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**Hells Bells**

by [PointGiven](http://archiveofourown.org/)

**Summary**

What if it wasn't Ginny who caught Harry's eye during his Sixth year at Hogwarts? A Half-Blood Prince AU. Features Harry/Katie Bell, Ron/Hermione and Ginny/Dean
I've reposted this from my story on Fanfiction where I go by the name of Point Given there. As you can tell from the summary, it's a Harry/Katie fic that takes place during Half Blood Prince and beyond. I generally like canon couples but I wanted to break out of my comfort zone and this pairing has always intrigued me. This fic will also feature Ron/Hermione (eventually, after the whole Lavender thing) and Ginny/Dean (I won't be spending much time on them, but I'm writing their relationship as happy, stable and successful) There will be no character bashing like I find a lot of alternate ships have.

The title of this fic is taken from a AC/DC song and obviously because of Katie's last name. If you have any other suggestions, please tell me. Update schedule will be on my Facebook page which you can find on my profile.

This is a dialogue heavy chapter since it's mostly setup for the future. I don't plan to have Harry and Katie immediately fall in love as that would be rather silly and unrealistic.

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter nor am I affiliated with Scholastic Inc, Warner Bros or their subsidiaries. Dialogue taken from the book will be in bold. My own writing will not.

Chapter written to Nightcall by Kavinsky

A few minutes later, Ron was cleared to do the same subjects as Harry, and the two of them let the table together.

"Look," said Ron delightedly, gazing at his schedule, "we've got a free period now...and a free period after break... and after lunch... excellent."

They returned to the common room, which was empty apart from a half dozen seventh years, including Katie Bell, the only remaining member of the original Gryffindor Quidditch team that Harry had joined in his first year.

"I thought you'd get that, well done," she called over, pointing at the Captain's badge on Harry's chest. "Tell me when you call trials."

Harry snorted. Besides Ron and Ginny, Katie was the one other person who he was sure would make the team.

"Don't be stupid," said Harry, "you don't need to try out, I watched you play for five years..."

"I appreciate the vote of confidence but, you mustn't start off like that," she said warily. "For all you know, there's someone much better than me out there. Good teams have been ruined before now because Captains just kept playing the old faces, or letting in their friends..."

She seemed to realize who was standing next to Harry as she finished her sentence.

"I don't mean you specifically Ron," she said hastily. "I mean just in general. Look at Slytherin. I heard Malfoy is keeping Crabbe and Goyle on the team, and they're not very good Beaters."
Ron did not look mollified. "I guess," he said moodily as he scuffed his feet, his head turning towards the nearby couches as if he wanted to sink into them and disappear.

"Well, Malfoy likes his enforcers," said Harry, who clearly remembered Crabbe's dirty hit the previous year, that had led to his yearlong ban for Quidditch. "But I wouldn't worry about it, if someone was better than you, they would have made the team last year during tryouts."

"Well, we really didn't test for Chasers," said Katie. "Angie thought we had a cohesive group already, so we just decided to do Keeper tryouts."

"Yeah, that was the first time I had detention with Umbridge," he said, his right hand twitching. "I remember Angelina was pissed at me."

Katie laughed. "You have no idea. At first she thought you were showing her up."

"What? Why would I do that?"

"Well that's what we tried to tell her," Katie replied, smiling at Harry's stunned expression. "She was stressed over the captaincy and preparing for the N.E.W.T.s that she wasn't thinking clearly. I mean, when was the last time you were disrespectful to anybody?"

Harry snorted. "You might want to ask Umbridge about that."

Katie grinned. "Okay, let me rephrase that. When was the last time you were disrespectful to anybody who didn't deserve it?"

Harry scratched the back of his neck, feeling slightly embarrassed. "Er…I don't really recall."

"Which proves my point. But anyway she's in a better place now."

"Thank Merlin for that," said Ron, who'd been in the receiving side of their former captain's displeasure more than once. "What's she doing now?"

"She's working for Nimbus Inc," Katie replied. "Apparently they're taking a beating thanks to the Firebolt taking first place in most broomsticks sold, so they're desperate for new talent. She's apparently working on the design of a new prototype."

"I'll have to keep them in mind," said Harry. He couldn't imagine anything outclassing his Firebolt, but if it did, it had to be world-class.

"I figured she'd have something to do with Quidditch," said Ron. "And Alicia?"

Katie sighed. "Well, she was going into banking. She got an internship at Gringotts and she was going to start in August…but her father disappeared."

Harry and Ron exchanged shocked looks. A sudden chill seemed to have descended on the common room, which had been toasty and warm scant moments before.

"Did it have anything to do with Voldemort?"

Katie flinched violently, a reaction that Harry was familiar with, but one which still made him want to roll his eyes every time.

"It's just a name," he said placatingly as Katie shook her head.

"You caught me by surprise with that," she replied defensively. "But, yes that's what we think. Her
father wasn't the type to go off on his own, and he had a grudge against Antonin Dolohov."

"Yeah, I know the feeling," said Ron bitterly. Dolohov had killed his Uncles Fabian and Gideon after a long protracted battle in which the two Prewetts had killed five Death Eaters.

"How's Alicia holding up?" Harry asked worriedly.

Katie shook her dark locks out of her face.

"Not well, poor thing," she replied sadly. "She had to take a leave of absence to stay with her mother. Mrs. Spinet had a breakdown after her husband went missing so Alicia has to care for her and make sure that Brian is doing alright too. He's her little brother, a first year here in Gryffindor," she added. "I've told her I'd keep an eye out for him, you know to help him fit in and study, especially since he's worried sick about his father."

"That's a lot to take on, especially since you have to deal with N.E.W.T.s too," said Harry.

Katie shrugged. "Anything for an old friend." She glanced over Harry's shoulder towards a blond haired boy descending the steps.

"There he is right now," she said, causing Harry and Ron to look around at the small kid.

"He looks so little," said Harry, marveling at how young the boy looked.

"That was you once upon a time," said Katie. "I remember how short you were when you showed up for our first Quidditch practice."

"Glad I could make such a memorable first impression," Harry replied dryly.

"Nah, your first impression was at your Sorting," said Katie. "The Hat practically slipped over your face."

Ron chuckled as Harry reddened. He had been very small for his age, probably on account of the ill treatment he had received from the Dursleys.

"Ah don't worry about it," said Katie. "You're taller than me now."

"It only took me six years," Harry replied with self-deprecation. Six years of Hogwarts food and Mrs. Weasley's cooking had certainly done wonders for his physique.

They watched Brian Spinet as he struck up a conversation with another short kid; undoubtedly one of his dormmates. Harry was pleased to see that they seemed to hit off, they walked over to two unoccupied chairs and sat down, still engrossed in their discussion.

"Well at least he seems to be making friends," Ron observed. "Hopefully that keeps his mind off things."

"For a little while perhaps," said Harry, his quiet voice tinged with sadness. "But he's going to dwell on his father for a long time."

Ron looked uncomfortably at his best friend. His hand hovered over Harry's shoulder as if he wasn't sure whether to clap him on the shoulder in solidarity or not.

Katie gave Harry a concerned look, but he waved it away.

"It's nothing," he said, his voice back to normal, "I was just thinking out loud. Anyway, I'll probably
start trials in a couple of weeks or so to give everyone some time to settle down with classes and schedules. What do you think?"

"You're the captain," said Katie. "But that probably sounds for the best. I want to see how difficult my N.E.W.T. classes are and figure out the best times to study and practice."

"It's fine," said Harry. "I'm new to this whole captain thing so I'll probably ask for some advice. After all, I was assuming you'd get it this year and I would next year."

Katie raised an eyebrow. "Why me? You're the natural leader, Harry."

Ron chuckled. "Good luck getting through to him. It took him forever to agree to starting Dumbledore's Army because he thought he wouldn't be a good teacher."

"That's exactly what I'm talking about," said Katie, looking at Harry with something like awe. "You taught over thirty students Defensive skills under Umbridge's nose all while the Ministry and the Prophet were going at you."

Harry's face turned red again. "Well, being a good teacher doesn't mean I'm a good leader."

A look on incredulity passed over the Gryffindor girl's face.

"Once again, let me rephrase that. You managed to take a bunch of students of different ages, from different houses and teach us all even though some of us didn't even believe you were sane. How is that not good leadership?"

Harry shook his head. That was immaterial. The only danger they had been in was expulsion. But when it came to life and death, he had failed miserably.

"Ron, show her your arms."

Ron frowned. "Why? They still haven't healed."

"That's the point," Harry said curtly as his best friend rolled up his sleeves. Katie gasped as she saw what lay underneath.

A lattice of grey ropes lay starkly on Ron's pale skin. The rope like scars began under the shoulder blades and wound their way around Ron's arm, from bicep to tricep, before terminating just below his wrists.

"They're not as bad as they were over the summer," said Ron as he shook his sleeves to cover his scars. "They were pitch black then. Madam Pomfrey says that they might completely fade away by this time next year."

"What on earth happened?" Katie exclaimed.

"I failed," said Harry. "You know that we were involved at the battle in the Department of Mysteries?"

"Yes, it was all over the papers."

"Did they tell you why we were there?"

"Well..." Katie began hesitantly. "The Quibbler said something about a prophecy, and I heard that the Prophet said that it named you the one to destroy You-Know-Who."
"I don't believe the Prophet," she quickly added. "Not after the hit-jobs they pulled on you last year."

Harry nodded. It might have been amusing that the Prophet was correct about the contents of the prophecy, if they hadn't spent the previous year playing right into Voldemort's hands by denying his return.

"We didn't go in to hear the prophecy," he began. "The true reason we were there was because I had a vision that my godfather had been captured by Voldemort (again Katie flinched) and was being tortured."

"That's awful!" Katie exclaimed out loud. She immediately clapped her hand over her mouth but the damage had already been done. The other students in the room glanced at them, some straining their ears to overhear what exactly Harry Potter was saying, so they could sort out fact from fiction. To her dismay, one of the people trying to listen in was her least favorite person in the entire House, Cormac McLaggen.

"Er…sorry about that," she said sheepishly.

"It's fine," said Harry. "But we should probably get out of here. I don't want people listening in."

The three of them walked out the portrait hole, ignoring the curious onlookers behind them.

"We were going to meet Hermione for lunch after she got off Ancient Runes," Harry explained as they navigated the labyrinthine castle, "so let's head to the Great Hall."

Katie jogged to keep up with the other two as they reached the main staircase.

"I don't understand how that makes you a bad leader though. If I saw that…vision, I'd want to do everything to help my godfather."

"That's what Voldemort was counting on," Harry said bitterly. "It was a trap meant to lure me there so I'd accidentally uncover the prophecy that the media's been talking about. Ron and Hermione almost died because of me. Ginny, Neville and Luna were all in the Hospital Wing because of me."

They had reached the ground floor as Harry finished listing his litany of failures.

"And my godfather died trying to save me. He wasn't even there in the first place; he came to try and rescue all us from my mistake and he got killed by Bellatrix Lestrange!"

"It wasn't your fault," Ron said quickly. "If anything it was Dumbledore's for not telling you that You-Know-Who would try and trick you."

"Maybe," Harry replied. "But it doesn't feel like it. If I'd just tried harder in Occlumency, if I'd just used that bloody mirror, I'd-"

Occlu-what? Katie couldn't make heads or tails of what Harry was saying, but it seemed that Ron did.

"Harry, you have to stop dwelling on it," said Ron. "Snape's responsible for what happened with Occlumency, and you didn't know what that mirror did anyway. Like Hermione said, you can't eat yourself up with what-ifs."

"Well said," said a female voice behind them. The three Gryffindors looked around to see a bushy haired girl standing at the entrance of the Great Hall.
"I knew you'd listen to me one day," said Hermione as they walked over to her.

"I listen to you all the time!"

"Only when I'm giving you answers," she said amusedly as Ron gave a cheeky grin back at her.

"Thank Merlin you're here, I'm starving!"

"We just had breakfast two hours ago!" Hermione replied as she and Ron walked toward the Gryffindor table

"I'll join you guys in a minute," Harry called over his shoulder. He turned back towards Katie.

"Anyway, that's my reason why I thought you'd be a better fit," he said.

Katie's liquid brown eyes met his green ones. She took a deep breath.

"Look, I'm sorry about what happened with your godfather, and I understand you must be going through a lot of pain, but that has no bearing on whether you'll be a good Quidditch captain or not. Quidditch isn't a life or death matter, no matter how much Oliver tried to make it seem so, so I don't see how your mistake at the Ministry is going to affect our team."

"I've been second guessing myself all summer," said Harry as he glanced over his shoulder at the Gryffindor table again. "I'm not sure if I can handle this on top of everything, that's why I wanted to ask you for help."

"What do you mean?"

"Put it this way," Harry said wryly. "I'm going to be very busy this school year, so I might need someone to help me in captaining the team."

Katie looked at the black haired boy with distinct shock.

"I know Charlie Weasley was co-captain in his fourth year, but that's only because the previous one missed half the season after a nasty wreck. I don't even think it's been done since then. Besides, I'm going to be pretty busy too. I have N.E.W.T.s and remember that I promised to keep an eye on Alicia's brother. I can't just start sharing duties unless you have a good reason."

Harry looked up to the staff table, but Dumbledore was not there. The Headmaster had told him that he could share the contents of the Prophecy, and his subsequent private lessons, with Ron and Hermione only. And he certainly couldn't tell her that he suspected that Draco Malfoy was a Death Eater and that he would be shadowing him to find out what his rival was up to.

"I can't tell you just yet," he said, with the barest hint of disappointment. "But I can say that the Prophet isn't always wrong."

Katie's eyes widened.

"You mean-?"

Harry nodded.

"Yes. But don't go around telling people, not even Angelina and Alicia."

Katie smiled. This had been the last thing she'd expected.
"Deal, I'll help you organize the team, but you're still the full captain. You have to tell me the full story, though!"

Harry smiled gratefully. He had desired the captaincy for a long time, but Voldemort's return had made him realize that there were far more important things in life...and Sirius's death had broken him. Not having to solely deal with the Gryffindor team would be one less stressful situation for him this year while he took Dumbledore's lesson and dealt with classes. "I'll have to check with Dumbledore first before I can tell you everything." he replied.

"Merlin's beard, Harry. You're working with Dumbledore? You know that's just going to make me even more curious!"

Harry snorted. "I told you I was going to be busy!"

Katie groaned. Now her curiosity was piqued, and like her older brothers could attest, that usually led to nothing good. "I'm going to grab some lunch," Harry said. "Want to join us?"

"I can't," she said regretfully. "I promised my friend Leanne that I'd meet her at the library to go over last year's Transfiguration notes. I heard McGonagall usually surprises the Seventh year with a first day test."

"Well that's good to know for next year," Harry said dryly as he started to walk towards the Gryffindor table.

"Wait," Katie called. She briskly walked over to Harry, who was standing between the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables.

"Please tell Ron that I didn't mean to insult him when I was talking about captains not letting in their old friends," she said earnestly. "I didn't want to single him out, I was just talking in general, like what happened with Cho Chang and Michael Corner."

Harry's eyes swept over the Ravenclaw table, but the two students in question hadn't arrived. "Why, what happened?" He asked, lips turning dry. Though their brief relationship had been dead for a while, he couldn't help but feel a twinge of regret for how it had played out.

"I heard it from Samantha Clearwater yesterday. Chang's captain now that Davies graduated and they needed a new Chaser to replace him. Well, apparently she just chose new boyfriend rather than holding tryouts. The entire Ravenclaw common room is angry at the both of them now."

Harry smiled ruefully. "I can't really say I'm surprised."

After all that had happened, Harry couldn't help but feel pity for Cho. He could now accept that Cedric had been her true love; and that she hadn't fully recovered from his death. She had only chosen him in an attempt to drown her sorrows, and connect with the one person who'd been with Cedric in his final moments. But that hadn't worked out; he couldn't provide the comfort that the needy girl required, and Cho's best friend had sold her and everyone else out under pressure from Dolores Umbridge.

Now she had jumped to yet another boy. Could Michael provide the stability that Cho needed? He rather thought not. From what Ginny had said in the train ride home last year, Corner seemed to be rather self-absorbed.
"You okay?" Katie asked, closely watching Harry's vacant eyes.

"Yeah, sorry," Harry said as he snapped back to reality. "Sorry, I've been…thinking a lot these past few days."

"Understandable," said Katie. From Harry's and Ron's reaction, it seemed the Prophet had been on the right track about the mysterious prophecy. She hadn't heard about Harry's godfather, but she could clearly see the feelings of regret that her teammate had about his death. If it had been her, she wouldn't just be lost in thought; she'd be a nervous wreck. How Harry could internalize that grief and responsibility and still stand strong was completely beyond Katie.

The sound of numerous footsteps echoed off the walls. The two Gryffindors looked around to see a surge of students walk through the entrance, ready to eat after their first classes of the term.

"Well I'd better head over to Ron and Hermione," said Harry. "I'd rather not be gawked at and whispered about for longer than necessary."

"Still not used to it, huh?" Katie teased.

"Well, it could be worse," Harry admitted. "At least they're not hostile like last year and when the Chamber was opened. Anyway, I'll tell Ron you didn't mean it like that," he said, as he continued onto the Gryffindor table.

"Thanks!" she called as she dashed around the oncoming rush of hungry students to meet Leanne.

"Everything all right?" Hermione asked when Harry had sat down.

"Yeah, we were just discussing Quidditch matters," Harry answered as he looked at the creamy sandwiches which had appeared on his plate. "Anyway, guess what Katie told me about Cho…?"

I figured that Harry would be feeling some self doubts over falling into Lucius Malfoy's trap at the Ministry, which is something I wish the actual Half Blood Prince book had explored more.

I also figured that Harry would have eventually told Ron and Hermione everything that had happened in Dumbledore's office after the battle (well except for smashing Dumbledore's stuff). It's one of those off camera things I figured took place during the summer Harry spent at the Burrow. I think Ron would've felt that Dumbledore was responsible for the disaster at the Ministry (remember how he wanted Dumbledore to come and fix Bill's injuries before he found out he was dead), especially to stop Harry from blaming himself, and that Hermione would partially agree.
An Unfortunate Conversation

Chapter Notes

All bold dialogue is from the book, specifically in the House of Gaunt chapter after Harry and Dumbledore have finished viewing Bob Ogden's memory.

The sky outside was inky black and the lamps in Dumbledore's office seemed to glow more brightly than before

"I think that will do for tonight, Harry," said Dumbledore after a moment or two.

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

He got to his feet, but did not leave

"Sir…is it important to know all this about Voldemort's past?"

"Very important, I think," said Dumbledore.

"And it…it's got something to do with the prophecy?"

"It has everything to do with the prophecy."

"Right," said Harry, a little confused, but reassured all the same.

He turned to go, then another question occurred to him and he turned back again. "Sir, am I allowed to tell Ron and Hermione everything you've told me?"

Dumbledore considered him for a moment, then said, "Yes, I think Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger have proved themselves trustworthy."

"But Harry, I am going to ask you to ask them not to repeated any of this to anybody else. It would not be a good idea if word got around how much I know, or suspect, about Lord Voldemort's secrets."

"I understand sir," Harry answered, but he did not leave.

"Another question, Harry?" Dumbledore asked, eyes twinkling behind his spectacles.

"Yes, er…I was wondering whether the same restriction applied to the prophecy."

Dumbledore frowned. "Well, I certainly do not think it would be wise to tell your fellow classmates about the prophecy, especially since we spent so much time preventing Lord Voldemort from hearing it in its entirety."

"I don't mean the entire prophecy," Harry said quickly. "Just the basic concepts. The Daily Prophet has been talking about me being "The Chosen One" already, so I wondered whether it would be wise to confirm that piece."
Dumbledore smiled. "You've already told someone haven't you?"

Harry scratched the back of his neck with embarrassment. "Yeah, I sort of let it slip to Katie Bell last week. I was asking her if she wanted to help me with some of the responsibilities of Quidditch Captain since I'm going to be very busy this year, and she wanted to know why I was so eager to share the position."

"That's fine," Dumbledore replied to Harry's relief. "But I would not make it a habit. Though, truth be told, it is not always such a bad thing to keep all of one's eggs in the same basket."

The Headmaster stroked his beard thoughtfully, as though Harry was not even there.

"Yes, why not? There may be a time you will be glad you told someone else other than your two best friends. However, I request that you keep the objective of our meetings secret for the time being."

"Yes sir."

Dumbledore smiled again at the boy in front of him. It seemed ages ago that he had dropped him off at Privet Drive for eleven years of neglect. Yet for everything that life's cruelties had thrown his way, Harry had grown into a remarkable young man.

"I must confess, Harry, that I am extremely proud of the person that you have become.

Harry lowered his head, feeling extremely awkward. "You told me this before, when we went to fetch Professor Slughorn."

"I know, and I'll say it again. You've been forced to grow up so quickly due to factors beyond your control. And yet you've never wavered from the goodness in your heart, the goodness that by all rights should have been driven out of you by your spiteful relatives, and you've never given into anger or hatred for the position you've been placed in."

"I had help," said Harry. "I don't know what I would have done if it hadn't been for Ron and Hermione."

"That doesn't diminish what you've done at all," said Dumbledore. "Take what you are doing with the Quidditch Captain position. By all rights you should be enjoying your new responsibility in a sport you love; and yet you act completely selfless by sacrificing your position so that you can concentrate on our lessons and your schoolwork, all so you will have the tools necessary to defeat Voldemort. Do you understand how truly remarkable that is?"

"I suppose," Harry muttered, aware that his flush had deepened. He could handle fighting Death Eaters and chasing a Snitch at over one hundred miles per hour, yet praise always managed to make him feel unworthy.

"You're too modest for your own good," said Albus as he noticed Harry's blush. Something which I'll have to remind Severus about, he thought.

"Anyway that is enough for tonight. I confess that I am not sure when the next lesson will be as I have work for the Order to do."

"Good night, sir," said Harry, turning away and walking toward the door. He was almost there when he saw it. Sitting on one of the little spindle-legged tables that supported so many frail-looking silver instruments was an ugly gold ring set with large, cracked, black stone.
"Sir," said Harry, staring at it. That ring."

"Yes?" said Dumbledore.

"You were wearing it when we visited Professor Slughorn that night."

"So I was," Dumbledore agreed.

"But isn't it… sir, isn't it the same ring Marvolo Gaunt showed Ogden?"

Dumbledore bowed his head. "The very same."

"But how come-? Have you always had it?"

"No, I acquired it very recently," said Dumbledore. "A few days before I came to fetch you from your aunt and uncle's in fact."

"That would be around the time you injured your hand, then, sir?"

"Around that time, yes, Harry."

Harry hesitated. Dumbledore was smiling

"Sir, how exactly-?"

"Too late, Harry! You shall hear the story another time. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Harry left the room, his mind consumed with speculation over how Dumbledore had injured his hand.

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…because the Draconifors spell has the ability to go catastrophically wrong, the following steps must be taken to ensure that the transfigured statue's flames do not exceed a length of three feet…

"Ugh, I can't do this!" Katie exclaimed as she threw her quill down.

"Shhhh!" her friend Leanne Sheffield hissed. She turned her parchment over and began to scratch out a new paragraph on the blank page.

"We've been at it for hours!" Katie exclaimed. "McGonagall's really piling on the homework this year. It's only our second week of classes!"

"Shhhh!" Madam Pince hissed as she threw her a disapproving look.

Sorry she mouthed.

"Look, we spent all of yesterday on Snape's essay on Lethifolds, you still have Slughorn's work on Love Potions and I have to work on three translations for Ancient Runes. If we spend too much time on McGonagall's work, we're not going to have enough time for any fun!"

Leanne sighed. "I know, but I really, really want to get an Outstanding for the N.E.W.T"

Katie rolled her eyes. Ever since Professor McGonagall had announced that all N.E.W.T. students
who received an Outstanding would be accepted for Animagus training after Hogwarts, Leanne had been going crazy for Transfiguration. She had heard from Angelina that no student had received that top honor in nearly a decade and that they hadn't completed the training, but there was no stopping her best friend. Leanne had told her that her great-grandmother had been a rabbit Animagus, and that she wanted to follow in her footsteps.

"I do too!" Katie exclaimed. "But it's so early in the semester. This isn't going to affect our tests in June. Besides, it's a Sunday, we're going to be swamped with work, we might as well enjoy the rest of our day off."

"I know, but still!" Leanne pleaded.

"Oh fine."

Katie reluctantly returned to her essay, but after a few more minutes of blank staring, she gave it up as a bad job.

"I'm going for a fly," she announced, earning another irritated look from the librarian. "I'll meet up with you at dinner."

"All right, have fun."

Katie walked back into the common room five minutes later to fetch her brand new broomstick, an early gift from her father for upcoming birthday. To her disappointment, Harry was not at his usual spot by the fireplace; she had wanted to discuss a schedule for tryouts now that they had all settled in for the new year.

"Bell!" called a familiar, hated, voice.

Katie turned sharply, her long dark brown hair nearly smacking a first year full in the face. "Yes, McLaggen?" she inquired icily.

The broad, handsome boy gingerly rose out of an armchair and walked toward her, hands spread apart like a politician wishing to appear friendly.

"Just the girl I was looking for," he said, in a voice apparently meant to convey flirtatiousness but which only served to make him sound even more arrogant.

"The answer is no, Cormac," she snapped. "It's always going to be no. When will you get that through your head?"

McLaggen's arms spread even further as an exaggerated look of surprise crossed his face.

"But you don't even know the question, Bell!"

"You've been trying to ask me out for the last two years, even though you gave me the worst time of my life at the Yule Ball!" she retorted sharply, nearly causing a group of nearby first and second years to jump in alarm.

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The seventh year boy laughed heartily. "Oh, certainly it couldn't have been that bad, Bell. We did have a nice dance, after all."

Katie snorted. After criticizing her dress for being too "tacky", McLaggen had nearly bowled her over three times during the dance, all the while insisting that she was dancing poorly and giving her tips on how not to embarrass him in front of everyone…as if people were actually there just to stare
"It was awful, you idiot," she said. "And it only got worse when we actually sat down to eat. If I wanted to hear all about every single thing you've done, I would have bought your biography…and then burned it!"

"Well you weren't so forthcoming about yourself," Cormac replied haughtily. "I had to make up for your shyness."

"Shyness? I couldn't get a bloody word in edgewise!" she exclaimed. "It was all, "I went on hunting with the Minister, I worked out a new trick for Quidditch, I passed Snape's class with one hundred and fifty percent!""

"What's your point? Who doesn't want to hear about all that?"

"Maybe if you'd done it in moderation," Katie replied. "Not all at once and not while dominating the conversation…if all that even was true. You made Gilderoy Lockhart look humble, for Merlin's sake."

"Hey! I liked Lockhart!"

"Which explains a lot about you," Katie retorted. "The man was incompetent and a liar."

Cormac's chest swelled with injured pride. "Since you seem so keen in throwing insults at me in front of the common room, I have to ask why you agreed to go with me to the Ball in the first place. After all, I apparently was such an awful date."

_Because Fred Weasley asked Angelina instead of me?_ Katie thought sadly. _Because all of the other guys in our year were fixated on Sarah, Leanne and Vanessa? Because I didn't want to look like an idiot during the biggest dance ever at Hogwarts?_ She didn't dare say so in front of Cormac, even if only second years and younger were listening in.

"I wish I knew why," she snapped. "That way I could take a Time Turner back and slap myself."

"I'd pay to see that," he leered.

Katie shot him a disgusted look. "Gross. Now move out of the way, I'm busy." She marched towards the stairs to the girl's dorm.

"Where're you going?"

"For a fly on the pitch, not that it's any of your business," she retorted, praying that he did not follow.

"You're not still on that old Cleansweep Eight, are you?" he jeered.

Katie couldn't resist taking the bait as she turned again to face him. "Actually, I just got a Numbus Two Thousand and Five," she said, a note of pride in her voice."

Cormac nodded. "A pretty decent broom if I may say so, however it's not going to keep up with the elite brooms."

Katie rolled her eyes. "And I'm sure you've got one of these 'elite brooms' lying around?"

"Of course," he said smugly. "My father shelled out for a Firebolt over the summer. The only other one who's got that is Potter, not even Malfoy does."
"You're joking!"

"I am not," he said. "Father bought it for me after he saw my latest grades. You're going to have to let me on the team this year."

Katie raised her eyebrows. "Why would I be the one to let you on the team?"

"Oh," said Cormac with the barest hint of complacency. "You're not captain? Who is it? Potter? One of the Weasleys?"

"Harry," she replied coldly.

To her surprise, Cormac broke out into a wide smile.

"Oh good, I'm guaranteed a spot then."

"Why would Harry let you of all people in? Aren't you a Keeper?"

"Yes, what's your point?"

"His best friend's Keeper," Katie pointed out. "And a damned good one, he singlehandedly won us the Cup Final last year."

McLaggen burst out laughing, his wide frame shaking with such mirth that he nearly knocked over Brian Spinnet who had turned to watch them.

"He had one good game, Bell!" he laughed. "Sure it was in the championship, but he did awful in the other matches. Even Potter could see that, and besides favoritism is a bad quality for Quidditch captains."

"Doesn't explain why you think Harry's going to pick you over Ron. You're an unknown quantity, after all. You were in the Hospital Wing last year after you took Fred's doxy egg bet."

"I did win a Galleon over that," he said. "Besides, I know Potter from the Slug Club."

"The what?"

"The Slug Club," McLaggen repeated. "Oh, you haven't heard of it? Slughorn's started a club for the best and the brightest of Hogwarts and we were both invited. I'm a cinch to get on the team."

"Then Slughorn's getting senile in his old age," Katie retorted. "Besides I thought you said that favoritism is a bad quality for captains to have."

"Well yes," said McLaggen, his eyes narrowed as if searching for a trap in Katie's words. "For friends, family and the like. But Potter knows me socially. Again we run in the same circles now; that's hardly favoritism, that's just recognizing a kindred spirit."

It certainly sounded like favoritism to Katie, but she was not worried. She would be stunned if Harry chose this idiot for Keeper, especially after Ron's dramatic improvement last year.

"Yeah well, you still have to pass the trials, Cormac," she replied. "And Ron Weasley's got a Cleansweep Eleven, you know, an actual Keeper's broom."

"The Firebolt is the broom of choice for international teams," he replied in the same smug voice as earlier. "Sure the Cleansweep Eleven has better turning for sudden saves, but the Firebolt's pure speed makes up for it."
"You sound like Lee Jordan when he does his commentary," Katie said. "Except you're not funny, or even likable."

"You wound me Bell," he said dramatically as a couple of First years snorted as his overacting.

Katie gritted her teeth, knowing that he would follow her if she went for an afternoon fly around the hoops.

"Whatever, I'm going to my room." She marched up the stairs, quietly thankful that the moron could not follow her.

"When's tryouts?" he called after her.

"Find out for yourself!" she shouted back as she reached the entrance of the dorm.

"Okay! Now will you go out with me?" he shouted.

"Piss off!"

"Thank goodness I found you," Katie said the following morning as she threw herself onto the bench next to Harry at breakfast. "We need to schedule Quidditch tryouts."

"Hmm?" Harry mumbled as he gulped down a large forkful of eggs. "Oh yeah, right. I was thinking this upcoming Saturday. We're all settled down and everything, and it gives us some time to practice on Sunday."

Katie nodded in agreement. "Sounds good to me. I was hoping it could be during one of Professor Slughorn's parties, though."

Harry chuckled. "Don't worry, another reason I want it on Saturday is because his next "Slug Club" party is then as well. He gave me an invitation last Friday and I've been looking for a way to get out of it since then. What's up, did he try and badger you into going to one of them too?"

"Something like that," Katie answered evasively. "I'm assuming you're not a fan of them?"

"Hell no!" he exclaimed. "I've had enough of people sucking up to me. Since this year started there've been a lot of people trying to worm themselves into my good graces, and Slughorn's the most obnoxious about it."

"What does he even want?" Katie asked. McLaggen had said something about this club being for the best and brightest. While that certainly described Harry, Katie couldn't comprehend why some loser like McLaggen would draw Slughorn's attention.

"Slughorn wants to attach himself to people he think are going to be famous and influential," Harry answered. "He tries to take us under his wing and help us into powerful positions and careers. That way when he wants to call in a favor or reap some benefit, he'll be certain to get them."

Katie shook her head in disgust. "That's pretty cold-blooded."

"Apparently he was the Head of Slytherin before Snape," Harry said wryly. "Not much of a surprise, is it?"

"He certainly has the cunning and ambition down," she replied.

"Anyway, you can see why I don't like it," Harry said, as he looked toward the Great Hall entrance.
Hermione and Ron were finally coming down for breakfast. "I mean, at least Hermione and Ginny are also in the club, but there's also a people like Blaise Zabini."

"And McLaggen," Katie muttered to herself.

"Sorry, I didn't catch that," Harry said as he leaned closer.

"Ah, it's nothing," Katie said, waving a hand in dismissal. "Anyway, who do you think will be on the team?"

"Well we're certainly not testing for Seekers," Harry laughed as Ron and Hermione sat down to a delicious looking breakfast of sausage, eggs and tea. "Keeper's also taken and one of the Chaser jobs is yours."

"I still want to try out for my spot!" Katie exclaimed. "I don't want to just get godfathered in."

"Er, you mean grandfathered in," Hermione said as Harry winced.

"I don't mean like that!" she said hastily, mentally cursing herself for forgetting the fate of Harry's godfather. "I mean, I want to earn my spot on the team again."

"Same here," Ron said flatly.

Harry looked at his best friend with puzzlement. "You sure, Ron?"

"Yeah!" Ron replied, looking slightly miffed "You don't think I can handle it?"

"I think you can, I'm just saying that you guys already are on the team and you won the Cup last year. Why go through all the stress again?"

"I want to prove it to myself," Katie answered.

"Same here," said Ron. "I remember that Angelina only picked me because Vicky Frobisher had other commitments and Geoffrey Hooper didn't get along with her. If you just let me on without trying out again, idiots like Zacharias Smith are just going to say that I only got it because I'm friends with you. I need this, Harry!"

"Alright then," said Harry, smiling. "I'm still certain you two will get on. So that leaves the two Beaters and two Chasers that will be probably be filled with new faces."

"Not going with Sloper and Kirke?" Ron asked.

"If they make it they'll be one," Harry answered. "But they were really god-awful last year, I'd be stunned if they made it back."

"Ginny's also trying out for Chaser," said Hermione. "So that should be another position filled."

Harry nodded in agreement "Yeah she did fantastic as Seeker last year, and she was saying Chaser's her best position, so she'll probably get on the team."

"Alright, that's settled then," Katie said with an air of finality as she finished the last of her breakfast. "Unfortunately I have Ancient Runes in ten minutes so I should get going."

"How is Seventh year Runes?" Hermione asked excitedly.

"Extremely difficult," Katie answered with a grimace. "Though it shouldn't be much of a problem for
you, I'd imagine."

With a final wave, she walked out of the Great Hall to her next class.
Tryouts

Chapter Notes

Again all dialogue from the book will be in bold (specifically from the Hermione's Helping Hand chapter) My work will not.

As she had done ever since she made the Gryffindor Quidditch team in Second year, Katie Bell was the first girl in her dorm to wake up.

She had always been an early riser. London deserved the title of the "city that never sleeps" just as much as New York did, and its constant bustle would wake her up earlier than she had any right to be when she was a child. It hadn't changed when she went off to Hogwarts, especially when she had made the Quidditch team; Oliver's crazy schedule had always ensured that the team would be up as close to the crack of dawn as they could.

Katie treasured those moments. She got to see the young waking Earth in all its pre-dawn glory. The blue-black sky would lighten imperceptibly until the first rays rose over the horizon; the vast bulk of the sun following soon after. The bright outline of the moon would fade as the sky lightened, until one could barely perceive the moon's outline before it sank to shine on other lands.

Flowers opened their petals. Leaves shifted to catch the first rays. The stillness of the dawn was punctured by the first tweets of the waking birds, searching for food and mates. And Katie got to see it all, before anyone else in the castle could.

It was perhaps why she wasn't the biggest fan of most people. For most people didn't get to enjoy the beauty of daybreak, and much less would appreciate it if they witnessed it. There were very few other early risers like her, so when she saw the rest of the students wake and meander down to the Great Hall, she knew her precious quiet time was over. It was hard not to resent most people after that.

Thankfully her roommates were an understanding lot, mostly because she didn't wake them up when she first rose. They were Sarah Kensington, Vanessa Daltres and her best friend, Leanne Sheffield, and they all got along famously.

Katie had always been loath to put labels on people, especially those she actually liked, but she supposed if she had to, Sarah would be the flirty one, Vanessa the badass one, and Leanne the studious one.

And herself? The athletic one, of course. She had been drawn into Quidditch since she was a girl. Her father, Stanley, never played professionally due to a recurrent back injury, but he had taken up coaching with a zeal that few others matched. He had coached the Kenmore Kestrels for seven years before transitioning into the announcer's booth where he still called Kestrel games.

Her mother Caterina, on the other hand, had played professionally. She was one half of the famous Bagman twins. Her brother Ludovic, Katie's uncle, had been a world class beater for the Wimbourne Wasps and had even risen to become Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports until his sudden resignation after the end of the Triwizard Tournament. Caterina, on the other hand, had flown Chaser for the Falmouth Falcons for nine seasons before she retired to raise a family. At least
that's what she had said publicly. It was well known in the Bell and Bagman families that the Chudley Cannons had placed a five million Galleon offer for her to play for them, and that Falmouth was going to accept it. Rather than be faced with spending the rest of her contract with the Cannons (four years worth) Caterina Bell had decided to make a graceful exit.

Needless to say, Katie had loved Quidditch since her first birthday, when her uncle Ludo had given her a toy broomstick. It wasn't just Quidditch that excited her. She even liked Muggle sports, especially football, which she had picked up from her Muggle neighbors as a girl. She had managed to rope her father into taking her to see a Tottenham-Arsenal match; a memorable day in which they had nearly broken the Statute of Secrecy three separate times.

She lived, ate, and breathed Quidditch. Her life's ambition was to follow in her mother's and uncle's footsteps to play professionally and then follow her father into coaching. It was why this year was especially important. She had seen scouts during her fourth year during their matches as they watched her captain Oliver Wood weave and dive to protect his hoops, and last year she had seen the same scouts observe Alicia and Angelina, as well as the other Seventh years. This year, those scouts would be watching her. But scouts wouldn't mean a thing if she didn't make the team again.

Unfortunately, the weather seemed to be conspiring against her. Instead of the rising golden rays of the sun, she was met with a dull grey sky. A light tapping fell against the window; it was drizzling, all over her perfect day.

Oh crap…

Katie hated the rain, which was rather unfortunate given that she lived in Britain. Her greatest weakness in Quidditch was bad weather. The Quaffle would become slippery, and drops would get into her eyes and prevent her from seeing. That horrible match in Fourth year had made her want to give up the sport, and that was even before the Dementors had invaded the field.

Katie had to force herself to leave her warm bed. Trying not to think about the chilly rain, she quickly changed into her Quidditch clothes and grabbed her Nimbus Two Thousand and Five. Tiptoeing her way down the stairs, and praying that she wouldn't run into McLaggen, she departed the common room and made her way down to the Great Hall.

Thankfully she was the first Gryffindor up. Though she was normally sociable and friendly, the peace and serenity she so treasured in her room also carried over to breakfast. She liked to plan her day in her head, silent and free of distractions. The only other person who understood this was Leanne, which was one of the many reasons she was her best friend.

After a quick breakfast of tea, toast and ham, Katie jogged down to the pitch, her broomstick, and a miniature Quaffle in tow Much like at breakfast, she was the only Gryffindor on the pitch. In fact, with the exception of a Hufflepuff couple jogging along the perimeter, she was the only student there.

All her worries were swept away the instant she mounted her new broom. The Nimbus turned at her slightest touch, so much so that Katie felt that she could dodge individual raindrops. Out of the corner of her eye she could see that the jogging couple had stopped and were watching her under the cover of the bleachers. She gave them a cheeky wave and pulled the broomstick back into her body, rising above the field and the hoops into the overcast sky.

When she saw that she was on level with the tallest towers of Hogwarts, she banked sharply and leaned forward into a shrieking dive. Though her new Nimbus was not as fast as Harry's Firebolt, it far outstripped her previous Cleansweep Eight. She hefted her miniature Quaffle in her hand and let it fly as she pulled out of her dive. The small red ball flew cleanly through the center hoop.
Katie heard scattered clapping from the traditional Gryffindor bleachers. She looked over to see that a handful of her fellow students had made the long trek down to the pitch, and were warming up, even now. To her delight, Leanne was sitting in the stands, Transfiguration books resting on her lap.

"What are you doing up so early?" Katie asked when she had flown over to her.

"I woke up early so I could get a jump on reading up on the next chapter," Leanne replied. "I figured I might as well come down to the tryouts to lend some moral support. Vanessa's still sleeping and Sarah wanted to come until she saw the weather."

"I don't blame her," said Katie, who was starting to shiver. She wrapped her scarf snugly around her neck and sat down on the wet seat next to her friend.

"Oh no," Leanne muttered as she looked over Katie's shoulder. "You might want to get back in the air quickly."

"Why? Wha-"

"There you are, Bell!"

Katie groaned in dismay. She should have figured that Cormac would also be here for tryouts.

"Oh hello," she said unenthusiastically.

"McLaggen," said Leanne with a curt nod.

"Hey Sheffield," said Cormac, flashing his pearly white teeth. "You haven't followed through on your promise."

Leanne looked perplexed. "What promise?"

"To convince Bell to go out with me, of course. Don't you remember our conversation on the train last year?"

"You do realize I'm standing right here?"

McLaggen ignored Katie's jibe.

"You mean the one where I said "Sure, McLaggen, whatever you say" in the most sarcastic voice imaginable?"

"That was sarcasm, Sheffield? You need to work on it."

Leanne clenched her fists, but Katie intervened, not wishing her friend to get into trouble on her behalf.

"So you decided to go ahead and try-out anyway?"

Cormac smirked. "Of course. I can out save Weasley any day. Incidentally, I saw you fly around on your Nimbus."

"Oh?" Katie said warily. She was too familiar with Cormac not to know what was coming next.

"You did decently enough, I admit. But you seriously have to work on your dives. That one was just sloppy; you were moving all over the place and it was a wonder you didn't spin out of control."
Katie fixed him with a cold glare. "You mean the dive in which I threw the Quaffle right through the center hoop?"

McLaggen gave a belly laugh that reminded Katie of Professor Slughorn. "Yeah, right down the middle when there was no Keeper! Maybe you could have fooled Ron Weasley, but a good Keeper would have saved that in a heartbeat."

"Well it's a good thing I was only practicing on my broom and not treating it like a game!" Katie snapped, the last of her patience gone.

McLaggen raised his hands and stepped back from the fuming girl. "All right, all right, keep your shirt on Bell, I was only giving you some pointers. You want to make the team right?"

"She's already on the team, you prat!" Leanne exclaimed. "Which is more than you can say?"

"She's still trying out anyway," McLaggen replied coolly, his gregariousness vanished. "Besides, Wood was blocking me from the team until last year, and I was sick for the tryouts then. Now that I can compete…well…those Quidditch scouts will have quite the story to take back when they see me play."

"Yeah I can't wait to see their tears of laughter when you fail miserably," Leanne retorted.

Katie suppressed a smile. She loved it when Leanne got angry with others; she had quite the cutting wit.

Cormac gave her friend a cold look, but thankfully walked away. He slipped slightly on the bleachers and nearly careened onto the field, evoking snorts of laughter.

"Good job getting him to go away," Katie said thankfully.

Leanne grinned. "My pleasure."

They sat chatting for a few minutes until they noticed Harry, Ron and Hermione making their way onto the field. Katie got up and joined the other Chaser hopefuls congregating around Harry. As she passed Hermione she noticed that the girl seemed extremely flustered about something.

Katie sighed. She figured Ron Weasley had done something stupid. Though the two of them were great friends, they were also known for their sudden flare-ups in the common room.

I guess I won't win the jackpot after all.

Fred and George had started a betting pool for when Ron and Hermione finally started to date. Almost the entire House had gotten in on it, as well as a few Ravenclaws, Hufflepuffs and even a couple of Slytherins. The pot was up to 150 Galleons, but it seemed unlikely Katie would win. She had picked October 25, 1996, which was a month away, but it didn't seem like the two of them were going to get together as of yet.

Katie watched as McLaggen stepped out of the crowd to shake Harry's hand. She couldn't hear what they said, but she smirked when she saw Cormac's crestfallen face when Harry pointed to the stands.

"Trying to talk your way onto the team?" she called mockingly after her fellow Seventh year.

"I don't need to," he replied confidently. "My skills will speak for themselves."
She rolled her eyes as she walked onwards. Harry had divided the large crowd into groups of ten, and even as she reached him, Harry shouted for them to begin.

"Oh hey Katie," he said when he noticed the brunette. "Since there are so many people trying out, I decided to make sure they could at least fly."

"Good idea," said Katie as she watched the first group. They were clearly First years, and it could not have plainer that they had hardly ever flown before. Only one boy managed to remain airborne for more than a few seconds, and he was so surprised that he promptly crashed into one of the goal posts.

"Take him up to the Hospital wing," Harry told two of the first years after he made sure the boy was conscious.

"They would have been eaten alive if you'd started off with Quaffle and Bludger drills," she observed. "Good thinking.

The second group was even worse than the first. At least the First years had attempted to fly. Yet when Harry blew his whistle, the girls merely fell about giggling and clutching each other. Worse still, after Harry told them to leave the pitch, they went to sit in the stands to heckle everyone else.

A muscle began to jump in Harry's jaw. He was clearly getting angry; a rare sight that Katie had only seen once before when he had snapped at Zacharias Smith when they had first signed up for Dumbledore's Army.

The third group had been doing quite well. Ginny Weasley was one of them, and she clearly outdistanced the other flyers in the group, who included her boyfriend Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan. Yet they were the only three flyers to make it around the pitch. Two of the other flyers slammed into each other halfway around the perimeter, and the resulting pile-up caused the remaining five to crash as well. Minutes later, the fallen seven joined the unlucky first year up at the Hospital Wing.

"Well, at least we had some people actually finish the lap," Katie quipped. Harry couldn't resist a snort.

The next two groups were just as useless as the first two. Most of the fourth group had come without broomsticks. The fifth group were Hufflepuffs.

Harry's composure finally cracked. "If there's anyone else here who's not from Gryffindor," he roared, "leave now, please!"

There was a pause, then a couple of little Ravenclaws went sprinting off the pitch, snorting with laughter.

"Well now that that's over with, can I join the next group?"

Harry smiled. "Go ahead. At least we know you'll be able to fly."

And fly she did. The brief workout she'd put in with her Nimbus Two Thousand and Five paid dividends. Once again Katie zipped around the perimeter of the pitch, banking sharply to take the turns and weaving through the hoops. She finished the lap when the rest of the group were barely halfway done.
Harry was clapping when she descended. "Great work, Katie. Is that the new Nimbus?"
"Yeah, my dad got it for me over the summer for my birthday," she replied.

Harry held the broom in his arms, turning the handle over and over as he felt its fine polish.
"Reminds me of my old 2000," he said. "At least until the Willow destroyed it."

Katie winced. That had been a very bad game, even before Harry's near fatal accident.
"At least you made it out okay," she said bracingly. "We thought you'd died."
"Luckily Dumbledore was there to slow me down, or I might have," Harry said quietly.
They looked at each other for long moment until the rest of Katie's flying group landed.
"Anyway, I just hope that I'll finally get to test this broom out in a real game."

Harry chuckled. "You just outflew everyone in tryouts, you'll be fine."
"If you say so."

She and Harry watched the remaining groups take flight. Twenty minutes later the first cuts were announced, much to the chagrin of many of the contenders.

Next up were the Quaffle and Bludger drills. To save time, and to see how well his prospective team would work together, Harry had decided to test the positions out at the same time. The prospective Beaters lined up two at a time with bats that Harry had obtained from Madam Hooch. Their objective, of course, was to attack the Chasers and prevent them from scoring. Since Harry was technically the only member of the team, he decided to play Keeper, to Katie's initial surprise.

"Now I've never actually played Keeper before," he announced to the contenders. "So you all are probably going to score quite a bit of goals. However, this test will be to see how good you are at passing and working as a team to dodge the Bludgers."

"Why don't you just test the Keepers at the same time?" she asked after everyone left to get set up.

"There will be too many applicants to keep track of," he replied hesitantly. Katie smirked as she grasped his meaning.

"You also want to make sure there aren't many people to watch the tryouts, don't you?"

Harry reddened slightly. "Yeah…that's another reason," he admitted.

She patted him on the shoulder. "Cheer up, I want Ron to get on the team as much as you do."

Harry frowned. "Why's that?"

"Let's just say I'd rather he get on the team than McLaggen," she answered evasively.

"That makes two of us," said Harry. "He tried to suck up to me just before tryouts just because we both went to the same meeting of the Slug Club."

"That sounds like him, he's always been concerned with power and status."

"Then he and Slughorn will be best friends," Harry said. "Oh well, I wasn't exactly planning to go to
anymore of his parties."

He glanced at his watch. "You should pair up with two other Chasers," he said. "We're running later than I wanted."

True to form, Katie excelled at Harry's test. She had to admit that it probably helped that neither Fred or George Weasley were launching Bludgers at her, but nevertheless she dodged every single Bludger that was hit her way. She could have peppered Harry with shots (and briefly considered it) but she decided to showcase her passing and help the two Chaser hopefuls in her group get on the center stage.

Her final tally was six goals scored, twelve goals assisted on and no Bludger hits.

"Congrats Katie, you've made it," Harry said when they all landed.

"Just like that?"

Harry grinned. "What? Do you want to fly head to head against everyone else? You've earned your spot; in fact you earned it a long time ago."

"That's fine, I'll take it." She smiled back at her captain. "You know, you might want to put yourself as a reserve Keeper. You're not half bad at it."

Harry chuckled. "I've nothing on Oliver, or Ron for that matter."

"True, but it'll be handy in case there's ever an injury, and we know Ginny can fill in for you as Seeker." And it'll make sure that McLaggen never gets anywhere near the team she did not add.

"Thanks, but I'd rather stick with Seeking for now."

Though most of the other Chasers were not on par with Alicia and Angelina, Ginny was. She put seventeen goals past Harry by herself, and was responsible for eleven other assists. Like Katie, she too did not have the mark of any Bludger upon her.

"Maybe I spoke too soon about you being reserve Keeper," Katie teased as Harry flew down to join her.

He shook his head ruefully. "She really put a number on me, didn't she?"

"Well it looks like we have our second Chaser unless you're too embarrassed to let her on the team," she said mischievously.

Harry laughed. "Nah, she beat me fair and square. Now, who do you think should be the final Chaser?"

"That's a tough one," Katie answered. "Demelza Robins was in my group and she did really well, but so did Dean Thomas and Emily Shawcross."

Harry nodded. "So it's settled, you take those three and have them take shots on you in goal."

"Me? Why me?"

"You agreed to be co-captains," Harry reminded her as he smiled. "I'm going to test the four Beater finalists Kirke and Sloper are in the running again and we have some new blood in Ritchie Coote and Jimmy Peakes."
Katie groaned. She'd been looking forward to sitting in the bleachers and watching the Keeper tryouts.

"Oh and I'll need you, Ginny and whoever you choose for the last spot to try out the Keepers," Harry called after her.

"Dammit Potter!"

Despite her initial reluctance, Katie found that she quite enjoyed playing the part of Keeper for the three finalists. Since she was quite familiar with Chaser tendencies, she was able to stop a good portion of the shots, though not as many as Oliver and Ron might have. Though Dean and Emily acquitted themselves quite well, the clear winner was Demelza, who had scored the most goals against her.

The three Chasers went over to Harry, who had apparently chosen Peakes and Coote to be the new Beaters, something which Katie was very thankful for. Though Sloper and Kirke had been enthusiastic teammates last year, their talent was negligible.

Katie, Ginny and Demelza soon proved that their selections were no mistake. They annihilated the Keeper hopefuls; None of the first five applicants saved more than two goals a piece, including Geoffrey Hooper, who had saved all five of his shots during the last tryout a year earlier. Out of the twenty five shots that were thrown at the five applicants, fifteen went through, each Chaser scoring an even five.

Then came the one Keeper whom Katie was determined to humiliate; Cormac McLaggen. She, being honorary co-Captain and the longest serving member of the team besides Harry, took the first shot.

Cormac easily swatted it away as if it were an annoying gnat.

"You're going to have to try better than that!" he called. "Your stance is all wrong; I could tell that you were favoring the right hoop."

"See what I have to put up with?" Katie complained as she swung around towards Harry.

"Is he always like this?" he asked.

"Ever since the first time we ended up on the Hogwarts Express," she muttered.

They watched hopefully as Ginny took her shot. It was a wild spinning one that banked toward the left hoop. For an instant, Katie thought it would slip past McLaggen's reach, but he got a finger on it in the nick time, pushing it just beyond the hoop.

"Almost got me there, Weasley!" he shouted. "But my talent was just too much this time."

Harry smacked his head. "I hope Ron at least ties him, so I have the excuse of choosing him over this prat. That's what Angelina did to Hooper and Vicky Frobisher last time, I heard."

Unsurprisingly, Demelza's shot was also blocked by the Seventh year. Ginny, still seething from what McLaggen had said, decided to take the fourth try. She sent a screamer toward the center hoop, but once again Cormac plucked it out of the air.

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It was all up to her; unless Ron managed to save all of his tries. Taking a deep breath, Katie urged her Nimbus forward, eyes scanning for a spot to throw the Quaffle in. She edged the broomstick to the right, mentally urging McLaggen to drift toward the right hoop so she could switch hands and go
However, her archenemy seemed to be guessing her strategy. He stayed at the center hoop and raised his arms out wide.

_Fine then, I'll go the right, you stuck up prat!_

She uncorked the Quaffle in a vicious throw at the right hoop. McLaggen took one look at the spinning ball….and dove to his left.

"Yes!" she exclaimed the ball soared through the hoop.

"What's the matter? Nothing to say?" she exclaimed as Cormac flew back toward the ground. She could only hear some indistinct mumbling. "You were happy to taunt us before? What happened?"

But McLaggen seemed to have other things on his mind for once.

Ron Weasley was a different matter. Katie was almost tempted to go easy on him, just to make sure that he made the team over Cormac, but she recognized that it would be unbecoming of an honorary co-captain to do so.

She had nothing to fear, both her tries were easily saved, despite the growing crowd in the bleachers. Demelza's shot was also knocked away, and Ginny's tricky first one was saved by Ron's fingertips.

It came down to the final ball, as it usually did, Katie reflected. Ginny took the Quaffle and hurtled up the field. Ron watched her progress, shifting from hoop to hoop as he tried to guess his little sister's intentions. The throw had a lot of spin on it, so much so that it looked like particularly sturdy top spinning on the table. For an instant, Katie thought that it might be Ron, but at the absolute last second Ron's palm connected with the Quaffle's underside, sending it up and over the center hoop.

"**You did brilliantly, Ron!**" cried a voice behind Katie. She turned to see Hermione rushing toward her friend and looking extremely happy.

_Well maybe I'll win my bet after all_ Katie thought with a smile. She looked around for Harry, only to see Cormac go stalking away from him, fists clenched and breathing hard.

"What did he say?" she asked.

Harry waved his hand dismissively. "He wanted another go. He actually claimed that Ginny went easy on Ron, even though he nearly missed her last shot."

"That's Cormac for you," Katie sighed. "He's never been one to take responsibility for anything. It's always someone else's fault."

Harry snorted. "Well that won't work with me. Thank Merlin that Ron outplayed him or he'd probably be writing to Minister Scrimgeour to force me to let him on the team."

"He might do that regardless," Katie observed, as they packed up the balls.

"Okay guys," Harry said when the new team assembled. "We'll have a brief meeting tomorrow, but practice will be on Thursday."

_I'll bet that's Slughorn's next party"_ Katie thought amusedly.

"Want to grab lunch?" she asked when Harry had finished his brief talk.
"Sorry, I promised I'd meet Hagrid, I haven't seen him all term."

"Fair enough," Katie replied. "See you tomorrow, Harry."

She walked back up the castle with Leanne jabbering excitedly about the tryouts. Now she could show those scouts that she was meant to follow in her mother's footsteps.
A chilly wind whipped through Katie's hair as she dove at the three hoops. She uncorked a laser throw to the right, but the Quaffle was blocked straight of the air.

"Nice save Ron!" she called as she streaked by him.

"Good work guys," came a voice from behind her. She turned to meet Harry's brilliant green eyes. "The formation needs some work though. Ginny you were positioned a bit too far to the left there. The Hawkshead Formation needs precise timing or the other team can easily counterattack."

"Sorry about that," Ginny said sheepishly. "I'm still getting used to the new position."

"That's fine," said Harry. "You're definitely improving. It's the only mistake you've made so far."

Katie had noticed it too. Since Ginny had played Seeker all last year, she had been used to freelancing on the Quidditch pitch, but Chasers needed cohesion and teamwork. But Ginny was doing well, considering. It was something Katie had been very anxious about, though she had told no one but Harry and Leanne about her worries.

"I've been working with Angelina and Alicia for so long that I'm not sure how good I'll be without them," she had said to Harry just before their first practice.

"You did brilliantly during tryouts," he had replied. "And half of the people you worked with never even stood a shot at making the team. If you can fly well with them, then you'll certainly do well with Ginny and Demelza."

She hadn't been completely assuaged by Harry's reassurance. "I suppose, but I never was the leader among the three of us. Angelina was always setting up tactics and standing up to Wood when he got too obsessive, and Alicia was the one you could go to for training tips and working out...I just watched and listened."

He'd laughed at that, but she hadn't felt offended in the slightest, particularly as she could tell it was not meant to mock.

"Katie, I was the youngest member of the team, and I really knew nothing about tactics when I first started playing. I just looked for the Snitch and tried not to get my head cracked open by a Bludger."

"You were mostly successful on the Bludger front." She well remembered the Slytherin match during her Third year.

"Well, overprotective house-elves aside, I didn't think I was cut out to be Captain, yet here I am. You've been playing Chaser for years, so I know you can teach Ginny and Demelza the ropes. So quit worrying. That's my job."

They quickly flew back into the air for the last fly around of the day. The three Chasers converged on Ron, passing the Quaffle back and forth and looking for an opening to score. On the other end of the pitch, Harry was putting the two new Beaters; Ritchie Coote and Jimmy Peakes, through their paces. He was certainly a demanding Captain, Katie though. Ritchie and Jimmy had to hit Harry three times each before they were finished, and considering he was on a Firebolt and they hadn't
played a game, it was a tall order indeed.

It was clear that Ron hadn't entirely gotten over his insecurities. Though he was doing markedly better than last year, they had still scored three goals apiece on him. His red flush could be seen from halfway across the pitch, clashing brilliantly with his scarlet hair. Katie's heart went out for him, but it was her job to score goals after all, and it was providing good training for the two new Chasers as well.

"Wow!"

"Harry that was amazing!"

Twin shouts of awe shook Katie out of her reverie. She glanced over her shoulder to see Harry come out of a reckless dive, his feet barely skimming the surface of the field.

"You must have dove over fifty feet!" Jimmy cried excitedly.

"And he spun through both our Bludgers at the same time!" Ritchie added.

Harry smiled sheepishly. "Just trying to get you guys a taste of what the speed of a real game will be like."

"It's not going to be quite like that," Katie said amusedly as she flew over to the group. "For one thing, no other team has a Firebolt on their side."

Harry chuckled. "All right, I wanted to show off a little. But it will help you guys when-"

He doubled over as two Bludgers smacked him in the side, nearly causing him to spin off his broom.

"Hey!"

"You never said when we had to hit you with the Bludgers!" the two beaters chorused. "That's three times we've hit you!"

"You never did specify when," Katie added.

Harry snorted. "I see I'm outnumbered. Fine you all get to go in."

"Not all of us," said Ginny. She turned to her brother. "We need to practice some more."

"Whyyyy?" Ron groaned.

"I need some extra repetitions if I want to get serious about Chasing! And really, you need some extra practice too."

"You're starting to sound like Mom, or Hermione." Ron grumbled.

"There are worse people to sound like!" she replied. "Besides, what's the alternative? You're going to sit down and do schoolwork?"

"Good point."

The rest of the team changed and walked back to the castle. From the direction of the pitch they could hear Ginny shouting at Ron to cover the hoops more closely.

"So, are you trying to give me a heart attack?" Katie asked Harry as Demelza and the two Beaters
"walked ahead of them."

"Huh?"

"That dive you did," Katie reminded him. "I thought you were going to slam into the ground again."

"Oh that." Harry chuckled. "I was trying to modify the Wronski Feint. It's usually used to trick the other Seeker, but I don't see why it can't be used to distract opposing Beaters as well."

"That sounds familiar," said Katie. "Didn't Viktor Krum use it to take out Aidan Lynch in the World Cup Final?"

"Exactly. You were there too?"

"Yes. We didn't get very good seats, but it was still a fantastic game."

"It certainly was," Harry agreed. "I've always wanted to try out that move but I didn't have much time during the Tri-wizard Tournament."

Katie watched her captain's face with concern. He seemed to visibly melt when he had mentioned the Tournament. But she couldn't blame him, especially not after his interview in *The Quibbler* where he had revealed what had happened the night of the Third Task.

"And then that cow Umbridge banned you last year and took your broom," Katie said bitterly. "Even though Malfoy provoked you and the twins."

Harry's face darkened at the mention of their former Defense teacher. "Yeah, and I wasn't really into practicing the move beforehand. I don't like admitting it, but it really got to me how most of Hogwarts thought I was some lying show-off and how that toad tried to make my life miserable."

"I'm surprised that you haven't given those students a piece of your mind," Katie said quietly. "They're the same ones who are fawning over you, and calling you the savior of the Wizarding World."

Harry turned to look at her. "There are times I want to. I want to ask some of my fellow Gryffindors, the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs where they were when the Ministry had its head in the sand. But then I realize, it doesn't matter. There's no point holding onto old grudges."

"Well, you're a better person than me," said Katie. "I wouldn't stop reminding them what prats they were." Of her three roommates, only Leanne had agreed with her that Harry had been telling the truth last year. It had taken a long time for Sarah and Vanessa to come around to their point of view; in fact they hadn't believed it until that mysterious battle at the Ministry. It had taken even longer for Katie to forgive them; even now she couldn't help but bring up their lack of faith from time to time.

"Ron and Hermione seem to have taken up that role," said Harry. "I actually heard Ron telling off that fourth year Romilda Vane when she was bothering me the other day. "I don't remember seeing at the DA meetings," he said to her.

"But I don't see the point in living in the past," Harry continued. "We have to meet Voldemort's (Katie flinched) threat now. I can't afford to still be bitter over what happened last year."

A chill ran through Katie's bones, but it wasn't the crisp October wind or the darkening sky. She hated to admit it, even to herself, but she had been deliberately throwing herself into Quidditch and schoolwork more than usual to avoid thinking about the peril which hung over all of them. She didn't want to dwell on the fact that many of her friends and family were in mortal danger merely by the
virtue of their blood or their allegiance. She didn't want to consider the likely scenario that people she liked and loved might die.

"It makes you think, doesn't it?" Katie said, as they reached the main doors to the castle. She indicated the Quidditch pitch in the distance, where they could still see Ginny shooting on Ron. "All of this I mean, what's the point of it in all this darkness?"

"Well, I'd like to have some semblance of a normal life," Harry said wryly. "There's no sense in turning into some miserable old sod like Snape or somebody while I wait for Voldemort to come after me."

"It just feels so strange," Katie replied, as they made their way into the castle. "I feel as if we're on the edge of some horrible event, that we're just postponing with classes, Quidditch and friends."

Even now she could almost physically feel You-Know-Who's menace casting its shadow over them, no matter how many hundreds of miles he was from them.

"He'll come when he wants to," Harry said reassuringly seeming to guess her thoughts. "There's no point in worrying about him until he decides to make his move. And now the entire Wizarding world knows he's back. I saw him a few months ago, back at the Ministry, and Dumbledore fought him to a standstill. As long as he's at Hogwarts, we have nothing to fear."

Katie nodded, feeling foolish. Besides her parents and Leanne, she hadn't opened up to anyone regarding her feelings on this new, second, war. And now she was close to spilling her deepest anxieties and fears to Harry Potter of all people. They walked up the main staircase in a companionable silence before she asked the question which had been bugging her since they had started talking.

"How...how was it...at the Ministry?" Facing him I mean."

"Well, Dumbledore fought him at the Ministry. I was...I was not in a good...place, to speak. My godfather had died, right in front of my eyes, just minutes before, and I almost shut down when Voldemort arrived," Harry admitted. "If Dumbledore wasn't there I would have died. You've heard what happened at the graveyard, I assume?"

"From the Quibbler," She answered. "But I'd rather hear it from you."

Harry sighed. "I wasn't really thinking, I was just running and fighting on instinct. I used the Disarming Curse of all spells on Voldemort, which tells you how little I was planning ahead when fighting him. Cedric had just died as well, and I couldn't help but think of his, and my parents' fates when Voldemort was hunting me across the graveyard, and wondering if that was going to happen to me in a few moments."

"That sounds terrifying."

"It was, in retrospect," said Harry. "But again, I wasn't really thinking about that; I was just trying to get out of there, I wasn't even attempting to hurt him."

Katie almost wished she hadn't asked. She supposed that she was hoping for some reassurance that it hadn't been all that bad, and that Harry had had things under control from the very beginning. But he had been scared and fighting to survive, just like she thought she would be if she was ever faced in a dangerous situation. She felt rather silly; she had known Harry for years, back from the scrawny shrimp he had been in his First year to the young, strong, man on the cusp of adulthood that stood before her. He wasn't some mythical hero; he was just Harry.
"It must have been hard, after the battles," she said, more to break the silence than anything else. "I mean, after seeing what happened to Cedric and your godfather."

"Yes," Harry said curtly. Katie could immediately tell that he didn't want to go into anymore detail, but then he smiled.

"I should take my own advice," he said in a self-deprecating tone. "Stop living in the past, I mean."

Harry was silent for a moment as he groped for words to say. "I still feel guilty over their deaths, even though everyone has told me that it wasn't my fault. I convinced Cedric to take the Cup with me, when he was perfectly content with letting me take it."

"You didn't know it was a Portkey."

"Still, it was a decision that lead to his death, even if it was Voldemort and Peter Pettigrew who did it."

A light went on the back of Katie's head. That Pettigrew name sounded familiar but she couldn't place it.

"And for my godfather, I told you before how Voldemort planted a false vision in my mind about how he was captured, and how I fell for it and went after him."

"Yes," said Katie, wondering how You-Know-Who could accomplish such a thing.

"Well, like I said, he went after me when he heard I was in a trap and Bellatrix Lestrange killed him for it."

They had reached the Fat Lady's portrait, but did not enter.

"He was the father I'd never had," said Harry. "He had so much ahead of him, and he was finally going to be cleared. And then he died at the hands of his own cousin, just because I was stupid enough to fall for a trap."

"Your godfather was a Lestrange?" Katie couldn't imagine a more horrible relation, short of Voldemort himself or the odious Cormac McLaggen.

"Nah, she married into the Lestrange family," Harry replied. "She was a Black before then; he told me the whole sordid tale."

"A Black?"

A bolt of understanding entered Katie's mind. She didn't know how she'd missed it before; one of the things that the papers had talked about was the death of Sirius Black at the Ministry, and how he had been fighting on the side of the Light. The resulting inquiry had exonerated him of the murders of those Muggles fourteen years before…and blamed it on…Peter Pettigrew!

"Your godfather was Sirius Black!"

Harry frowned. "Don't hold it against him; he was innocent of everythi-"

"Of course he was!" she exclaimed. "I read the papers too! The news would have been bigger if not for the war and Amelia Bones's murder, but it was still all over the*Prophet.*"

"Ah," Harry visibly relaxed. "I didn't want to say his name in case…"
"Don't worry, I keep up to date with what's going on," Katie replied with a smile.

Harry's grin matched hers. "Good to hear. Seeker," he said to the Fat Lady's portrait, which swung open to admit them.

"Harry, have you finish Flitwick's essay? It's due at the beginning of class!" was their greeting when they entered the Common Room. Unsurprisingly, it was Hermione who said it. She was tucked away near the fireplace on one of the armchairs, scribbling what looked to be a two foot essay.

He sighed. "I'll get on it." He turned to the Chaser. "G'night."

"Have fun with your essay," she chortled as she walked towards the stairs to the girls' dormitories. She took once last look at the grumpy Captain plopping into an armchair, before disappearing up the steps.

Chapter End Notes

I know the story is building slowly, in terms of Harry's and Katie's relationship but I can assure you that there is a method to my madness :P I generally write in a subtle style, instead of boldly stating things, but if you read between the lines of my chapters you can see a growing attraction. (At least, from my perspective) It's slow yes, but it's happening, don't fret.
The Necklace

Though Katie had been kept busy with studying for her N.E.W.T.s and her classes, she couldn't help but feel melancholy over the fact that it was her final year at Hogwarts.

The slight sadness even made its way into the Quidditch practices. At the back of her mind, Katie couldn't help but think that there were only three or four Quidditch games left in her school career, and that the end of every practice spelled one less day to enjoy the pitch and her teammates. It wasn't as if it would be her last time flying; she was, after all, hoping to latch onto a professional team upon graduating. But there was something simple and nostalgic about playing at Hogwarts, something she probably would never be able to regain.

It was this reason why she was so thankful for the first Hogsmeade visit of the year…and wistful at the same time. There were generally five trips per year, and soon for her, there would only be four more. At least she would be able to attend with all her dormmates; Leanne had finally consented to go, after achieving an Outstanding on McGonagall's latest test, and Sarah and Vanessa were always game to go with Katie, even though relations had been strained ever since they hadn't believed You-Know-Who's return last year.

It had taken longer than usual for the four of them to get down to the village. Filch was standing at the oak front doors as usual, checking off the names of people who had permission to go into Hogsmeade. But this process took even longer than normal as Filch was triple-checking everybody with his Secrecy Sensor. Finally, after much grumbling and soreness, they were given the go ahead to leave.

The walk into Hogsmeade was not enjoyable. The road to the village was full of students bent double against the bitter wind. Not for the first time, Katie wished that the school would provide the carriages to take them to the village during terrible weather. It wasn't as if they were used much, after all.

"I'm starting to wonder why we ever left the common room in the first place!" Leanne called over the howling wind.

"We're not going to have many more trips like this," Sarah answered. "Come on, I'm sure Katie's flown in worse conditions than this."

"Too true," said Katie. She hadn't been properly dry for at least a day after the Hufflepuff match in Fourth year.

"Besides, the Three Broomsticks will be warm enough," said Vanessa. "Assuming we get a table."

"I hope we do," said Katie. "I have a feeling that everyone's going to want to get out of the cold soon enough."
They were walking by Hogsmeade station when a call from ahead of them made them stop. A good looking boy was standing next to the platform. Katie recognized him as a Ravenclaw Seventh year, Thomas Chambers.

He hesitantly walked up to their small group. Katie could see his hands twisting in his pockets and behind him he could see Thomas' mates whispering to each other.

"Er, could I speak to you, Sarah?" he asked after a brief pause. His pale face might have been from the chill wind, but Katie thought that it was more from anxiety than anything else.

Sarah gave him a brilliant smile, her white teeth flashing in the cold.

"Of course," she answered, stepping off to the side with the Ravenclaw. She looked back at her three dorm-mates.

"You three go on ahead, if I don't meet up with you at the village, I'll see you back at the common room."

Vanessa laughed. "Have fun." She gave Thomas a meaningful look as they walked on, one which Katie recognized. You'd better be a perfect gentlemen, it seemed to say.

"So…Sarah and Thomas Chambers?" Katie asked when they had walked past the station and of earshot.

"Yes," Vanessa answered. "Didn't you know?"

"So…Sarah and Thomas Chambers?" Katie asked when they had walked past the station and of earshot.

"Yes," Vanessa answered. "Didn't you know?"

Katie shook her head.

"Apparently they both ran into each other over the holidays when their families were vacationing in Ireland," said Vanessa. "They haven't gotten anywhere yet, they only really got to know each other over the summer, but it looks like things might be progressing."

"Oh…I had no idea." She felt slightly hurt at what Vanessa had said. She had been very close to Sarah before the falling out over the return of Voldemort, but she still figured that she would have heard something about this. They had exchanged a few owls over the summer; and while Katie had known about Sarah's vacation to Ireland, she hadn't heard anything about this.

"Really?" Leanne asked. "Even I heard about it."

"Well, it's not much of a surprise is it?" Vanessa asked.

"What isn't?" Katie asked warily.

Vanessa looked away for a moment and hesitated before answering.

"Well, you've been spending a lot of time with Harry Potter and your other Quidditch mates that it's not much of a surprise that you haven't been keeping up with our lives."

The accusation in Vanessa's voice cut Katie deeply.

"I spent a lot of time with Angie and Alicia!" she exclaimed defensively. "Why are you getting so angry?"

"Because you didn't blow the rest of us off when doing so," her friend replied.

"I didn't blow you guys off!" said Katie. "You and Sarah starting pulling away from me last year."
over the Ministry's cover-up! You never apologized to me and Leanne about that.

"We did apologize to Leanne," said Vanessa. "You wouldn't let us say sorry to you before summer break."

Leanne flinched at the use of the name."Vanessa, Katie…” She began cautiously. "Don't argue, we're supposed to be having fun…"

Katie took a deep breath. She had been about to ask why neither of them had sent her an owl with an apology note, but her best friend was right.

"Alright," she said, once she had mastered her irritation. Next to her, Vanessa was nodding as well.

"I know it's late, Katie…but I'm really sorry about how I treated you. I know Sarah feels the same way also. It's just that…well, you know how my aunt and uncle were murdered in the last war…I didn't want to believe You-Know-Who was back…that the rest of my family could be danger again."

"It's fine," she said, feeling acutely embarrassed. "I understand…"

*But I didn't think that at all,* she did not say. *And I'm just as worried about my family as yours. I don't even know where Uncle Ludo disappeared off to.*

She clamped down on that bitter thought. It would not do to ruin their first Hogsmeade trip of the year.

Katie did not have to worry about her lingering bitterness ruining the trip; the weather was taking care of that all on its own. The icy chill continued as they made their way down High Street. In fact, the wind speed even picked up, so that they were all frozen to the bones. It didn't help that the particular chill reminded Katie of a certain train ride to Hogwarts in Fourth year, or the terror during that stormy Quidditch game when the dementors had invaded the pitch…

"Oh damn!" Vanessa cried when they had reached Zonko's Joke Shop. Rough, wooden boards were nailed across the windows, and a "Out of Business" sign hung across the entrance.

"Looks like your boyfriend and his twin drove them out of business," she cracked as she looked disappointedly at her once favorite store.

"Vanessa!" Leanne exclaimed. "I thought you and Katie were going to stop this!"

"I'm just saying!"

"Fred was never my boyfriend," said Katie. Once upon a time she would have felt a twinge of self-pity and hurt at that sentence, but it seemed that time healed all wounds.

"That's right, didn't he ask Angelina to the ball?" she asked.

"Vanessa!" Leanne exclaimed again, while putting her head in her hands.

"That was because George was too nervous to ask her," said Katie. "So Fred asked her, and decided to pull a switch with George so he could dance with her. She realized immediately, but after telling them off I think that they all had a good time."

"So how come you two didn't get together after that?" Vanessa continued.

"He just wasn't interested in me, and I got over it," said Katie. "Why the hell are you asking me all
this? It's not like we grew *that* far apart last year."

"Nothing," she said hastily. "I was just curious."

Leanne sighed. "Look, let's just go into Honeydukes. At least that's open."

While they poked around the various sweets, Katie's thoughts strayed to Vanessa's hostility. Why was she acting like this? She had just apologized minutes before, and immediately she had tried to start an argument. She knew that Vanessa liked Zonko's, she had always been the prankster of their group, but why jump down her throat for its closing?

She gritted her teeth. It all stemmed back to the Ministry and its lies. If they had just accepted that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was back, so many people would've realized the truth, and this dangerous delay wouldn't have happened.

The sharp peal of a bell interrupted her thoughts. The door swung open to reveal a very large mustachioed man.

"Oh ho ho ho," Professor Slughorn laughed, like some conniving Santa Claus. "Vanessa Daltres, fancy seeing you here. I hope you liked our get together last weekend?"

"Oh yes," Vanessa said earnestly. Yet Katie could her fingers crossed behind her back. "The Club is great!"

"I trust you'll attend the next meeting of the Slug Club then? It's next Wednesday."

"I'd love to," she replied in an unconvincing tone. "But I have too much work this week, so maybe next time."

"What a shame, what a shame," Slughorn replied while shaking his head. "Be sure to attend too, Miss Sheffield," he said to Leanne. "I've heard many great things about you from Minerva McGonagall. You want to study to be an Animagus?"

"I do," Leanne replied. "But it involves so much studying and practicing that I just don't have the time to attend your get togethers."

"Oh nonsense!" Slughorn chortled. "I know Minerva's strict policies but I'll talk to her to see if she can't relax it a little. I used to teach her, you know!"

*Good luck with that* thought Katie.

Professor Slughorn turned his meaty head towards her. "And you must be Miss Bell."

*Aw crap*

"I haven't seen you in my Potions class," he said.

"I only got an Acceptable on my O.W.L.s," said Katie. "Charms and Transfiguration are more my strong suits."

"Oh well, oh well," said Slughorn. "I gather you're on the Quidditch team as Harry Potter. Is that correct?"

"Yep," Katie said monosyllabically.

"Is there any way you can convince Mr. Potter to attend one of my get-togethers. He's had to decline
because of his frequent Quidditch practices."

"I doubt I'll be able to convince him," said Katie. "We're really practicing hard to win the Cup again. Gryffindor hasn't won back to back Cups since James Potter was captain."

"Understandable, understandable," said Slughorn. Katie suppressed a sigh. She was getting quite irritated by his tendency to repeat himself.

"Nevertheless, if you have the chance, do try and convince him," he said. "And, of course, you're always welcome to come as well. I've heard that you're related to two Quidditch players, and that your uncle even worked in the Ministry for a time."

"I'll think about it," Katie lied.

"Fair enough. Now, if you'll excuse me, there's a pile of Chocolate Cauldrons with my name on it! He gave a deep laugh and sauntered over to the Cauldron display behind them.

"Let's get going," Vanessa whispered.

"Right behind you."

"So," Leanne began. "How was Slughorn's club?"

"You're not thinking of joining?" Katie exclaimed.

"Of course not," she replied. "I just want to know if they are as bad as I imagine."

"Worse," said Vanessa. "I mean, sure there's a few people who attend who are alright, like Hermione Granger and Terry Boot, but it's mostly full of stuck up, self-important idiots, and Slughorn's the worst of the lot!"

"Though," she continued. "He does have pretty good food, and I'll probably attend his Christmas party, if I can wrangle a date." She pursed her lips, looking lost in thought, as they made their way to the Three Broomsticks.

Though the pub was mostly packed, they were lucky enough to grab a small table by the entrance, which had just been vacated by three Hufflepuffs. Leanne walked up to the counter to order while the other two settled in.

"So, do you think you will try and get Harry Potter to go to the Slug Club?" Vanessa asked.

Katie raised an eyebrow. It was an awfully strange question.

"Probably not," she answered. "Harry was telling me that he doesn't much like Slughorn because he showers attention on him because he's famous. Why do you ask?"

Vanessa blinked rapidly. "Well…I was kind of hoping that I could go to Slughorn's Christmas party with him."

Katie's jaw dropped. "You, and Harry Potter?"

"Not so loud!"

She was astounded. Vanessa and Harry? Just a few months ago, she couldn't stop criticizing her friend!
"Why?"

Vanessa rolled her eyes. "Come on, Katie, haven't you seen him? Sure he used to be a scrawny shrimp, but he's really filled in the last few years, ever since the tournament."

"Weren't you the one whispering about that he was a lying attention-whore?"

"I was," Vanessa admitted. "And I was an idiot about it. He had to deal with crap from people like me all year, and he was telling the truth the entire time. I can't even imagine how he feels."

"You're right, he did." Katie's reply came out much harsher than she intended, but she was seething inside. Vanessa hadn't even apologized to Harry; so many people hadn't, even the Daily Prophet had attempted to pass off the blame to others until they had issued a mea culpa over the summer. But now Vanessa was just expecting Katie to participate in setting the two of them up, as if she felt that Harry would just go along with it. Her friend hadn't even asked her for her opinion.

But that didn't mean that she wasn't going to give it.

"I don't think it's going to work," she said flatly.

Vanessa raised an eyebrow. "Oh? Why do you think that?"

"Harry hasn't forgotten all the criticism and rumors from last year," she explained. "He knows who exactly stood up for him because we joined his Defense group and learned defensive spells from him. He knows exactly who was whispering about him, and though he's not going to act bitter about it, it doesn't mean he's going to give you the time of day, Vanessa."

"Is that what you think, or is it what you hope?" Vanessa asked.

Katie glanced over her shoulder at the bar, but Leanne was nowhere to be seen in the tightly packed line. She inwardly sighed. It looked like their brief truce was already broken. "What do you mean?" she asked suspiciously.

Vanessa laughed. "Oh come on. You've been spending a lot more time with the guy."

"I play Quidditch with him, of course I-"

"Not just in Quidditch too," Vanessa continued, interrupting her friend. "You've also been hanging out with him at meals and in the common room sometimes."

"Yeah, sometimes," Katie said with emphasis. "Not all the time. Besides, we're friends. I hung out with the twins just as much, and Gary and William from our year."

"You also had a crush on one of the twins and didn't you date Gary?"

"For like two weeks in third year," said Katie. "And like I said earlier, that crush is over with."

"I'll bet you've noticed him filling out too," Vanessa replied, ignoring what Katie had said. "And those eyes too, those bright green eyes. Come on, I've seen you staring at them when you think no one else is around."

"Oh grow up," Katie said irritably. "Here I am, trying to give you some advice, and you're completely overreacting and thinking that I'm trying to swoop in and somehow steal Harry from you, even though you never had him. I'm his friend, genius! And as a new friend of his, and an old friend of you, I'm just saying how I see it."
Vanessa frowned. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I am!"

"Oh."

Vanessa seemed to visibly deflate. "I'm- I'm sorry. I've really been acting like an idiot."

Perhaps if Leanne were there to defuse the situation, Katie might have readily accepted Vanessa's contriteness, but she was the first to admit, she wasn't as even-keeled as her best friend.

"Yes you have," she said coldly as she stared at the far wall.

They continued like this for a couple of minutes, with Vanessa glancing at Katie every few seconds, mouth half-open to apologize.

The door next to them opened, revealing the boy in question, Ron and Hermione.

**Harry burst out, 'He was nicking Sirius's stuff!'**

"I know, Harry, but please don't shout, people are staring," whispered Hermione. "Go and sit down, I'll get you a drink."

*Looks like I'm not the only one having a bad time,* Katie thought, recognizing the name of Harry's godfather. She considered greeting her friend as he sat down, but thought better of it. Obviously he was just as irritated as she was about something, and she wasn't going to give Vanessa the satisfaction of seeing the two of them talk, no matter how regretful her friend seemed.

The door opened again. This time Sarah and Thomas walked in with another Ravenclaw boy.

"There you guys are!" she exclaimed. "Where's Leanne?"

"Supposed to be getting Butterbeers," Katie answered. "But there's apparently a long line. I can't even see her."

"Oh well," she answered, moving to a recently vacated table nearby. "Anyway I'd like to introduce you to Godwin Glassworth. He's also a Ravenclaw, in our year."

Katie nodded. She recognized him from the Hufflepuff Quidditch team. Vanessa took a quick glance at her before rising to greet him.

After exchanging pleasantries, Godwin turned to Thomas and began to talk; Sarah and Vanessa did the same.

"What's up with Katie?" she could hear Sarah ask.

"Er...well...it's kind of my fault," was the reply.

She tuned the two of them out; not wanting to hear anymore. To her relief, she saw Leanne emerge from the door leading the women's restroom, holding three bottles of Butterbeer

"There you are!" she exclaimed. "What happened?"

Leanne blinked and shook her head, as if trying to clear a troublesome fly.

"I had to go to the bathroom," she said in a vague tone. "Sorry about that."
Katie chuckled for the first time in a while. "You really must have had to go if you went with the butterbeers. Anyway, you wouldn't believe what Vanessa and I were arguing about..."

She quickly and succinctly described their argument to Leanne. Apparently her friend was tired about the constant sniping, because the only replied were "Uh huh," and "Okay."

The door kept on opening throughout the conversation. More and more Hogwarts students were coming in, and the pub was quickly filling up. Worse, the constant entrances were bringing a cold draft indoors, and Katie and Leanne bore the brunt of it.

"This is getting really annoying," Katie sighed. "Look, do you just want to go back?"

"Yes, that sounds good," Leanne replied, saying her longest string of words since she had returned with the butterbeers. Katie walked over to Vanessa and gave her the extra bottle, but quickly marched off before her roommate could utter so much as a thank you.

They set off up the road, back toward the castle. The weather looked even drearier than it had done just an hour before, which was quite a feat. It had not been a fun trip. Zonko's was closed, Slughorn had ruined Honeydukes for them, and of course, Vanessa had been acting like an idiot.

Sure, she had been spending a bit more time with Harry, but that was because they were friends. Hell, she wished she had gotten to know him better earlier in their Hogwarts career; he was a funny, respectful, interesting guy. And all right, Harry had certainly "filled in", as Vanessa had so eloquently put it. Anyone with eyes could see that. But what was bothering her was her friend's arrogant attitude over the entire thing. She had only been trying to tell her friend not to get her hopes up, that Harry wasn't going to forget who had tried to make his life hell, and Vanessa had immediately jumped down her throat and acted like some jealous Fourth year instead of the mature young woman she was supposed to be. Oh well, hopefully this Godwin fellow would take Vanessa's mind off of Harry. Merlin knew that she wasn't going to get anywhere with Harry.

They had just reached the open Hogwarts gates when Katie noticed that Leanne was holding a brown paper package in her hand.

"Did you get something from Honeydukes?" She asked. "I didn't see you buy anything."

"Oh that," Leanne answered in the same vague tone. "It's a surprise."

Katie looked puzzled. "What do you mean? For who?"

"I can't tell you, otherwise it wouldn't be a surprise," Leanne replied. "Or for whom."

Katie shrugged. "Alright."

It looked like Leanne had her own love life to deal with, much like Sarah and apparently Vanessa had to deal with.

It was strange though, Katie thought as the front doors of Hogwarts grew closer. Wouldn't Leanne have just given her surprise gift to this mysterious person in Hogsmeade? Then again, it had been rather crowded. Maybe she was just waiting for a quieter time back at the castle.

"And what do you two have?" came a grumpy voice from ahead of them. Filch stood in front of the oak doors, hunched over in his brown blazer against the howling wind.

"It's a surprise," Leanne repeated, clutching the brown package tighter to her chest.
"The caretaker scowled.

"I have to check everything and everyone that comes in and out of Hogwarts, as I've said a million times," he grumbled. He took out his golden Secrecy Scanner and walked toward them. "Give it here so I can scan it."

"But it's a surprise," Leanne whispered as she snuggled it even closer.

Katie looked at her strangely. "Leanne, just give it to him so we can get in. It's getting really cold."

Leanne shook her head.

"He's not even going to open it, just scan it with his sensor," Katie said placatingly. Why in Merlin's name is she acting this way?

"I'm going to have to open it now," Filch said maliciously. "The way she's acting, it could be anything, something Dark, even."

"It's nothing to do with you!" Leanne shouted

"It's just a bit of candy," Katie said with exasperation. "We were at Honeydukes earlier."

"Could be poisoned," Filch grunted. "Open it up."

Leanne didn't look likely to release her hold, so Katie reached over and grabbed the package. To her surprise, Leanne immediately yanked it back, knocking Katie off balance onto the ground

"What's gotten into you?" she shouted.

"Bloody kids," she heard Filch say. He wrenched the package hard towards him.

The sodden brown paper tore apart in their hands. Katie, who was still sprawled on the ground got a quick glimpse of an ornate opal necklace, glinting strangely even though the sun was still hidden behind the clouds.

And then the screaming started. Leanne, whose hands were still gloved, rose almost comically into the air, except she was yelling in pain and agony. Filch, whose hands were bare, roared in agony as he dropped the necklace. In that same split second, Katie could see Filch's gnarled hand grow black with rot.

The necklace almost dropped on top of her. It would have hit her straight in the face, had she not had the presence of mind to twist away. Yet she could feel the heat of that Dark object right next to her cheek as it landed.

A wave of nausea overtook her. Whatever that thing was, it was doing something to her, even though she hadn't touched it. She tried to stagger to her feet, but doubled over, retching.

Must help Leanne she thought desperately. Above her, she could hear her best friend screaming. Have to get Filch to Pomfrey. Next to her she felt the caretaker writhing on the ground

But she could not muster the strength to do. She sank to her knees, unable to shake the sharp pain in her stomach or keep the fog which was overtaking her mind away. She nearly touched the necklace as she bent over and vomited

"Katie, Katie!" She could hear, above the screaming
Someone was calling her name, but from who and from where, she could not tell. The fog was growing; she could barely make out shapes or objects.

She could feel someone desperately shaking her. Two pinpricks of bright green flashed above her before she lapsed into unconsciousness.
"I heard that Leanne and Filch were taken to St. Mungo's," came a voice from beside Harry as he sat outside the Hospital Wing. Katie's two roommates, Vanessa and Sarah, were standing with him, as was most of the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

"That's good news for Katie though," Ron pointed out. "Since she's still here, she wasn't as badly affected."

"Still not good for Leanne," Sarah shot back, looking affronted. "Or Filch for that matter."

Ron opened his mouth, but quickly closed it at Ginny's warning glance. He had to admit that not even Filch deserved what had happened…whatever had happened.

Vanessa sniffed loudly. She could not believe that she had been so cold towards Katie back at the Three Broomsticks, and she hadn't even said two words to Leanne after the argument. What if this were the last time she would ever get to see her two friends?

The sound of voices grew closer to the Hospital Wing door. The group of students moved backwards as it opened to reveal an anxious looking woman and a pale man.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bell!" Vanessa exclaimed. "How's Katie doing?"

"Better," said Katie's father, exhaling sharply. "She's still unconscious of course, but Madam Pomfrey and Professor Snape say that there has been no further damage."

He glanced at the green eyed boy in front of him.

"It seems my wife and I have a lot to thank you for, Mr. Potter," he said wearily. "If you hadn't pulled Katie away from that…thing, she might have been badly affected."

Harry scratched the back of his neck with embarrassment.

"It was nothing," he said placatingly. "I mean, she'd already dodged the necklace. I just made sure to get her away from it."

"But if it caused that much trouble without touching her, who knows what might have happened if she was left next to that object any longer?" said Mrs. Bell.

"I guess," Harry mumbled, looking distinctly uncomfortable. He could feel the eyes of his fellow students upon him. His face grew flushed.

Mercifully, the door opened again, and Albus Dumbledore stepped across the threshold.

"How's Leanne?" Sarah asked immediately.

"The Healers are working on her and Argus as we speak," Dumbledore answered. "We won't know more until this evening, I presume."

"Professor," said Harry. "I need to talk to you." "Privately," he added.

Dumbledore looked at the young Gryffindor for a moment before nodding. "Very well," he said, as he beckoned him back into the Hospital Wing.
Katie and Madam Pomfrey were the only people in the wing. The matron was administering some sort of potion to the unconscious Chaser. Harry craned his neck to see her, but all he could see was a mass of black hair hidden beneath a blanket. He was vaguely disappointed, but he couldn't help but notice that she was on his bed, so to speak. He always seemed to end up by the far wall, whenever he stayed there, which was unfortunately more frequent than he liked.

"It's about the necklace," Harry began, without preamble as they both sat down on the nearest bed. "I've seen it before, at Borgin and Burkes. Before Second year I got lost in Knockturn Alley while shopping and I distinctly remembering seeing it on the shelves."

"Ah yes," said Dumbledore, stroking his beard. "I remember Hagrid telling me about your sojourn down there."

"Not one of my finer moments," Harry admitted. "But this summer, Ron, Hermione and I followed Draco Malfoy down to the same shop where we saw him buying some object there. I think it was the necklace."

"Arthur had passed along that information to me, as well as your suspicions of him as a Death Eater," said the Headmaster. "Did you directly observe him buying the necklace?"

Harry shifted his feet. "Well, no…but it's too suspicious not to be a coincidence."

"Be that as it may, I still cannot do anything with Mr. Malfoy without proof. Besides, Professor McGonagall informed me that he served detention with her today. He was never at Hogsmeade."

Harry's mouth fell open with dismay.

"He must have had help then!"

Dumbledore smiled. "You are determined to see the bad in Mr. Malfoy. Not everything is so black and white. But I advise you to put this out of your mind. Draco is not important in the grand scheme of things.

If he's working for Voldemort it's important Harry thought, but wisely held his tongue.

"I must speak with Madam Pomfrey now," said Dumbledore, as he looked at the matron. "But I also want to inform you that our next session will be next Monday."

"Okay, thanks," said Harry as he walked out of the room, burning with irritation over Dumbledore's lack of reaction to Malfoy."

"How is she?" Sarah and Vanessa asked when he entered the hallway.

"I couldn't get a good look at her," Harry answered. "I'm sure she'll be fine, Madam Pomfrey is the best."

"As you well know," said Ron with a brief chuckle. "You end up in there every couple of months."

"Well I haven't died yet," said Harry."

Hermione snorted. "Not for lack of trying."

Ron's stomach roiled with hunger. "Well, not to sound insensitive," (Hermione gave a stately cough) "but, we're not going to accomplish much by standing here. Anyone want to go down for dinner?"

Ginny rolled her eyes. "Fine, Mr. Not-To-Sound-Insensitive."
The rest of the Quidditch team walked towards the main staircase. After a quick glance at the Hospital door, Harry reluctantly followed.

Katie blinked.

The twin pinpricks of green had vanished. In their place was a sea of white.

Katie blinked again.

The white expanse molded into a white fluffy blanket. It was a moment before Katie realized the blanket was on top of her, and that she was still lying down. She tried to rise, but a wave of nausea over took her. She lay back down and groaned in pain.

"Madam Pomfrey!" a familiar voice cried from next to her ear. "Katie's awake!"

"You should sit back down," another voice said. "Remember what happened with your nosebleed?"

Despite her indisposition Katie had to smile. She now knew those two voices.

"Angie? Alicia?"

"Of course," Angelina replied. Katie could feel the smile in her voice. "We weren't about to let you suffer in the Hospital Wing on your own, you know. We came as soon as your parents owled us."

"Alright, alright, shoo!" Madam Pomfrey said irritably as she hustled over to Katie's bed. "I have to give her some potions and run a diagnostic. Please wait outside."

"Glad to see some things never change," Angelina laughed as she walked outside.

Katie was glad when Madam Pomfrey had stopped her fussing. The potions were disgusting, and worst, the matron informed her that she would have to spend an extra day confined to bed.

"But I have schoolwork and Quidditch!" she had protested.

"And they can wait one more day," Pomfrey chided. "But you will feel much better with one more day of rest. Now your parents are here to see you."

"Mum! Dad!" she exclaimed as her parents enveloped her in a hug that nearly made her nauseous again.

"How're you feeling?" Mrs. Bell asked her with concern as Angelina and Alicia re-entered the room behind them.

"A bit nauseous, but I'll be fine," Katie answered. "What happened to me, anyway? All I remember is that necklace hurting all of us."

"Harry Potter saved you," said her mother "The boy who lived."

Katie rolled her eyes. "I know who Harry is, mom. I've been on the same Quidditch team as him since I first started." Harry was there. She suddenly realized what those twin pinpricks of green had been. A thrill of happiness traveled up her spine.

"We ran into Harry at the Great Hall," said Alicia. "He told us about finding you, Leanne and Filch on the ground. Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger pulled Leanne out of the air and he wrapped that necklace up in his coat."
"It was right by your face," her father said, face pale. "If you had accidentally rolled onto it, or if you had lay next to it for another minute you might have died."

Katie gasped. "But Leanne...Filch...they both touched it."

And both are still at St. Mungos," Mrs. Bell said. "Professor Snape came right after harry and his friends found you and whisked them off there."

"How did this all happen," Alicia asked. "How did you guys come by that necklace anyway?"

"That is something that I hope Ms. Bell can answer," said a kindly voice behind Katie's visitors. Albus Dumbledore had entered the room.

The others rose to leave but Dumbledore rose his hand to forestall them

"It is fine, you do not have to go. I imagine it will be easier for Katie to tell her tale among family and friends."

To Katie's surprise it was. She did not go into the specifics of the argument that she and Vanessa had had, (not least because of her lingering resentment over Vanessa's presumption about Harry) but she did explain that the argument had caused her not to notice where Leanne had gone until she returned with the package and a dazed expression.

"The Imperius Curse then?" Mr. Bell asked.

"Yes," Dumbledore replied. "Most likely placed on her in the bathroom. A shame it was so crowded though. Did you see anyone else go into or out of the bathroom while you and Vanessa waited for Leanne?"

"It was so crowded I could barely see the bar," Katie answered.

"I will make inquiries with Madam Rosmerta and her assistants then," said Dumbledore. "Perhaps they might recall seeing anyone there." The headmaster turned to leave when Katie blurted out the question that had been on her mind since she had woken up.

"Please Headmaster, will Leanne be all right?"

"She will be at St. Mungo's for many weeks," he said gravely. "Perhaps many months. Thankfully it appears she touched the necklace with the barest of skin. She will live."

What about her studies though?" Mrs. Bell asked. She was fond of her daughters best friend.

"Yes, what about them?" Katie mimicked. "She was preparing to study to become an animagus. She'll be very behind because of all this and it really meant a lot to her."

"Now, now Minerva isn't heartless," Dumbledore said placatingly. "These are extenuating circumstances. The tests and practice to become an animagus stretches beyond Hogwarts. I believe Professor Mcgonagall would accept a few month's postponement."

"And what of Filch?" Alicia asked. Sure the caretaker was the least popular of Hogwarts' staff (barring certain Defense teachers) but no one deserved an attack like that. Katie flinched as she recalled his hand growing black with rot before her eyes. IT reminded her of dumblesores blackened hand; the one that even now he was keeping concealed in his robes.

Dumbledore's face fell. "It appears that Argus took the brunt of the necklaces curse," he said sadly.
"The last update I received from Professor Snape was not encouraging. He is in a bad way."

"But," he added, "At least you and Ms. sheffield are on the mend. I must leave now to investigate this matter further," he nodded to the others. "Good evening."

Mr. and Mrs. Bell who had been by Katie's bedside for six hours, left shortly after to send word to other family members what had happened. To Katie's embarassment and pleasure, they told her that they had booked rooms at Hogsmeade and that they would give her a nice one day holiday when she was released from Madam Pomfrey's care the following morning. Soon it was just Angelina and Alicia in the wing, though they received word that Sarah and Vanessa would come up shortly.

"So how has Quidditch been going," Angelina asked. "You hardly write anymore."

"I know, Katie replied abashedly. "I've just been so busy with schoolwork and practice." She quickly launched into a retelling of her year to date; the constant work, McLaggen's general idiocy, and her semi official co-captainship. She went through all their practices in detail and said she hoped that this event wouldnt keep her out of the upcoming Slytherin match because how much would it suck to miss her final match against their archrivals?

"So you've been seeing quite a lot of Harry this year, then?" Alicia asked innocently when she had finished.

"Yeah," Katie replied warily. "Why?"

"Nothing its just interesting that you mentioned him every five sentences," she replied as she exchanged a brief glance with Angelina. "But im glad to hear he's doing well."

Katie felt slightly uneasy, as if she had revealed too much. Her two friends were smirking too much for her to feel comfortable, but thankfully a distraction arrived in the form of Sarah and Vanessa.

The five of them spent a long time catching up before Madam Pomfrey arrived to shoo them away. Katie was just happy that nobody gave her any more knowing looks.

The following morning came upon Hogwarts crisp and blue, made all the more sweeter by Katie's freedom from the hospital wing's tyranny. She and her parents hit the Hogsmeade shops early. The rain and bitter cold of yesterday were lost in the annals of history. Today was fine and bracing.

"So how's life in the booth?" she asked her father.

"Good, good." He answered. "I have a new announcing partner whom I believe you know. I'm calling Kenmore Kestrel games with Lee Jordan now. He's so good I think he will be announcing national games in no time."

Katie grinned. For as long as she had known him, Lee had always wanted to become an announcer. Now he was calling Quidditch matches barely a year after graduating, he would deservedly go far. She found out that her mother was also getting into Quidditch media. She had just signed a hefty contract to write for the Quidditch Quarterly magazine; an upstart paper determined to break the Daily Prophet's monopoly on sports media. Apparently her family was determined that no one would ever think that the Bells did not eat, drink and breathe Quidditch.

As dusk fell they started up the pathway back to the castle again when noises from the Quidditch pitch caught their attention. Katie, who by now was quite used to Harry's voice, smiled when she heard him calling out orders and tactics.
"Want to see our practice?" she asked her parents, knowing the answer before she had even opened her mouth.

"Of course!"

The three Bells took a seat in the Gryffindor student section. Harry immediately flew down to talk.

"Glad to see you're back!" he called cheerfully as he hovered low over the bleachers. "I would have come and seen you first thing, but with classes and all I didn't get a chance."

"That's fine," said Katie. "How's practice going?"

"Pretty well. I think we'll knock Slytherin's block off on Saturday." He followed Katie's gaze towards the three Chasers passing back and forth. "I decided to use Dean in today's practice just to work with the other's since you've recovered he won't take your spot against those snakes." He peered closer to the girl. "You are feeling better, right?"

"Mostly," said Katie. "But I'll definitely be fine by Saturday. I'm not going to miss my last match against Slytherin!"

"That's the spirit," Harry said approvingly. His eyes traveled to her parents who smiled up at their daughter's savior. "You know...why don't you give your parents a treat and take over practice for a bit?"

Katie grinned widely. She was itching to show her Quidditch-mad parents what she was fully capable of. "All right," she answered cheerfully. "Now get back into Seeking position, Potter!"

Harry snorted as he flew up above his other teammates to pantomime searching for the Snitch. The Chasers and Beaters gathered around Katie as she re-explained what she expected out of the Hawkshead Attacking Formation and how to defend it against Slytherin aimed Bludgers.

It was by far the most successful practice that Katie had ever conducted, though granted it was one of the few she had led since she had agreed to help Harry at the beginning of the year. Nevertheless, the fact that she was able to do so in front of her parents made it all the sweeter. When darkness fell on the field, her parents let out a mighty cheer, slightly embarrassing the Seventh year.

"We'll be there on Saturday!" they called as they walked towards the Hogwarts gates to Apparate back home. They weren't about to miss their daughter's last Slytherin match either.

"By the way," her father said in a low voice. "I heard that Kenmore Kestral scouts are going to be attending, just to let you and the others know."

"I'll be sure to tell them," Katie said, giving him a peck on the cheek.

Kenmore Kestral scouts? A chance to impress the team her father used to coach? Katie beamed, determined to show her stuff and smash Slytherin to bits.
As was her ritual before matches, Katie was awakened by the first rays of dawn. She stared out the window, shielding her eyes against the slowly rising sun. The pitch was empty of any life; Katie reckoned that not a living soul had stirred on the Hogwarts grounds. She tiptoed quietly along the room, careful not to awaken Sarah or Vanessa. She acutely felt Leanne’s absence; her best friend was usually right beside her on gameday mornings. Her empty bed still drew Katie’s eye even a week after her injury. Leanne's mother had told her that she was improving at the hospital but Katie was still anxious. After all, the news on Filch was discouraging. He still seemed to be at death’s door.

A mouthwatering breakfast of sausage and eggs met her when she walked into the Great Hall. Oliver would have called it "a fortifying source of protein and energy." But Katie's only thoughts were on how delicious it tasted. As she tore into her food, she saw a few other of her teammates entering the hall, led by Harry and a disgruntled looking Ron.

Ron's attitude had been awful during the previous week. Something must have happened between Katie's coached practice and the following one. One day he was playing well and confidently, the next he was as touchy as a Blast-Ended Skrewt and playing like one too. He had started yelling at everyone on the team and had reduced poor Demelza to tears, nearly resulting in a fight between him and Ritchie Coote. Even she was victim to Ron's hostility though Harry had read him the riot act after that. She scooted over to the far side of the table. She wasn't keen on putting up with any crap before the match.

"Hey," Ginny greeted as she plopped down across from Katie. "You excited?"

"Last match against the snakes? You know I am. Your brother had better be ready too. Has he gotten over whatever's bugging him?"

Ginny sighed. "Not unless he gets his hands on another Time Turner." At Katie's questioning look she began her explanation. Apparently Ron and Harry had walked in on Ginny and Dean snogging in a deserted hallway and Ron had decided to throw his weight around in the guise of being a "responsible" older brother which had caused Ginny to taunt him about his lack of experience. The upshot of the entire thing was that Ron had found out that Hermione had snogged Krum (What did he expect? Katie thought) and was now taking out his resulting anger on everyone, especially Hermione.

"Well I'm glad I'm an only child," Katie quipped after Ginny had finished.

"I wish I was, sometimes", the red-head replied. "It's just so aggravating. I wish I hadn't gone off on him, but he was butting in on my personal life and now I'm worried I might have permanently mucked things up for Hermione and him."

"It's Ron's problem if he's hung up on that," Katie said placatingly. "It's Hermione's life at the end of the day, and it wasn't like she and Ron were dating at the time...or ever, for that matter."

"True"

Katie stole a glance at her captain. Harry seemed to be offering a glass of orange juice to Ron, who looked pale. She sighed. They all knew Ron had talent, he'd helped clinch the Cup last year, but it still remained to be seen if he had the mental makeup to be a successful Keeper. For all their sakes, she hoped he did.
Her musing was interrupted by the loud entrance of the Slytherin team. Cold. Arrogant. Snooty. Katie hated all of them. Slytherin had never beat them since she and Harry had joined the team. She was not about to let them start now.

"That's strange," said Ginny as she coolly appraised their rivals. "Where's Malfoy?"

"Oi Harper!" she yelled cheerfully. "Slytherin must really be scraping the barrel if they're letting you on the team!"

The young Slytherin flushed red. "Shove off Weasel! Malfoy picked me personally to replace him when he got sick. We'll wipe the pitch with you!"

Katie raised an eyebrow. "Since when did Malfoy miss a match? He's been itching to beat us for years! I'd better tell Harry."

She walked over to Harry and Ron, the latter of whom apparently finishing up yet another argument with Hermione. Katie waited for Ron to finish the dregs of orange juice before starting.

"Good news Harry! Apparently Malfoy has gone off sick so they're using some underclassman named Harper to fly Seeker."

Harry nodded with pleasure thought he seemed to be perturbed. "Not like Malfoy to call out of a game."

"I almost forgot to mention that one of their Chasers, Damon Vaisley is out as well," said Ginny as she hurried up to the group. "He took a Bludger to the head yesterday in practice."

"Not good for Slytherin," said Harry. "He's their best goal-scorer."

"Lucky for me," said Ron. "Maybe we have a shot after all." He took two steps toward the pitch before his jaw dropped. He turned back to Harry.

"I...you..." Ron had dropped his voice, he looked both scared and excited. "My drink...my pumpkin juice...you didn't...?"

Harry raised his eyebrows, but said nothing except, "We'll be starting in about five minutes, you'd better get your boots on."

What in Merlin's name are they talking about? Deciding it was probably better that she didn't know, she walked ahead out of the castle to the changing rooms.

To Katie's disappointment, the rising sun was obscured by clouds when she and the rest of the team exited from the changing room. The stands were full of tumultuous roars and boos. One end of the stadium was solid red and gold; the other a sea of green and silver. Many Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws had taken sides too; the vast majority for Gryffindor of course. It was tantamount to declaring sides in the raging war all over Wizarding Britain.

She scanned the crowd as she took her position in the air. She grinned brilliantly as she recognized the cheering forms of her parents, Angelina, and Alicia, the latter of whom had her little brother Brian by her side. With a pang, Katie realized that she hadn't been spending as much time as she had promised to with Alicia's First year brother. She would have to make up for that soon. Behind her family and friends were three tall people; one woman, two men, who were jotting down notes.
"Captains shake hands," said Madam Hooch, and Harry had his hand crushed by the new Slytherin Captain, Urquhart. "Mount your brooms. On the whistle...three...two...one..."

The whistle sounded. Katie and the others kicked off hard from the frozen ground, and they were away.

An unfortunately familiar voice rang out across the stands.

"Well, there they go, and I think we're all surprised to see the team that Potter's put together this year. Many thought, given Ronald Weasley's patchy performance as Keeper last year, that he might be off the team, but of course, a close personal friendship with the Captain does help."

For a second, Katie thought it was McLaggen announcing, until she looked over and saw the upturned nose of Zacharias Smith in the commenter's booth.

Git...

Katie took a pass from Ginny and turned upfield. The Nimbus Two Thousand and Five responded immediately to her touch. She might as well have not gotten injured last week; as she dove and weaved, she could detect no adverse effects from the necklace.

Her first shot on the hoop was a cracker; It zipped through the flailing arms of the Slytherin Keeper through the right hoop. Katie swung around on her broom as the Keeper retrieved the Quaffle. 10-0.

Let's see what the scouts think about that!

Ron, despite his abject failures in practice, was playing brilliantly. He cleanly stopped Urquhart's first shot, eliciting an underhanded compliment from Smith

"He's bound to get lucky sometimes, I suppose..."

Katie thought back to Ron's strange comment after learning about Malfoy's and Vaisey's absences from the match. Lucky...lucky... What had that been all about?

Whatever the cause, it was clear that today was Gryffindor's day. Within a half hour, Gryffindor was leading eighty points to zero, half of which had come from Katie and another thirty from Ginny. Nothing could slow her down. Katie twisted around bludgers, intercepted passes, and delivered crisp ones of her own. She could only imagine what the Kestrel scouts were writing about her, and what Harry must be thinking as they piled the goals up. It wasn't only she who was playing spectacularly. Both Peakes' and Coote' were channeling the Weasley twins as they smacked the Slytherins around, Ginny had nearly scored as many as her and Demelza was doing a great job with counter-attacking the slytherin Chasers. And as for their Keeper, Ron had made some truly spectacular saves, some by the very tips of his gloves, and one amazing kick save which reminded Katie of the one he had pulled in practice last year.

This had effectively stopped Zacharias from criticizing Ron and the Chasers. For he had started in on them as well, wondering why the Gryffindors seemed to only play females. He had slyly hinted that Harry was trading those positions for certain favors, until McGonagall threatened to give him a month's detention for "scurrilous rumor-mongering" Katie's cheeks had turned bright red at this; she was so angry that she immediately scored another two goals in succession. This, added to another by Demelza had brought the score to 110-0. Soon Harry wouldn't even need to catch the Snitch...not
That he was going to lose to some scrub like Harper.

Again and again they scored, and again and again, at the other end of the pitch, Ron saved goals with apparent ease. He was actually smiling now and when the crowd greeted a particularly good save with a rousing chorus of the old favorite, "Weasley Is Our King," her pretended to conduct them from on high.

A roar of outrage erupted from the stands just a moment after. Katie looked up to see Harper slam into Harry, nearly knocking him off his Firebolt. Katie winced, and a second later, clapped her hand to her mouth in alarm.

"And I think Harper of Slytherin's seen the Snitch!" said Zacharias Smith through his megaphone. Yes, he's certainly seen something Potter hasn't!"

A wink of gold came from high in the air as the sun shone on the Snitch. Harper was gaining, and Harry was still far behind.

"Come on...come on..." Katie prayed as her Captain took off after the Slytherin. The score was 170-30. If Harper reached the Snitch, Slytherin would steal a ten point victory. Harry was flying just behind Harper, but the Slytherin Seeker already had his arm outstretched...

And then the Snitch went right through the Slytherin's fingers as he fumbled in mid-air. As he shot past it, Harry made a great swipe for the golden ball, nearly losing his balance. He raised his hand in triumph; the Snitch fluttering trapped inside his fingers.

"YES!" Kate yelled as Harry hurtled back toward the ground, the Snitch held high. A great shout went up that almost drowned out the sound of the whistle that signaled the end of the game. Katie and most of the team dove toward the ground; she noticed Ginny clip Zacharias's podium, knocking him over, as they all landed.

They enveloped Harry in a many-armed hug when they landed. It was a rousing send-off for Katie. She could proudly say that she had never been defeated by Slytherin in all her seven years.

Over the cheering Gryffindors, she could see her parents and graduated friends trying to make their way through the crowd. She gave Harry a quick peck on the cheek (wondering why her face was getting warm) and ran over to join them.

"You did amazing!" her parents cried as Angelina and Alicia hugged her. "That was the most dominating game I've ever witnessed," said her mother; high praise from a woman who had flown for the Wimbourne Wasps.

"And in front of the scouts too," added her father. "It wasn't just Kenmore, the Holyhead Harpies and the Tutshill Tornadoes also sent their scouts!"

"You're joking!"

"Not at all. I couldn't see what they were writing. Of course, but the way you played definitely got their attention. You scored half of Gryffindor's goals."

Mr. Bell seemed to want to say more, nut his wife placed her hand on his arm. "All right dear, let's give Angie and Alicia a chance to talk with her."

"Sorry," he said sheepishly. "We'll see you later then."
Katie rolled her eyes. "Christmas break is just a month away, Dad. I'll see you then."

"Maybe, maybe not," he said conspiratorially, as he and his wife threaded their way among the crowd.

Katie stared after them before turning to walk toward the changing room. "What the bloody hell was that about?"

Angelina chuckled as she and Alicia kept pace. "We wanted to tell you that we've decided to toast your quick recovery in style. We've planned a trip to France for Christmas break. It'll be nice to get out of Britain and get away from everything...at least temporarily."

"That sounds fantastic!" Katie exclaimed. But she immediately felt concern. "What about your mother, Alicia. And your brother?"

Alicia sighed. "Mom's not doing so well. I decided to have her committed to St. Mungo's for now and see if the Healers can't help her. You don't mind if we take Brian with us? I need to watch him and a week away will help him keep his mind off things."

"I'd love to have him along," said Katie as they reached the changing room. "And thank you for the trip. It'll be great!"

After saying her goodbyes, she slipped into the changing room where her teammates were already finishing up. She was in the midst of changing into her school robes when she heard heated voices outside the door. When she emerged, she saw Harry and Hermione by the exit, the latter wiping her eyes

"You go," Hermione said through tears. "I'm sick of Ron at the moment. I don't know what I'm supposed to have done."

And with that she ran out the door, Harry staring helplessly after her.

"Is everything alright?" Katie asked tentatively as she walked up beside Harry.

"Hm...?" Harry muttered before he registered Katie's appearance. "Oh...well...I seem to have really messed things up for Hermione and Ron."

"Well at least you're a better captain than matchmaker," said Katie as Harry chuckled.

They walked out into the crisp cool air as Harry elaborated what happened.

He had apparently won a bottle of Felix Felicis from Slughorn, something which surprised Katie. She had never heard of such a valuable potion being freely given away like that. For the first time, she wished she had been able to take Potions NEWTs, but when Snape taught it, an "Exceeds Expectations" had not been good enough.

Harry had kept the potion safe, not knowing how to use it until the opportunity presented itself to help buck up Ron's confidence which had been shot when Ginny had taunted him over his lack of "experience" and over Viktor Krum.

"I thought that if Ron thought I gave him the potion he would play more confidently. And I used Hermione to really get him to believe. I just didn't think it would end up so badly."

"They've fought before", said Katie, who well remembered the "cat and rat" incident and the Yule Ball common room confrontation. "They'll probably make up once again."
"True, but I've usually been a bystander. Not this much involved."

They reached the castle as the sun plunged below the horizon. A few Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs congratulated them in the Great Hall (and the Slytherins frowned) but they got quite a reception back at the common room, where a raging party was underway.

Renewed cheers and clapping greeted their appearance and Harry was soon surrounded by a mob of admirers and well-wishers. Katie was buffeted out of the way by the press of people (mostly girls) and was content in finding Sarah in a corner of the Common Room.

"Where's Vanessa?"

Sarah pointed to the crowd. Vanessa was near the front, laughing at something Harry said. Katie rolled her eyes, ignoring the twinge of annoyance in her chest.

"So how're things with Thomas Chambers?" Katie asked as she looked away from the scene.

Sarah smiled shyly. "I know I didn't get a chance to tell you with your injury and practicing for Quidditch, but we're dating now."

"Congratulations!"

"Yeah, I can't wait for Slughorn's Christmas party. It'll be great to go to one of those."

"Oh, is Thomas part of that Slug Club of his?"

"The Slug Club?" Sarah giggled at the name. "Yeah, his father is a major investor in some Icelandic bank. Apparently they're working on a merger with Gringotts, so Slughorn's taken interest in Tom."

Her face fell as she looked over Katie's shoulder. "Oh no, Katie, you'd better run."

"Bell!"

Katie turned quickly to see the massive form of Cormac McLaggen.

"Oh...hi McLaggen," she muttered as she searched for an avenue of escape. Behind her, she could feel Sarah quickly vacating the scene. She could not blame her.

"Not calling me Cormac anymore?" McLaggen gave an ingratiating laugh.

She sighed. "I'll call you Cormac when you stop calling me Bell. Now what do you want?"

The large Gryffindor took an exaggerated step back. "Whoa, what's with the hostility there? I only wanted to congratulate you on the match."

Katie looked disbelieving. "Yeah, yeah, now what criticism are you going to give me now?"

"None whatsoever," he replied, looking befuddled. "You played a great match, and impressed the scouts. Heck, even Weasley did, for once."

Katie darted a suspicious look at the boy. "What's your angle, McLaggen? Since when have you been nice?"

"I'm always nice," Cormac replied. "You're just being paranoid. But since you ask."

But Katie had just noticed Harry escape the crowd around him, with the help of Dean and Seamus.
She walked off, leaving Cormac in mid-sentence."

"Escape your fans?" she teased.

"Thankfully," Harry muttered as he brushed his robes. They had gotten crumpled with so many people around him. "They all wanted a blow by blow account of the match, which I've never really understood. I can understand asking one of you guys, Ron or the Beaters, but I just spend most of the time searching for the Snitch; which is hardly exciting to retell."

"Yeah, but they want you to re-tell it," said Katie. "I'm pretty sure no one is asking Malfoy, Chang or Summerby for their accounts."

"Too bad they also have to stop me from enjoying the party," said Harry as he looked around the room. "It's annoying getting surrounded all the time by girls who just want me to take them to Slughorn's party."

The way he said that made Katie look up. "You're not going?"

"Well, I suppose I'd better," Harry sighed. "I've blown off pretty much everyone one of his meetings. Maybe it'll be fun...but of course he'll probably spend the entire time talking my head off."

Katie grabbed a small tray on a nearby table, which had two firewhiskeys, and pressed one into his hand.

"For a guy who just destroyed Slytherin, you look awfully annoyed. You ever had one before?"

"Yeah," Harry replied as he glanced at the drink. "Sirius gave me some last year over Christmas break. Where did you get these?"

"One of my fellow Seventh years must have," she said. "The House-elves will give you anything, as long as you're of age."

"You sound like you speak from experience," Harry teased.

"Well...I might have taken a few liberties last year when I came of age," she admitted, blushing. "But so did Angie and Alicia!"

"How are they?"

They nursed their drinks while she filled him in on their former teammates until they were interrupted by Ginny, with Arnold the Pygmy Puff and Dean Thomas in tow.

"If you're looking for Ron, he's over there...the filthy hypocrite."

There, in full view of the whole room, stood Ron wrapped so closely around Lavender Brown it was hardy to tell whose hands were whose.

"It looks like he's eating her face, doesn't it?" said Ginny dispassionately. "But I suppose he's got to refine his technique somehow."

She patted Harry's arm and walked off.

"What the hell?" Katie asked. "What's he doing with Lavender Brown?"

"It looks like I really messed things up," said Harry as he turned away from Ron, who did not
"Look like he would be surfacing soon. "I really hope Hermione doesn't see this."

"No, if it's anyone, it's Ron who screwed up," said Katie, but a loud slam echoed around the room. They were just in time to see a mane of bushy brown hair whipping out of sight

"Damn," Harry swore. "I have to go after her." He dashed out of the portrait hole, leaving Katie holding two Firewhiskeys.

Looks like everyone will lose their bet, Katie thought dryly as she turned to put one of them down. But Romilda Vane was in the way, glaring daggers.

"I know what you're trying to do," she said coldly. Behind her, a few other Fourth year girls looked disapproving at her.

"You mean trying to put these away?" Katie retorted.

"No, I mean with Harry Potter," she replied, in a voice which clearly conveyed that she thought Katie was an idiot. "You're obviously trying to get him to ask you to Slughorn's Christmas Ball."

Katie flinched. "You mean I can't talk to my teammate and friend in peace without you freaking out about it?"

"Oh you can," Romilda said in an oily voice. "If that's all that you were doing...but you're too transparent, Bell. In fact, you're desperate."

Katie scoffed. "Right. Because throwing yourself at the guy isn't desperate at all. If I'm desperate, then you all are stalkers. Besides, why get mad at me? My friend Vanessa was doing the same thing and you're not acting bitchy towards her."

"Because-

"Because they're jealous of you," said a thankfully familiar voice beside her. Ginny had come to her rescue. "Because the only woman that Harry actually paid genuine attention to all night has been you." She glared daggers at the Fourth year girls, who looked taken aback.

"It is quite rich for a bunch of fourteen year olds to act all catty around a seventeen year old one," said Katie, smirking. "Perhaps you should get back to your dolls and magazines?"

She and Ginny walked off in triumph.

"You really think that I was the only one who Harry was paying genuine attention to?" Katie asked.

"I've practically lived with the guy for the past two summers," Ginny replied, smiling. "I'm sure of it." She gave Katie a cheeky look. "Of course, you might want to ask yourself exactly why you asked me that question. And with that, she flounced off, over to Dean.

Katie spent the rest of the party with Sarah and Vanessa, only partially paying attention to the conversation. Why did she care what Harry thought of her?
The Invitation

Chapter Notes

All bolded parts are from the book.

It seemed like Hogwarts was doing its best to make regret that this was her final year, Katie thought wistfully as she looked at the Christmas decorations adorning the Great Hall.

*Leanne would really enjoy this.* Of course, St Mungo’s was decorated beyond reason for the holidays, in an attempt to lighten its normally somber atmosphere. But there was a difference between lying in bed and seeing a wreath on the far side of the room, and standing in the Great Hall and seeing what Hagrid and the elves had done for festive cheer.

The biggest tree that she had ever seen stood near the professors’ table, towering over all. It was so large that it nearly touched the enchanted ceiling where flurries of snow swirled around the tip. Holly wreaths were hung around the back of every chair and (most importantly of all) mistletoe hung over the entrances to the Hall.

Some of the more exhibitionist couples (and some singles) had ended up blocking traffic in and out of the Hall because of this, until Professor McGonagall had threatened two weeks detention; one before and one after the holiday. Needless to say, it ceased shortly thereafter, for all but one.

Harry had a tough time of it, thought Katie as she saw him and Ron quickly disappear behind a disused secret exit that the twins had discovered years before. Now that he was, once again, the Boy Who Lived instead of the Boy Who Lied, many other girls were eager to get with the hero, through whatever means necessary. Harry had told her of Hermione’s warning about the spiked Chocolate Cauldrons, and she had witnessed first-hand Harry’s attempts to get through hallways laced with mistletoe. It would be funny, Katie thought, if she weren’t so conflicted.

It had started after they had kicked Slytherin’s arse a few weeks earlier. The win was sweet, without a doubt, but the important bits had happened during the post-game party. She and Harry had been hanging out with each other throughout the party, (with some interruptions by Ron and Lavender, and Harry comforting Hermione) when she had been confronted by some fourth-year named Romilda Vane and her gaggle of followers.

"You're obviously trying to get him to ask you to Slughorn's Christmas Ball."
It wasn’t as if she couldn’t handle the situation by herself against some fourth year midgets, but Ginny had come on over to tell them off.

"Because they're jealous of you. Because the only woman that Harry actually paid genuine attention to all night has been you."

When Katie had asked her whether she thought Harry had been paying attention only to her Ginny replied cheekily

"I'm sure of it. Of course, you might want to ask yourself exactly why you asked me that question."

And Katie had, despite her best attempts to ignore Ginny’s advice. And she wasn’t pleased with the answer.

Oh, it wasn’t as if she were some prude or someone who put her future over romance, Katie wasn’t nearly that cliché. It was the fact that she had just told off Vanessa over going for Harry during the Hogsmeade visit, the fact that she had sneered at Romilda and the other girls trying to waylay Harry in the hallways for a quick smooch. In the end, was she better than any of them?

Because Katie could now finally admit to herself that she fancied Harry, not that she had told anyone else. Perhaps she would have told Leanne, if she hadn’t been recuperating at St Mungo’s and perhaps she might have told Angelina and Alicia, if she hadn’t known that they would tease her for it. She definitely was not going to tell Vanessa or Sarah though; there was no quicker way for it to spread around the castle than telling her roommates.

Harry had changed a lot from the scrawny bespectacled midget whose head had nearly been engulfed by the Sorting Hat during his first day at Hogwarts. He was still bespectacled of course, but he had grown into his previously oversized glasses. Six years of Quidditch (and of fighting the Dark Arts) had done him well.

Granted, any lunkhead could be good looking. Draco Malfoy and Roger Davies were okay on the eyes, but the former was an evil scumbag and the latter merely an egotistical one. Harry had what so many others in Hogwarts lacked; a good personality. There was an inner strength in him, apparent to anyone who spent more than five minutes in his company. So many others, faced with Harry’s tragic past, his stressful present and his dark future would have crumbled in the face of it, Katie reflected. But not Harry. No, he was made of sterner stuff indeed. He didn’t only have to face the evil of You-Know-Who, but he had to deal with cowards and skeptics who were supposedly on his side, like the former Minister of Magic and his lackey, Umbridge. Almost as bad was the whisper campaign against him last year, by his fellow students, and four years ago during the opening of the Chamber
of Secrets. Yet Harry had persevered.

It wasn’t just that which so intrigued Katie. It was Harry’s sense of humor, his loyalty to his friends, the way she felt so comfortable in his presence, even last year in Dumbledore’s Army. Yet she hadn’t felt anything for Harry until this year, not until they had started spending time with each other drawing up practices, and even hanging out periodically outside of the Quidditch team. She remembered the first day Harry had joined the team. Though she had been excited that she would be flying alongside somebody famous, she was mostly happy that she wasn’t going to be the youngest person on the team. Times certainly had changed.

The problem was, it seemed like half the girls at Hogwarts had their eyes set on Harry as well, and with the biggest party since the Yule Ball coming up, they had stepped up their efforts to get Harry to ask them to Slughorn’s celebration, like Romilda trying to slip love potion to him. Katie wasn’t going to play that game though, she wasn’t going to stoop to that level or give Vanessa, Romilda and any others the satisfaction of watching her do so.

Unfortunately for Katie, there was somebody else who was intent on taking her to Slughorn’s party.

“Bell!!”

_Oh bollocks_

She reluctantly turned to see the unwelcome figure of Cormac McLaggen looming at the entrance of the Great Hall. His arms were spread out wide as if in greeting, but only served to make sure that she couldn’t push past him into the hallway.

“What do you want, McLaggen?” she asked in a resigned voice. Her fellow seventh year raised an eyebrow dramatically.

“I can’t say hello to you anymore without you sounding irritable?”

“You never said hello," Katie replied as she walked towards him. "Now can you move out of the way? I want to go to the library.”

Cormac grinned as he slid aside. "Oh good I was headed that way myself.”
"Alone!" Katie snapped. "I need to study, and it'll be a lot easier without you around."

"A fair point, Bell," McLaggen replied, the hint of a smirk in his voice. "I imagine there would be a lot of staring on your part."

Katie shuddered. With anybody else, she would assume they were kidding around. But with McLaggen, one got the sense that he actually believed what he said. Not to mention that the boy had no sense of humor when it came to himself.

She had hoped Cormac would have taken the hint, but she could still sense him close behind as she walked up the stairs. *Probably staring at my butt* she thought, irritably. When she reached the third floor landing, she whirled around.

"I thought I told you to leave me alone!"

"Just a second Bell, you never gave me a chance to explain myself."

"Explain what?" Katie said with confusion. Was the idiot actually going to apologize for four years of being the most annoying tosser in Hogwarts' existence?

McLaggen hesitated slightly, surprising Katie. It was perhaps the first time she had ever seen anything crack his giant ego. The moment quickly passed, however as he found his footing.

"Well, seeing as you don't have a date for the biggest party of the year and seeing that I am attending it, and seeing that the party is tomorrow night...I was wondering if you'd go with me."

Katie stared in disbelief.

"Why on earth would you ask me, McLaggen? I've turned you down every time you've asked to do anything with me. Don't you get that you treated me abominably at the Yule Ball? I mean, surely it would occur to anyone else that I wasn't interested in them, but no, for some reason you keep on pretending that I'm going to cave and go gaga over you. Have you been watching too many Muggle romantic comedies?"
Cormac clenched his fists as his face turned a fine shade of red. If Peeves had been present he certainly would have started singing about how much the Gryffindor boy resembled a tomato. Yet Katie took a step back. She knew that McLaggen had an awful temper; he'd managed to snap his broom cleanly in half when he heard that Oliver wasn't going to call a second tryout the previous year after he had missed the first one in the Hospital Wing.

"Slughorn's party isn't just some regular party. Don't you understand you little.... (Katie raised an eyebrow) don't you understand, Bell? Slughorn advances the careers of any student he takes a fancy to. I mean, they say Gwenog Jones is going to be at one of the Slug Club's meetings. If you come with me to this party, I can convince old Sluggy to let you in, and you'll get to meet her."

Katie opened her mouth to interrupt but McLaggen plowed ahead.

"Come on Bell, you'll get to meet the greatest woman Quidditch player in a century? You want a Quidditch career right? Jones will get you noticed by the Holyhead Harpies, you can get a reserve contract right after graduating!"

She couldn't deny that this was a most attractive prospect....if it didn't involve going with McLaggen. Katie had more pride than that, and it wasn't as if she lacked for Quidditch connections, even if she was one of Jones's biggest fans.

"First of all, McLaggen, you seem to forget that my family is filled with Quidditch pros," she said icily. "Secondly, it wouldn't matter anyway, since I'm not that desperate about my Quidditch future."

Cormac threw up his hands in dismay. "Come on Bell! Just come to the party with me, I promise that you'll enjoy yourself."

"No, McLaggen," Katie replied with an air of finality. She turned to walk to the library once more, thankful that there were no other students around, until McLaggen called after her. "Don't you understand that I like you?"

Enough is enough

"I understand that you'd probably like to sleep with me," she said, turning around once more, "but that's not going to happen, McLaggen."
She wasn't surprised that there was no embarrassment on the boy's face.

"What makes you think that?"

Katie's face twisted in disgust. She marched up to him, jabbing a finger to his chest

"Did you ever ask about how I nearly died last month? Did you come visit me in the Hospital Wing? Did you bring me my school work? Did you even express your condolences?"

McLaggen's mouth hung open. He looked as if he had malfunctioned.

"You didn't, McLaggen. So don't go pretending you're some long suffering martyr who's being denied by the love of his life. I'm just some challenge to you that you want to fuck and chuck....not that you're some suave ladies man in the first place."

To Katie's surprise, McLaggen didn't argue. Once he had his mouth under control, he simply shrugged and walked down the stairs. Katie felt oddly deflated. She'd been hoping that he'd somehow confess that he'd been an idiot and that he'd leave her alone forever....but perhaps she had been watching one too many Muggle movies herself.

It was a shame though. Slughorn's party did sound fascinating. But there was such a thing as self-respect and if she was going to accept that idiot's invitation just to experience a party, than how could she live with herself? Especially after she had gone to the Yule Ball with him, and how that had turned out.

Damn, Katie thought, as she glanced at her pocketwatch. She had hoped to get some studying time in before her next class, but now it was only twenty minutes away. Grumbling to herself, she set out back down to the first floor for Transfiguration. Trust McLaggen to mess things up.

As Katie made her way towards McGonagall's class, she was knocked over by someone heading in the opposite direction

"Watch it!" she snapped. Then she got a look at the other. "Oh....sorry Hermione, I didn't know it was you. Is....is everything okay?"
Hermione scrambled for her books, trying to hide her face. But it was clear that she was crying.

"N-no," she choked out.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Hermione looked as if she wanted to refuse again, but after a slight pause she nodded.

"Not here though, classes are letting out right now and I don't want anyone else to see me like this."

And so she marched off down a disused corridor, until they reached a bathroom on the far end.

"Moaning Myrtle's bathroom?" Katie asked incredulously. "You know, she's not going to make you feel better, unless you want to feel good by comparison."

"No one's going to overhear us in there," she said simply. Katie was pleased to note that her tears were drying on her cheeks.

"So what did Ron do now?" Katie began without preamble, once they had entered the room. Thankfully it seemed as if Myrtle had taken a trip to a septic tank

"How did you-"

"Come on," said Katie. "We were all at the after party last week, and Ron and Lavender were pretty......demonstrative."

Hermione pursed her lips at the mention of the girl's name.

"Right, but how did you know that I -"
Katie snorted.

"Hermione, I might not be as smart as you, but I'm not a complete idiot. None of us are...well most of us aren't."

A ghost of a smile came across the younger girl's face, but quickly vanished. She told Katie about what had happened at Transfiguration, about how Ron had mocked her in front of the entire class, and how Lavender had laughed.

"I know he makes fun of me all the time, and I'm fine with that. But this time...."

"I understand," said Katie. What seemed commonplace one day, could turn into a crisis the next, especially to someone undergoing the amount of emotional stress that Hermione had.

"I just don't know what to do anymore, I-"

Hermione broke off, mouth open in alarm as the door creaked open. A second later, she sighed with relief.

"Luna, you nearly gave me a heart attack!"

Luna Lovegood stood at the entrance, looking both ethereal and bizarre at the same time. Her blonde hair was like a curtain framing her shoulders, but the entire ensemble was marred by the strange glasses she was wearing.

"Spectrespecs," Luna said as she caught Katie's gaze. "For finding wrackspurts."

"Oh,"  

As if I have idea what those are

"I heard voices within," Luna said to them. I was wondering if Myrtle needed someone to talk to."

"She's not here," said Hermione, "but I could use another ear. If you don't mind of course, Katie."
"That's fine," said Katie. "I should get going anyway. I have McGonagall in ten minutes."

"You'd better get going then," said Hermione as Katie walked for the exit. "And Katie?"

"Yes?"

"Thanks."

With a smile Katie closed the door. Her heart gave an almighty leap when she turned around. Harry was walking swiftly towards her.

"Oh, hey Harry," she said breathlessly, mentally kicking herself for sounding like an idiot."

*Get a grip Bell, you were fine talking to Harry only a week ago!*

"Hey Katie," said Harry with a slow smile. "Have you seen Hermione around? She ran out of Transfiguration and I want to talk to her."

"She's in the bathroom with Luna Lovegood," Katie said, jerking her thumb behind her. "I was trying to comfort her earlier, she said that Ron was being an idiot."

"He was," said Harry, with a sigh. "I'll wait for her out here then, if Luna's taking care of her. With my luck, Snape's going to pop out just as I enter a girl's bathroom."

"He certainly has a habit of swooping down when you least expect it," Katie agreed. She had been on the wrong side of the Head of Slytherin quite a few times.

"I should get going," said Katie, cursing the fact that she had a class. "McGonagall will kill me if I'm late."
"Just a sec," said Harry. "How would you like to come to Slughorn’s party with me tonight?

Katie, who had been about to reluctantly leave, stood frozen on the spot.

"Wait...what?" She couldn't have heard him correctly....right?

"We're supposed to bring guests," Harry said quickly. "So I thought you might like... I mean...I mean just as friends, you know. But if you don't want to."

Katie felt oddly deflated at Harry’s words, particularly how intently he took pains to say that he was only asking her as friends.

But even so....it would be a lot of fun to go. Especially with Harry, especially now that she had taken a long hard look at her feelings for her fellow co-captain.

"Oh, no, I'd love to with you as friends," Katie replied with a wide smile. She would take what she could get. "Tomorrow night, right?"

"Yep, eight o'clock, up at Slughorn’s office."

"AHA!" screamed a voice from overhead and both of them jumped; unnoticed by either of them, they had just passed underneath Peeves, who was hanging upside down from a chandelier and grinning maliciously at them.

"Potty asked Belly to go the party! Potty lurves Belly! Potty luuuuuurves Belllllllly!"

And he zoomed away, cackling and shrieking. "Potty loves Belly!"

"Nice to keep these things private," said Harry.

Katie snorted. "Knowing Peeves, this is going to be around the school in an hour." And I'm going to
get a ton of questions from my friends.

"Probably less," Harry replied. "Anyway, you should get going, you're going to Transfiguration, right?"

"Oh bollocks, I'm going to be late!" And in an instant, Katie was running down the hall. Apparently there was always something to keep her from being truly happy.

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