

Chapter 2

"I never imagined the Wizarding World would be so societally advanced when their technology is so far behind," Hermione commented. "They had comprehensive women's rights and ended slavery centuries before the Muggle world."

Harry glanced up briefly from his Charms book. He was sitting in the library with Hermione, Daphne, and her best friend, Tracey Davis. Tracey was a plain-looking girl with pale skin and light brown hair, which she'd tied back in a loose, messy ponytail.

Ron had been with them earlier, but he'd left to use the loo an hour ago and never returned. They were supposed to be studying for their upcoming midterms. Harry and Tracey still were, but Hermione and Daphne had long since fallen into a discussion about the differences between the Muggle and Magical worlds.

"I told you," Daphne said. "We have our own issues, of course, but our worlds are very different."

"Muggleborns tend to think the Muggle world is better just because we have cars and telephones," Tracey added.

"We?" Hermione asked. "Are you Muggleborns?"

Tracey looked up from her book and shrugged.

"Might as well be," she said. "My parents are Squibs."

Hermione tilted her head curiously.

"What's a Squib?" she asked.

“A witch or wizard born to magical parents who can’t perform magic themselves,” Tracey answered. “It mostly happens in Pureblood lines, and they tend to be looked down upon, even by the more moderate magical families. Both my parents were disowned. Daphne and I are actually cousins by blood.”

“That’s horrible,” Hermione gasped.

“Yeah, but it’s a bit of a blessing, too,” Tracey told her. “Imagine growing up in a world where your friends, your family, and everyone you meet can do magic except you. My parents are much happier in the Muggle world than they ever were in the Magical world.”

Harry wondered if that’s why his aunt hated him so much. Was she jealous that he and his mum could do magic, and she couldn’t? He’d seen how nasty Dudley could get when he was jealous, and it made sense. It didn’t explain why Vernon hated him, though.

“Why do you think Filch is so awful?” Daphne asked.

“Filch is a Squib?” Harry replied, setting aside his book.

“That’s what my dad said,” she shrugged.

“Was he kicked out of his family, too?” Hermione asked, looking horrified.

“Probably,” Daphne said. “And it’s not done entirely out of cruelty. It’s illegal for Squibs to inherit magical artifacts. The Ministry doesn’t want them to fall into Muggle hands.”

“That still doesn’t make it right,” Hermione said, folding her arms over her chest.

“Maybe,” Tracey shrugged. “But it’s the way things are.”

Hermione huffed indignantly, and they all turned back to their studies.

It turned out that midterms weren't Harry's biggest worry before Christmas. Oliver broke the terrible news at the end of practice that Snape would be refereeing the next match against Ravenclaw. He was convinced that if Gryffindor played by the book, Snape wouldn't have any reason to penalize them, but Harry wasn't so sure. He'd followed the rules in every Potions class he'd ever had, and Snape still found a way to take points.

He was so worried that he didn't notice Daphne waiting for him by the entrance until she'd looped her arm through his. His teammates glanced back briefly before continuing.

"I heard the news," she said. "Malfoy's been bragging since you left for practice. Are you alright?"

"What am I supposed to do?" Harry asked miserably. "There's no way Snape's going to call the game fair."

"You could sit out the game," she offered, rubbing his arm soothingly. "Maybe fake an injury?"

"No," he said, shaking his head. "I'm the only Seeker Gryffindor has. If I don't play, the team has to forfeit."

"Well," Daphne drawled, "as far as I know, Snape never played Quidditch, and he probably hasn't flown since he was a student. You could always suggest to Fred and George that they send a few Bludgers his way."

Harry's jaw dropped, and he stared at her incredulously. The corners of her lips quirked up in a restrained smile, and he burst out laughing. The image of Snape ranting for a hospital bed with a bandaged leg sprang to mind.

“That’d be brilliant if he didn’t murder them after the game.”

Daphne shrugged.

“The twins might think it’s worth it.”

“Knowing them, you’re probably right,” Harry said.

“Feel better?” she asked.

“A little,” he admitted, then sighed. “We’ll still probably lose the game, but I have to play. Plus, I still have mid-terms to worry about and figure out who this Flamel guy is.”

“Flamel?” Daphne asked. “You mean Nicolas Flamel?”

“You know who he is?”

“He’s a famous Alchemist,” she said, confused. “What’s so important about Flamel? We haven’t studied him in History.”

Harry hesitated. He hadn’t told her about his trip to his vault with Hagrid or the incident with the giant dog. That had all happened before he’d met her, and he’d never had a reason to bring it up since. But she could help, and he trusted her.

“How long do we have until curfew?” he asked.

Daphne glanced at her watch.

“About an hour.”

“Good. Meet me in the library. I need to get Ron and Hermione. I’ll explain everything then, I promise.”

Daphne raised an eyebrow but nodded.

A few minutes later, the four of them were crowded around a small table in a dark corner of the library. Harry, with the help of Ron and Hermione, quickly recounted everything they knew.

“So, you think Dumbledore is hiding something on the third floor behind a Cerberus?” Daphne asked.

“Yes,” Hermione nodded. “And whatever it is has something to do with this Flamel guy.”

“Well, it’s not really a big secret,” Daphne said. “I’m surprised Weasley doesn’t know. Every wizarding family knows who he is.”

Harry and Hermione turned to Ron, whose ears rapidly reddened.

“Well, if you’re so smart, why don’t you tell us?”

Daphne gave him a flat look.

“Nicolas Flamel, the creator of the Philosopher’s Stone.”

“Oh! Him,” Ron said, his face reddening with embarrassment.

Hermione gasped and jumped to her feet.

"I'll be right back!"

She quickly disappeared amongst the bookshelves. They shared a bewildered look and sat quietly for a brief moment before Hermione returned with a massive old tome clutched to her chest.

"I took this book out ages ago for a bit of light reading," she said.

"Light?" Ron asked incredulously.

Hermione ignored him as she frantically flipped through the pages.

"I think it mentioned something about the Philosopher's Stone... Ah! Here it is! Nicolas Flamel is the only known maker of the Philosopher's Stone!"

"What is the Philosopher's Stone, exactly?" Harry asked.

"It turns anything it touches into gold!" Ron said excitedly.

"It does a lot more than that," Daphne told him, rolling her eyes.

"The Philosopher's Stone is a miracle of Alchemy with astonishing powers," Hermione read from the book. "Most famously, it will turn any metal it touches into gold."

"Told you," Ron said smugly.

"It also turns water into the fabled Elixir of Life, granting the drinker a form of immortality by leaving them in perfect health. Many Alchemists have claimed to have created the Philosopher's Stone over the centuries, but the only one known to exist today belongs to Nicolas Flamel, who just celebrated his six-hundred and sixty-fifth birthday, and his wife, Pernelle, age six-hundred and fifty-eight."

"A stone that turns metal into gold and stops you from dying," Ron said. "No wonder Snape wants it."

"But why is it even in the castle?" Daphne asked. "I know Dumbledore trained under Flamel, but he's rarely, if ever, let anyone use the stone."

"Someone did break into Gringotts for it," Harry said. "Maybe Flamel knew someone was after it and asked Dumbledore to hide it?"

"Maybe," Daphne nodded. "I'll keep an eye on Snape and let you know if I see anything suspicious."

The week leading up to exams and the Quidditch match was torture for Harry. All of his free time was spent on studying and Quidditch practice, leaving him little time to worry about the stone except in his dreams. More than once, he'd dreamt of chasing a winged stone on his broom with Snape hot on his heels, a malevolent grin on his face. Each time, he woke in a cold sweat just as Snape grabbed his ankle.

Finally, the day of the match came, and Harry felt like he was going to be sick from worry. Despite Hermione and Ron's best attempts to calm him, he barely talked or ate at breakfast. When Oliver finally stood and signaled for them to go to the pitch, it happened silently, without the usual fanfare. It felt less like they were heading to a Quidditch match and more like they were walking to their own execution.

The locker room was just as silent and even more tense as they suited up.

“Right, listen up,” Oliver said. “We know this is going to be a tough match. Remember, we need to play clean. Harry, if there was ever a time to catch the Snitch early, this is it. Our best chance is to end this before Snape can hit us with too many penalties.”

Harry nodded once and then stopped, worried he might lose what little breakfast he’d eaten if he moved too much.

“Alright, let’s do this!”

Daphne and Tracey ignored the dirty looks they received as they climbed the stands and took a seat next to Ron and Hermione.

“And they’re off!” Lee Jordan announced, lacking his usual enthusiasm.

The game had been going for just a few seconds before he called his first foul. He called blatching on Fred Weasley for flying too close to one of the Hufflepuff Chasers.

“That’s bullocks!” Ron screamed.

“Oh, this is going to be terrible, I just know it,” Hermione fretted.

“It’s great, isn’t it?”

The four of them spun around and glared at Malfoy, who’d seated himself smugly in the row behind them, along with Crabbe and Goyle.

"We should have Professor Snape referee all the games."

"Shut, Malfoy," Ron said through gritted teeth.

The Gryffindors groaned as Snape awarded Hufflepuff with another penalty, this time for seemingly no reason at all.

"A pity this is the only way our team can win," Daphne sighed.

Malfoy pinned her with a nasty glare.

"I can't believe your father saddled you with a loser like Potter," he spat.

Daphne, who'd never taken her eyes off the game, smirked.

"He doesn't look like a loser to me," she said just as Harry pulled into a sharp dive, the Hufflepuff Seeker scrambling to catch up. "Imagine if Slytherin still lost after all their cheating. That would be truly pathetic."

Malfoy seethed, breathing harshly through clenched teeth as his cheeks reddened.

"At least my mother's not a Mud-"

Before he could finish, Ron turned and jumped on top of him. Crabbe and Goyle tried to pull him off just as he struck Malfoy sharply in the eye. Neville hesitated for a moment before joining in. The girls ignored the mass of bodies and pained grunts as they jumped to their feet in excitement.

"Go, Harry!" Daphne screamed at the top of her lungs.

“He’s gonna hit the ground!” Hermione yelled fearfully.

“No, he’s not!” Tracey shouted. “Look!”

Harry pulled up just a few feet from the ground, his fist raised. Two golden wings glinted in the sun.

“Gryffindor wins!”

Not only had Gryffindor won, they’d taken the lead in the Quidditch Cup for the first time in seven years. Harry and his teammates were hailed as heroes by three-quarters of the school. The celebration lasted for a week, as did Ron and Neville’s detentions for fighting.

Christmas came and went, with Hermione and Daphne returning home to see their families, while Harry and Ron remained at the castle. Upon their return to the castle, Harry excitedly showed them his Invisibility cloak and told them about the Mirror of Erised and the conversation he’d had with Dumbledore. However, before any of them could figure out why the mirror was in the castle, and what connection it might have with the stone, they ran into a more pressing problem.

Hagrid was trying to raise a dragon in his hut.

“This is absurd,” Daphne had ranted when they told her. “The stone, the Cerberus, the Troll, the Mirror, and now a dragon? Hogwarts can’t always be like this, can it?”

She thought they should let Hagrid deal with his own problems, but Ron, Harry, and Hermione were determined to keep him out of trouble. After weeks, they finally convinced Hagrid to send the dragon to Romania with Ron’s brother, Charlie.

It had all gone downhill from there. While Ron was in the hospital wing getting his dragon bite treated, Harry, Hermione, and, surprisingly, Neville, had all been caught out of bed. On the bright side, they'd managed to send Norbert off without notice, and Malfoy had also been caught. All of them had been given detention with Hagrid in the Forbidden Forest.

As terrifying as the experience was, Harry learned something very important. The next morning, he gathered Hermione and Daphne around Ron's bed in the hospital wing and told them everything.

"It's Voldemort," Harry whispered. "That's why Snape wants the Stone."

"Are you sure it was him?" Daphne asked softly, her face unusually pale.

"Positive," Harry said. "My scar burned when I saw him. What else could it be?"

"But he's dead."

"Well," Hermione said, "no one *actually* knows what really happened that night. It's all just speculation. There's no proof that Voldemort died."

"Stop saying his name," Ron said with a shiver.

"It has to be Voldemort," Harry said, ignoring him. "I know it. I can feel it."

"What do we do?" Hermione asked nervously.

Harry looked from one face to the next, each looking as pale and worried as he felt.

"I don't know."

Days and weeks passed, and yet, a gnawing worry remained ever-present in the pit of Harry's stomach. His sleep was constantly interrupted by nightmares of a figure, shrouded in darkness, with bright red eyes, reaching out through a mirror to grab him. Each day felt like it was bringing him closer and closer to a fateful confrontation.

As final exams neared, Harry had an epiphany. How could it be a coincidence that Hagrid just so happens to run into a strange with the one thing he wanted most, a dragon egg, in his pocket. He, along with Ron, Hermione, and Daphne, ran down to his hut to question him, and that's when he let slip just how simple it was to sneak past Fluffy.

They raced to warn Dumbledore, but he was out of the castle, and when they told McGonagall, she brushed off their concerns. Harry felt like he was being forced to take action himself.

"It's tonight," he said, pacing back and forth in front of his friends in an empty corridor. "Snape's going after the stone tonight, and I'm going to stop him."

Later that night, once everyone had gone to sleep, Harry, Ron, and Hermione snuck out of Gryffindor Tower. Poor Neville had tried to stop them, but Hermione petrified him. Harry felt bad leaving him frozen in the middle of the common room, but Voldemort had to be stopped.

Quickly and quietly, they gathered under the cloak and snuck their way to the third-floor corridor, where they were met with a surprise. Daphne was waiting for them. She jumped when Harry slung off the cloak, but sighed in relief when she recognized them.

"What are you doing here?" Ron asked.

Daphne pinned him with a glare.

"I'm not going to let my betrothed face that monster alone," she said with a haughty sniff.

Harry felt tempted to remind her that they weren't actually betrothed, but thought better of it. Now wasn't the time to be hanging out in the corridor having a discussion.

"Come on," he said. "We need to get moving."

Drawing his wand, he crept to the door.

"Alohamora."

The lock clicked open. He was mildly surprised and disappointed that it had been so easy. Slowly, he pushed open the door. Fluffy was sound asleep at the back of the room. A golden harp in the corner had been charmed to play a continuous song. In the center of the room, the trap door stood open.

"Snape's already been here," he said with growing dread. "Come on."

They slipped into the room one by one and gathered around the hole in the floor. It opened up to the deep, dark pit. So dark they couldn't see the bottom.

"We have to go down there?" Ron asked nervously.

"That's the plan," Harry said, swallowing his own nerves.

"But we don't know what's at the bottom."

Harry looked up at his friends' scared faces.

"Only one way to find out," he said.

Taking a deep breath, he took a step forward and jumped.

“Harry!”

He wasn’t sure who screamed. It could’ve been Daphne or Hermione, but the wind was rushing past his ears too quickly for him to tell. He fell, faster and faster, and just when he thought he’d for sure end up as a stain on the floor below, he came to a stop.

But the floor wasn’t hard. It was soft and surprisingly squishy.

“Harry!” Daphne called, her voice echoing through the long, square hole he’d fallen through.

“I’m fine!” he yelled. “It’s safe!”

Ron came screaming down the hole, then Hermione, then Daphne. Harry scrambled to get out of their way on the uneven, slippery floor.

“Urgh, what is this?” Ron asked.

“Lumos.”

Harry shielded his eyes and blinked away the spots as light poured from Daphne’s wand. He looked down at the floor he was sitting on, only to realize it wasn’t a floor. It was a plant. A plant that was slowly moving and wrapping around them. Everyone panicked and began to struggle, but the plant only wrapped more tightly around them.

“It’s going to kill us!” Ron shouted.

“That’s it!” Hermione exclaimed. “It’s Devil’s Snare!”

“Oh, just bloody great!” Ron yelled, struggling even harder.

“Stop struggling, Weasley, it’ll only kill you faster,” Daphne said.

“Oh, that’s a relaxing thought!” Ron howled, his entire lower body wrapped in vines.

“You need to relax,” she told him.

Hermione and Daphne went still, and slowly sank into the Devil’s Snare. Ron froze, watching in horror, and then his struggles resumed.

“You just need to relax!”

“Hermione?” Harry called.

“We’re fine, just relax,” she yelled.

Harry lay back against the vines and stopped struggling. Every instinct in his body told him to fight as the vines swallowed him, but he remained still. He nearly panicked when he was covered entirely and everything went dark, but a moment later, he fell through the bottom and landed on the hard stone floor.

“Help! Help!” Ron screamed.

“He isn’t relaxing, is he?” Hermione asked.

“Idiot,” Daphne muttered. “He’s going to get himself killed.”

“I know!” Hermione gasped. “Devil’s Snare shrinks in the sun! We need light!”

She looked around wildly.

“But we don’t have any wood.”

Harry stared at her incredulously.

“You’re a witch, aren’t you?”

“Oh, right,” she said, embarrassed.

“We don’t need fire, we need sunlight,” Daphne said. “Remember the Sunlight Charm Quirrell mentioned. The one he said was useful against Vampires?”

Hermione’s eyes widened, and she nodded quickly. Together, they raised their wands.

“Lumos Solem,” they incanted in unison.

Bright light lit the room like morning sun pouring in through a window. The Devil’s Snare retreated rapidly, and Ron fell with a scream. He hit the floor with a thud and gingerly climbed to his feet.

“We’re through,” he said in relief. “Good thing no one panicked.”

Hermione and Daphne placed their hands on their hips and gave him an unimpressed stare. Harry turned away and examined the room. It was fairly small, dark, and there was only one door.

"We need to keep moving," he said.

He marched over to the door and cautiously pulled it open. At first, it looked empty, with only another wooden door at the other end, but as he entered, he heard a sound above him and looked up. The room was so tall he couldn't see the ceiling, and was filled with dozens, maybe hundreds of winged creatures.

"Are those...keys?" Daphne asked.

"Looks like," Harry replied after a moment.

"Look!" Hermione exclaimed.

She was pointing behind them at an old, battered broom leaning next to the door they'd entered through.

"Looks like you'll have to catch the key," Ron said.

"But which one?" Harry asked.

"It'll probably be old and rusted, like the lock," Daphne told him.

Harry searched around until he spotted an old, rusted key with a bent wing. Mounting the broom, he flew up and chased after it. Catching it was easy enough, but the moment he touched it, the other keys attacked. He threw the rusted key to Hermione and outflew the keys chasing him until they'd unlocked the door and slipped into the next room. Pulling into a sharp

dive, he pulled up inches above the floor and shot through the door while Ron slammed it closed behind him. They could hear the keys thudding against the other side.

The moment of relief was short-lived until they turned around and spotted the Troll in the room. After a moment, they realized it was already dead. It sat slouched against the wall below a bloody stain where it had hit the back of its head. Sharing a fearful look, they crept past it and went through the door into the next room.

It was much larger than the others. Torches flared to life as they entered, illuminating a life-size chessboard. There were four missing pieces on the black side, and it became clear that if they wanted to get through, they would have to play.

Ron performed wonderfully, but in the end, had to sacrifice himself so they could win. The Queen's staff shattered the stone horse he was riding, and he fell to the floor hard. As soon as the game was won, they rushed over to check on him.

"I think he's just unconscious," Hermione said. "He's still breathing."

They were reluctant to leave him, but the only way out was to keep going through. The next room contained a wall of fire, a potions cabinet, and a riddle. Harry wasn't much good at riddles, but Hermione and Daphne were. He stood back and waited nervously as they talked it through.

"So, this one should get you past the fire," Daphne said.

"These are the nettle wine," Hermione continued, "and these should be the poison."

"Should be?" Harry asked.

"They are," Daphne corrected. "We're sure of it, but there's only enough for one of us to keep going."

Harry snatched up the potion and downed it before anyone could argue. It felt like ice had been injected into his veins, and he shivered. A moment later, the feeling passed.

"I'll delay Snape as long as I can," he said. "You two go find someone, anyone, and get help. We just have to hope Professor Dumbledore gets back soon."

With tears welling in her eyes, Hermione lunged forward and hugged him tightly.

"You promise me you'll come back," she sniffled.

Harry wanted to, but he knew it would be a lie.

"I'll try," he whispered.

Hermione stepped back, and Daphne jumped into his arms.

"Why do I have to be betrothed to a Gryffindor?" she asked.

Harry smiled and hugged her tightly before pulling back. She kissed his cheek, stepped back, and took Hermione by the hand.

"We'll go get help," she promised. "You'd better still be alive when we get back."

He nodded and watched them leave with a lump in his throat. Turning back to the flames, he took a deep breath and stepped through to the door on the other side.

Harry woke in a dark room. It took him a moment to realize he was in the hospital wing, and another for his memories to come crashing back. His eyes widened, and he sat up swiftly.

“Ah, you’re awake.”

“Professor Dumbledore!” Harry gasped. “Professor, it was Voldemort! Quirrell had him on the back of his head! He was after the stone!”

“The stone is safe,” Dumbledore said with a reassuring pat on the shoulder. “Your friends are well, and Voldemort is gone. Please, calm yourself before Madam Pomfrey throws me out.”

Sighing in relief, Harry sat back against his pillows.

“Thank you,” Dumbledore said. “Now, I’m sure you have many questions, but first, I’d like you to tell me everything that happened.”

Harry nodded and started from the beginning. At the end of his explanation, Dumbledore answered a few of his questions, though not as many as he would have liked. By the time Madam Pomfrey forced the headmaster to leave, Harry was already feeling tired. As he adjusted his position on the bed, he felt a sharp pain in the heel of his palm.

At first, he’d thought one of the mattress springs had poked through, like his bed at the Dursleys. On closer inspection, he noticed something red and sharp, like a sliver, sticking out of the skin. He picked at it for a bit and eventually managed to grip it with his nails and pull it out. Holding it under the candlelight, he realized what it was. A tiny shard of the Philosopher’s Stone. It must have broken off when Quirrell had knocked him down.

For a moment, he thought about giving it back to Professor Dumbledore, but then he remembered what the stone could do. Surely Flamel wouldn’t miss such a small piece.

Grabbing an empty potions vial from the bedside table, he dropped the shard inside, sealed it with the cork, and tucked it safely under his pillow. Turning onto his side, he was asleep in seconds.

Harry was released from the hospital wing just in time for the leaving feast. Dumbledore gave his end-of-year speech, and while he was glad to have won the House Cup, the way in which it happened left a bad taste in his mouth. Sure, Snape had cheated to give Slytherin the lead, but it just didn't feel right to rip it away from them at the last moment.

Daphne didn't look pleased either, and Harry shared a commiserating look with her across the hall.

He didn't get to see her again until it was time to get on the train. She and Tracey joined him, Ron, and Hermione in a compartment. Shortly after the journey began, Tracey stepped out to visit a few of her friends, and Harry quickly leaned over to lock the door and close the curtains. His friends looked at him curiously.

"I have something for you," he said to Daphne.

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the vial containing the Philosopher's Stone shard. She peered at it closely.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It's a piece of the Philosopher's Stone," he told it. "It was stuck in my hand when I got to the hospital wing."

Daphne gasped and gazed in wonder at the stone shard.

"Blimey," Ron said, leaning forward eagerly.

"Are you sure you should keep that?" Hermione asked, worrying her bottom lip. "Didn't Dumbledore say it was better if the stone was destroyed?"

"It's only a small piece," Harry shrugged. "I doubt Flamel will even notice it missing."

"That's not the point," Hermione argued.

"Oh, come on, Hermione," Ron said. "Think of all the gold he could make. He'd be richer than the Malfoys!"

"Actually, I was thinking about its other properties," Harry said, turning to Daphne. "Remember what the book said. The Elixir of Life leaves you in perfect health. I thought, maybe, if you gave it to your sister..."

Daphne gasped, and her eyes widened.

"You think it could cure her?"

"Maybe," Harry shrugged. "It's worth a try, isn't it?"

"What's wrong with your sister?" Hermione asked.

"She has a Malediction," Daphne said softly, staring at the stone. "It's a blood curse that's slowly killing her. It runs in the family."

"Oh," Hermione said, eyes widening. "Well, if it's to save a life, then I suppose that's alright."

Harry flashed her a grateful smile.

“But what about the gold?”

Daphne and Hermione turned to him with poisonous glares.

“I mean, after you save your sister,” he added nervously.

Daphne rolled her eyes.

“Weasley, if this cures my sister, I’ll turn the biggest piece of metal you can find into gold.”

Ron grinned and rubbed his hands together gleefully. As he stared off through the window dreamily, Daphne turned back to Harry.

“Thank you,” she said gratefully. “I-”

She broke off, as if unsure what to say. Harry smiled, but before he could reply, she lunged forward and pressed her lips against his. His eyes widened, and his heart raced. He froze, not knowing what to do, and before he could come up with an answer, she pulled back. While he struggled to form a useful thought, she smiled more brightly than he’d ever seen and curled up against his side.

Slowly, he turned to Hermione, hoping for advice, but her only response was to cover a laugh with her hand. Harry’s cheeks burned. Mercifully, Ron was still busy staring out the window. Cautiously, he slipped an arm around Daphne’s shoulder. When she didn’t react, he relaxed and smiled.

The summer hadn’t even truly begun, and already he couldn’t wait to return to Hogwarts.