

“So this is a muggle house, is it? Goodness, look at all those ecklectic things! How marvellous!” Mr Weasley seemed to realise he wasn’t alone, and smiled abashedly at Harry. “Ready to go, Harry? Where’s your trunk?”

“It’s in the hall,” he said, turning to retrieve his things. When he returned, there was a fire in the grate.

“You boys go first, now. I’ll stay back and, ah, clear up the mess,” Mr Weasley said with a glance at the gaping hole in the wall. He pulled out a small pouch of floo powder. “Here you are, boys.”

Harry let Ron and the twins go first, then stepped into the fire and spoke his destination, squeezing his eyes shut against the whirl of ash that followed. He stumbled out into the kitchen at the Burrow, stomach churning uncomfortably. Before he could properly catch his breath, he was wrapped up in a tight hug. “Harry, dear!” Mrs Weasley fussed. “Welcome back. You’re looking a little peaky, have you eaten yet?”

Harry wasn’t sure how she could say he was ‘peaky’ when his skin was the darkest it had been in years, but he didn’t question it. “Good to see you too, Mrs Weasley. I’ve already had lunch, thanks.”

“Let him put his things away before you start feeding him, Mum,” came a deep, amused voice. Harry glanced over at the kitchen table, where Ron and George were sat with two older redheads Harry had only ever seen pictures of. The two eldest Weasley brothers, Bill and Charlie. “How’s it going, Harry?” the one who had just spoken greeted, holding out a burn-scarred hand for Harry to shake. Charlie, the dragon tamer, was shorter than Harry expected, with incredibly muscular arms covered in tattoos and a face that was more freckles than lightly tanned skin.

The eldest brother, Bill, rounded the table to shake Harry’s hand properly. Harry’s throat went a little dry. Bill Weasley was tall and broad-shouldered, with long hair tied back in a ponytail and a fang earring dangling from one ear. He looked so *cool*. Certainly not what Harry expected from someone who worked for Gringotts. He grinned, blue eyes sparkling. “Nice to finally meet you, Harry. We’ve heard so much about you, after all.” He winked. Harry’s stomach filled with butterflies.

“Yeah, uh, hi,” he croaked, then coughed. “Nice to meet you, too. I didn’t realise you’d both be home.”

“It’s the Quidditch Cup Final!” Charlie pointed out. “No way we were gonna miss it.”

Mr Weasley apparated into the kitchen with a pop, brushing plaster dust off his robes. “All sorted,” he assured Harry. “Not a spot out of place.”

As if summoned by all the noise, Hermione and Ginny wandered into the kitchen, stopping when they saw the new arrival. “Harry!” Hermione hugged him tightly, looking him over. “Wow! You look great!” Then she blushed. “You know what I mean. You look like you’ve been eating.”