.

"Those two," she muttered. "Are you boarding the train?"

"Yeah. Seamus and I are ready to go," he said.

"Good for you," she said. She didn't want to bring it up, but she couldn't help herself. "Did you say goodbye to Ginny? Even if you don't feel up to it, it might be a good idea."

"I did, actually," he said, looking somewhat pleased with himself. "She's in the hall and I told that I hope she has a great holiday and that I'll see her next term. It's not muchâ€¦"

"It's plenty," she finished. She swiftly took out some paper and wrote her number using her hip for support. "I know you and I haven't spoken as much this year as we usually do, but you're still my friend no matter what's going on between you and Ginny and Harry. I care about you, and I'd love to talk to you sometime."

"Same here," he said, taking the paper. "This is a phone number. I haven't seen one of these since I left home."

"Exactly," she said. "I'll be at my parent's house for a while. Feel free to ring me. I'd like to catch up, and it will be so nice to talk to someone from school on the phone. Sometimes I really think Muggles have it better with technology."

He grinned and his cheeks rose and made him look so much more handsome and charming like he had always been before everything had happened. "Cheers to that. Alright, I'll do that sometime."

She gave him a small hug. "If you see Ron and Harry, tell them that they're in trouble."

"It'd be a pleasure," he said.

Hermione kept walking to the Great Hall. McGonagall was at the front of the doors. "Ms. Granger," she said.

"Professor, it's a bit busy today," she said, almost out of breath.

"It unfortunately is. I'm surprised that I found you so soon," she said. "You and Mr. Weasley will take the first sweep of the train when it takes off. I want everyone to get a rotation this year, especially with all the commotion today."

"Yes, Professor McGonagall," she said. "As soon as I find Ron, I'll tell him."

She smiled. "Thank you, Ms. Granger. It's been such an honor this year."

"For me as well, and I haven't let our conversation sidetrack me," she reassured.

"I have faith in that, Ms. Granger," she said. "I also have faith in my word."

"I'll be looking out for your letter. I won't let you down," she said.

"You never do, Ms. Granger. You never do." McGonagall shook her hand and let her continue on her way.

Hermione finally made it back into the Great Hall and was relieved to see a mane of red sitting on top of the table. "Ginny!"

"It's about time," she said. "Have you seen the guys?"

"They haven't finished packing," Hermione said, sitting on the bench next to her.

"Those prats," she said. "I asked Harry before we started messing around last night if he'd finished all his packing. The bugger told me yes. I shouldn't have let us go down on each other, or I at least shouldn't have let him pop his second one in me."

"Ginny, vulgarity," she said with a cringe.

Ginny shook her head as if she was distracted. "Sorry. Forgot that I wasn't talking to myself." She got off the table and sat next to her. "He's just so talented with his body. He's gotta be the best out there."

"I'll have to go with Ron on that one," Hermione said.

"Now that's vulgar. Yuck." She stuck out her tongue and ran her fingers through her hair. "I really want to go home. I want to lay in my own bed and talk to mum." Ginny smiled and it was the same sort of carefree and sincere look that Dean had given her.

"I ran into Dean on the way here," she said. "He told me that he said goodbye to you."

"He did," she said. "I didn't expect him to, but I'm glad that he did. It was okay."

"Okay is a good start," Hermione said, touching her arm.

"I like having your optimism around, Hermione," Ginny said.

"It's yours whenever you need it," she said.

She smiled even wider. "Ron's lucky to have you."

"I'm lucky to have him," she said. "I think things are in order now. With us and with you and Harry."

"Yeah, let's keep it that way this time," she said.

"Weâ€¦areâ€¦soâ€¦sorry," Ron said out of breath as he and Harry ran up to them.

"I thought we were all set?" Ginny said, looking at Harry.

"It's not his fault," Ron said. "I asked him to help me look for something."

"Sorry, Ginny," Harry said. "Ron needed my help." He gave her an expression that Hermione couldn't understand and for whatever reason Ginny's anger vanished and she looked back at him affectionately.

"Did you at least find it?" she asked

"Yeah." Ron reached into his bag. "My last supply of chocolate frogs. Couldn't forget these. Thanks, mate." He gave one to Harry and the two high-fived each other and ended it with a complicated handshake.

"We're bloody geniuses," Harry said.

"Are you serious? That's it. I'm leaving!" Hermione got up and pushed past them to lead the way. They boarded the train and Harry and Ginny took their stuff and joined Neville and Luna while Hermione and Ron did a sweep of the compartments. Hermione had never minded patrolling the train. It was serene in a way, and it gave her time to organize her thoughts.

"Granger," someone said. She sighed and turned around. Cormac was smirking at her. "Where's the trolley?" he asked.

"At the other end," she said. "You know the schedule."

"True," he said, "but I never got a chance to say thanks for all you did for the graduation ceremony. Your name was all over the itinerary. So, thank you."

"You're welcome," she said. He gave her what had to be his best smile, but it didn't register to her. She didn't even feel the least bit nervous anymore. "Well, have a good holiday, Cormac, and a good life, I guess." She started to walk off, but he took her arm.

"Same to you, Hermione. Maybe I'll see you sometime." His voice was low and his grip was firm.

"Possibly. If you come back to Hogwarts to see a game next year, then you'll definitely see me. I'll be in the Gryffindor section, cheering for Ron." She pulled her arm away and kept walking.

She finally made it back to her compartment. Ron was already sliding the door back. "We finished at the same time," she said.

"We're like magic, yeah? Move over, lot. Prefects are back." Ron sat next to Ginny, and Hermione sat across from him and next to Harry.

"We were just making a bet about how many new suits Malfoy will come back with next term," Harry said.

"Can't you leave him alone?" Hermione said. "He's not worth it."

"I told them to keep it down," Luna said, who was on the other side of Harry, said. "It creates foggy energy."

"It's all in good fun," Neville said, who sat across from her.

"I couldn't give a shit," Ginny said.

"That's because you're a Weasley," Ron said. "It's in our blood to hate the Malfoys, and the hatred for them is probably why our hair is so red." He put his head on his shoulder.

"Get off me," she said, popping her shoulder.

He didn't move. "Not until you feed me."

Ginny reached into her pocket. She unwrapped a chocolate frog and nearly shoved it down his throat. "There."

"Mmm. Thank you, sis." He gave her a loud, smacking kiss on the cheek and she pushed him away.

"Ew! I don't know where your lips have been," she said, wiping her cheek but smiling just the same.

Ron nudged his head in Hermione's direction. "Wellâ€¦!"

"Don't you dare answer that!" Harry said, standing up and pointing at him. Ron laughed but soon they were each hitting Ron in the arm and demanding that he didn't answer that, including Hermione. Watching Neville have a go at Ron made her laugh and she kept laughing for almost the entire duration of the train ride. However, it couldn't last. The train eventually took them back to the platform, and the holiday officially began.

Hermione helped guide out some of the first years and when she made it outside, she saw Lavender and Ron talking. She said something to him, and he smiled and nodded. She handed him a note as well and gave him a hug. Ron hugged her back and said something in her ear. When she let him go, Hermione walked over to them. "I wondered where you were," he said, taking her hand.

"We were just saying goodbye," Lavender said. The three of them went silent, and Hermione decided to end it. She had to end their mutual relationship and start over.

"I hope you have a nice holiday, Lavender," she said. "Parvati said that she might make a girls' day, so I'll probably see you sometime soon."

"She told me that, too." Lavender's tone was rather dull, but she covered it up with a smile. She looked between them. "Well, I need to meet my dad. Have a good summer, you two."

"Bye," Ron said. "I'll read this, okay? I promise."

"Alright." She smiled at him more sincerely, and Hermione could see the restraint that she was using. "Bye, Ron," she said. She gave Ron's hand a squeeze and Hermione a nod before walking off. Hermione watched her walk away. Hearing her not call him Won Won, Won, Wonnie, or Ronnie made her feel hopeful about their future relationship.

"I really hope you read her note, Ron," she said.

"I will, and I'll write her back. I'm not going to be a prick," he said. "Do you want to know what I told her before you came over?"

She almost said yes, but she knew that she didn't need to hear it. It didn't matter. "It's between you two. I don't need to be a part of it."

"Ron, Fred and George are coming up," Harry said, strolling up to them.

"Good. I'm gonna go find Ginny and get our stuff over there," he said. "I'll be back."

"Let me go with you to say hi," she said.

"Out of the question," he quickly said. "They wanted to be the ones to meet us just so they could bother you with questions about our relationship. Let me air them out. When you come to my house, they'll be fit for talking to. Trust me."

"Okay," she said. He patted her arm and ran over to them.

"Are your parents here?" Harry asked.

"Not yet. They're usually here later on," she said. "Where did you go?"

"I was saying goodbye to Cho," he said. "I'm not in any hurry."

"When will your uncle get her?" she asked.

"Soon," he said dreadfully.

"Cheer up. You won't be there long," she said.

"I know," he said. "I'll be counting down like I usually do."

"I'll write to you when I get home," she said. "Don't do anything rash. You'll get out of there soon enough."

"I'll make a small effort." He looked happier, but it rapidly faded. "Hell, I see Vernon's head from all the way over here. I better go."

She felt a small pang for him. "I'll see you soon, Harry."

"Yeah," he said. He looked a bit uncomfortable, and his cheeks flushed somewhat. "You really kept me going this year, Hermione, and I don't have a better way of putting it. No matter what happened, we stayed friends. You stayed with me, and there's nothing that means more to me than that."

"Where else would I go? I needed you as much as you needed me. I still do." She hugged him closely. "I love you so much, Harry. Nothing's changed, and that certainly won't."

He held her tighter. "I love you too, Hermione. I really do." He pulled away and kissed her cheek.

"What was that for?" she asked.



He smiled and he looked younger than he had all term. "For being the best thing I had this year."

"Oh, Harry," she said. "Write to me as soon as you get my letter so I can know how you are. We're still getting through this together."

"I will. Take care of yourself, and I'll see you soon." He ran over to Ron, Ginny, and the twins. Fred said something and Ron punched his arm. He shook Harry's hand and gave him a sort of sliding hug before dashing back over to her.

"We're leaving now," he said, "or at least after Harry and Ginny finish dry humping. I'm not sorry that you didn't get to say hi, by the way. They're brutal today."

"I trust you. I should probably start walking the other way to meet my parents." She stopped talking and stared at him. It was weird. She had talked about vacation for weeks, but now she didn't want it. Suddenly, saying goodbye to Ron was the hardest thing she had to do, and she had done it many times before. "I don't like this," she said.

"Me neither." He rubbed his neck. "Saying bye to you was always bollocks but now you're my girlfriend. Do we have new instructions?"

"I don't think so. I think it's just harder," she said. "Let's get it over with. I'll see you in a couple of weeks or so."

"Sooner than that. I'll come by. I have to meet your parents anyway," he said. He looked around frantically.

"They're not here. You're safe," she said.

He took her hand and laced their fingers. "I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you. Don't make fun of me for missing you already," she said.

"I'd never. If I wasn't me, then I'd miss me," he teased.

She slapped his arm. "You're rude. I swear youâ€!" She trailed off when Ron's mouth pressed against hers. She closed her eyes and wrapped her arms around his neck. He lifted her off the ground a little, and she moaned longingly. She knew people were watching, but she didn't care. They kissed harder and deeper until she thought that her lips would implode.

Ron put her down, and he looked dazed. "I can't wait until I can do that every night and every morning again. Harry and I are going to plan the swap. He'll stay with Ginny at night, and you'll be with me."

She felt excited already. "You're going to let Harry do that?"

"If it means that I get to wake up with you every morning, then yes," he said. He held her close. "We're going to have so much fun, Mione. I won't be satisfied until you're all mine again."

"That sounds like ownership," she said, running her finger down his nose.

"I thought we established that already?" he said. He kissed her again. "I really should go before I can't anymore." He pulled away from her slightly. "I love you, and I'll write to you tonight."

"I'll be waiting for the letter, and I love you," she said. "I love you so much that I can't bloody stand to say goodbye to you right now."

His eyes widened. "Youâ€¦you did it again. You did it again!"

"My best, right?" she said, blushing. "I got you."

"You can have this one. I swear, on your first day back I'm locking us in my room," he said. "I'm not going to hold back either."

"Don't. I'm not a delicate girl," she said.

He shook his head and kissed her hand. "I'll see you, Hermione."

"It won't be long." She pulled him over to her and kissed him. "I promise," she said against his mouth.

"I trust you." He tucked hair behind her ear before walking backwards so they could still look at each other. He only turned around when he bumped into someone. She laughed and waved at him. He disappeared with his family, and Hermione turned around and began to walk to other way. She felt hot and bothered, a bit sad, nervous, and a dozen other emotions. So much was dancing inside her, and she felt a bit foolish because she truly did already miss Ron.

Someone tapped her shoulder so she turned around. "Ron!" she said in a gasp.

He pulled her into another hug. "Didn't think you could get rid of me that easily, did you?" She didn't respond. She took in his smell and the feeling of his firmness and the sound of his heart before letting him go. He cupped her face and kissed her, and this time it was slow and soft. Their tongues slipped around and over each other's, and they held each other like it was the only way to breathe. They moaned and Ron squeezed her hips. He broke away and put his forehead to hers. "I needed one more to help me last the day."

"How'd you know I needed one as well?" she asked.

He traced her mouth and shrugged. "Soul mates?"

She melted. She was a Prefect, a future Head Girl, an academic, a friend, a best friend, a daughter, a girlfriend, and now a soul mate. Nothing had ever fit her life so naturally before. "I think you're right, sweetheart."

"I have my moments." He kissed her one more time and gave her a once over. "You look really beautiful day."

"I wasn't sure if you'd notice," she said. "I had jeans on originally."

"Hermione, I always notice. You're too bloody special not to get all my attention," he said. "Anyway, you should know that skirt, jeans, or Hagrid's stained underwear, you're incredible."

"You're vulgar and too much," she said. She felt tingling in her feet, and he had to go before she lost it. "You really should go before I take you with me."

"I know. I know." He held her again. "This time is for real. I'm not even going to say the usual stuff because it'll start the cycle over. I'll just say, bring a bathing suit and a picnic basket."

"For what and for when?" she asked.

"You let me worry about that, Ms. Granger," he said.

She had more questions for him, but she held her tongue. "Fine, I trust you."

He took her hand and laced their fingers. "Soon."

"Soon," she said. He pulled away and waved at her. She waved as well and once more watched him walk off and disappear. Hermione bit her lip and hugged her stomach. She felt something on her side. She pulled out a scarp of paper that had been folded covertly between her skirt hem and knickers. She frowned and opened it.

Okay, I'm a liar. We both know that I can't wait that long to see you again. My head will explode. I'm sure of it. Just have the materials ready tonight. I have your address, so I'm sure you're place won't be too hard to find. Meet me at the corner of your street at nine. I don't want to get too close to your house. Dad told me all about machine guns and plug-in toasters. I don't want your dad using them on me.

I love you. Ron.

Hermione squeaked and her heart began to race. She would see Ron for whatever plan he had in store for them. She couldn't wait to see him so they could enjoy their night and begin their holiday happy and together. It was all she wanted. She knew that things wouldn't always be so fun for them, but she was optimistic and she wasn't going to ruin it by worrying. Things happened all the time, but she'd always have Harry at her side and she knew that Ron wasn't going anywhere. The three of them would be okay, and

there would no longer be any need for games. Even though there were many unknowns in her future, there were also things simply written like Harry had told her.

She clutched the note in her hand. Ron had taken the upper hand by slipping the paper in her skirt when he hugged her. He could be so smooth. She was going to sneak out of her house and break yet another rule with him. Ron had made her break so many rules that year. He had made her swear and cry and laugh and scream and love more than she ever had in her life. Ron was her weakness, and he did have her every time. He was right about that, but overall she knew what was really important.

Hermione looked at Ron's note again and smirked. She read the, I love you. Ron., part over and over before looking up and putting it against her chest. Even though the game was over, there was still one truth that Hermione hadn't admitted to herself yet.

"I win," she whispered aloud.

\*\*\*\* RON/HERMIONE-FOR THE WIN! Well, there you have it! It took a few tries before I found the right note to end on. I thought something competitive between Ron and Hermione would be good because that's their personalities, but I also wanted it to sort of tie into the whole theme of the story and the whole "game" thing. For Harry, it was about finding his normalcy. For Hermione, I think it's a reassurance of what she has and a knowledge that she was right and will be fine. That's the type of girl she is.

So, I want to thank everyone again for all the reviews and messages and kind words. I can't believe it's finally over. I'm sad but at the same time I'm ready to move on. Written in the Sand has been a gem for me and even though I had my moments and angers and doubts and whatnot, I love it so much and it will be at my heart always. I really hope you lot enjoyed reading this story. I know it was super long but I have no regrets. All I have is optimism, like Hermione. :P

Well, important things to say is that I really hope that you all will Author Alert me or look to my page every once in a while or something because I'm about to start posting new things! I've already started them and they star the great ones, Ron and Hermione, of course. I've got some R/Hr chapter stories coming out and some R/Hr one-shots coming out as well. Please, check them out and my page. I will start posting new thingsâ€¦like yesterday, lol. So, as one thing finishes, something else will take it's place. I've been busy with R/Hr so it never sleeps for me. Don't worry, Turned to Real Life isn't being forgotten. It's my baby, and it'll always get tended to. I've got so much coming up for that story. I'm simply expanding my R/Hr story family.

Anyway, enough of that. Thanks for reading and REVIEW!  
RON/HERMIONE-FOR THE WIN! :)

CHEERS!