"Come here a second," Harry said, taking pity on the redhead. Luna would have a terrible time if her date was scowling and sulking all night.

A few Cutting charms later, and there was a… marginal improvement. Harry managed to get rid of the lace, but there were a few frayed edges, and he could do nothing about the old-fashioned style of the robes themselves. For Ron, it wasn't enough. "I look ridiculous," he muttered, scowling at his reflection. Harry shrugged.

"Well, I tried," he said, heading back towards his own bed. Sirius had given him some hair potion that he insisted would tame the wild Potter hair — James swore by it, apparently. Harry was determined to at least *try*.

Twenty minutes later, Harry hardly recognised his own reflection. With a comb, the potion, and a little help from Dean, Harry's hair was more 'tastefully mussed' than 'dragged through a hedge backwards'. It was by no means neat — Harry thought that was asking far too much — but it was better.

"I think we're ready," Neville declared, appearing at Harry's shoulder. "Even if we're not, we have to go. McGonagall will kill you if you're late."

He had a point, so Harry bid the rest of his roommates goodbye and followed Neville down to the common room. Ginny was waiting, and the sight of her made Neville almost trip down the stairs. Harry steadied him, grinning.

The Weasley girl was in pastel blue dress robes with a sweetheart neckline, the cap sleeves made out of floaty sheer blue material. There was a gold pendant in the hollow of her throat, and her fiery hair was half-up in an elaborate braid, the rest hanging straight down her back. She had make-up on for the first time Harry had ever seen, her brown eyes sparkling as she turned to look at Neville. "Hi," she greeted shyly, hands behind her back.

"Hi." Neville's voice was a little breathless, and he coughed. "You look really pretty, Ginny." She grinned, giving a little twirl.

"Thanks! You look great. You too, Harry — I like the hair!"

Harry resisted the urge to run a hand through his hair, undoing all of his and Dean's hard work. "Thanks, Gin. I'd better go meet Susan, but I'll see you two at the ball?" He nudged Neville closer to Ginny, clapping him on the shoulder. "Look after her." He leaned in, kissing Ginny's cheek. "Look after him." Then, with a wink, he was hurrying out of the common room.

He'd agreed to meet Susan on the stairs by the Entrance Hall, and he sped past several people in dress robes on their way to meet their own dates. When he caught sight of her, he grinned. Her dress robes were a deep burnished gold colour, tight below her bust and flaring out over the curve of her stomach and the width of her hips. They shimmered in the candlelight, the full skirt trailing all the way down to the floor, and glittering beads embroidered on like constellations. Her hair was pinned up like a bright copper waterfall, and the earrings Harry had given her for Christmas sparkled at her ears. "Not bad, Potter," she said by way of greeting, eyeing him up and down. "I think I can handle being seen with you tonight."