



something less than  
*something more*  
by femmequixotic

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Ginny Weasley

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**Summary:** Tonight she wants to pretend the lies are  
true. Tonight she wants to believe that a girl like her could  
actually end up with the hero.

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**Author Site:** [Dreamwidth](#) or [AO3](#).



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Photo by Laughing Rhoda

# one

The clock's just struck half-eleven when the Floo flares, casting a faint green glow down the hall of Millicent's flat. She closes the dossier she's been looking at, setting it down on the pile of file jackets already spread across her coverlet.

She's not worried. There are only a handful of people who have access to her warded Floo, and fewer still who would have the audacity to arrive this late unannounced. In fact, there's only one. She slides out of bed, reaching for the dark brown silk robe Pansy gave her last Christmas, insisting that Millie destroy the scruffy bathrobe she'd had for a decade. Despite her protests, it's Millie's favourite now, simple in its cut and devoid of any ridiculous frippery.

When she turns, tying the belt in a loose knot, he's already leaning against her door frame, arms crossed, his eyes weary, the furrows at the corners of his mouth deeper. The light from her lamp glints across his glasses. She can see a smudge on one lens, a certain indication that Harry'd pushed them up, rubbing at his eyes. These are the things you learn when you've been partnered with another Auror for eight years.

"You fought again," Millie says. She takes in Harry's ancient grey wool jumper, pulled over bare skin. One cuff's beginning to unravel. His hair's still damp from the shower; his cheeks are flushed. He hasn't bothered with proper trousers. His pyjama bottoms are worn flannel, a red plaid that have been mended more than once.

Harry nods. "Over Lily this time." He runs a hand through his hair. It's still as messy as it'd been at Hogwarts, but now it's threaded with silver. They're growing old now, all of them. Harry has children at school; Millie's goddaughter's getting married next fall. Tracey's hoping Olivia at least waits a few years before making her a grandmother.

“Neither of you are happy.” Millie just looks at him. She hates how familiar this is. “You haven’t been in years.”

Harry doesn’t say anything. She’s had this fight with him before. The children. It doesn’t matter how miserable his marriage is making him or Ginny. He’s been clear that neither of them will end this farce of a relationship until the children are out of school.

Millie sighs. “You’re an idiot, you know.” She gathers the file jackets on her bed and stacks them on the side table.

“So you’ve said.” Harry gives her a small smile. “Repeatedly.”

Shadows flicker across the walls; the tick of the clock in the hall fills the silence. Millie finally holds out her hand, and the tension in Harry’s shoulders eases. He pushes himself away from the door, stepping across the rug towards her.

For a moment, Millie thinks of pulling back, of insisting he go home. Millie hates being the other woman, hates being the rough fuck when the Saviour of the Wizarding World’s furious with his wife.

But Harry’s fingers are warm as they curl around her wrist, and when he pulls her towards him, his eyes dark and heated, Millie’s breath catches.

“That jumper should be burnt,” she says.

Harry just laughs. “You’ve been out with Pansy again.”

“No, really.” Millie slips her hands beneath the hem of the jumper, her fingers smoothing across Harry’s warm skin. He breathes in sharply. “Anyone with any sense would agree.”

“Maybe I don’t have sense,” he murmurs into her dark curls. His mouth brushes her ear.

Millie looks up at him, her hands stilling on his hips. “I thought we’d already established that.” She’s not teasing.

Harry looks away. “Don’t,” he says, thickly. Millie knows he doesn’t like this any more than she does. She doesn’t care. He’s the one who comes to her bed, after all. It’s always been his choice. Millie has no intention of not making that clear to him. She turns her head, rests her forehead against his shoulder. It’s solid and strong. Steady. Stable.

She still remembers the morning they sat in Kingsley’s office, being told they were being partnered together. They’d both been horrified. She’d had no desire to work with the Golden Boy, and he’d had no wish to be paired with a Slytherin. Their first six months had been filled with screaming matches, slammed doors, and minor hexes. Until a raid went wrong. There’d been a Diffindo cast. Millicent had acted without thinking, instinctively shoving Harry aside and taking the full brunt herself.

When she’d woken in hospital, Harry’d been sleeping in the chair beside her bed. He’d stayed the night, the mediwitches had told her.

*That’s what partners do*, he told her later, and she’d just snorted.

*Partners buy each other a pint, she'd said.*

He'd come back the next day with two bottles of lager.

Harry's hands are on her shoulders now, his thumbs circling over the silk of her robe. Millie can hear the steady huff of his breath.

"Mils," he says, and it's the ridiculous nickname that breaks her, makes her look up at him instead of shoving him away. He touches her cheek, his fingers light against her skin. "Please."

She loosens the knot in her belt, letting her robe fall open. Harry slides the silk off her shoulders; it pools at their feet. His fingers brush over her throat, across her collarbone and the square neck of her jersey nightshirt, before dipping between her breasts. She'd hated them before Harry, hated how heavy and full and pendulous they were. His fascination with them perplexed her, as did his delight in teasing her nipples to pebbled pink points beneath the soft white cotton of her shirt.

Millie catches her lip between her teeth as Harry pinches one nipple, rolling it between his fingertips.

"I want to see," he says, and Millie doesn't need to look at the swell of his cock against his pyjama bottoms. She knows he's hard already just by the raggedness of his breath.

She pulls her shirt off, standing in front of him in a pair of knickers. It's Harry who's taught her to be comfortable in her body. She's had lovers before--one night stands mostly, and two relationships--but it's only been Harry who took such pleasure in watching her, in telling her he enjoyed her soft curves and pale skin.

Harry studies her, his hands sliding beneath her breasts to cup them in his palms as he scrapes his thumbnails across her pink aureoles. "You have amazing tits," he murmurs before he leans in to take a nipple into his mouth, sucking lightly.

Millie's fingers tangle in his hair. "Harry," she says. She wants more and he knows it. She protests when he pulls away.

Harry takes off his glasses and sets them on the side table beneath the lamp, next to the neat pile of files. He looks back at her. The dark circles beneath his eyes are more pronounced. "I need to be inside of you," he says, his voice rough, and he reaches for her again. His breath is hot on her throat. Millie arches her neck; he sucks at her collarbone, his teeth scraping against her skin. It'll leave a mark, she knows.

They fall to the bed, and Millie's tugging on Harry's jumper, pulling it over his head. She throws it aside as he leans down again, his mouth catching hers. She loves kissing him, loves the way his hard chest feels against the softness of her breasts. He strokes the damp silk of her knickers, sliding a finger past the fabric to slip between her slick folds.

She gasps, and Harry laughs into their kiss. "Like that?" he asks, and he nips at her jaw, his finger pressing deeper into her.

"Don't be an arse," she says breathlessly, and when Harry smiles and slides down her body, pulling her knickers with him, she spreads her thighs wide in anticipation.

Harry's mouth is warm against her skin, and his tongue flicks at her clitoris, making her arch against him. He's the first lover she's had who didn't flinch at this. His mouth moves across her as his finger moves inside of her, and she grabs the coverlet, twisting her hands in the rumpled cotton. She cries out, bites her lip, when he slips another finger inside of her, stretching her with each quick thrust. His tongue drives her to distraction. Her legs are shaking. His stubble scrapes against the delicate skin of her thigh. It makes her throb.

"Please." She twists her hips up against his face. Her knickers are caught on one ankle. "Harry."

She can feel the mattress shift as he kicks off his pyjama bottoms. Harry slides his naked body against hers, his mouth trailing wet kisses across her skin, and when he finds her mouth again, she can taste herself on his tongue. She groans. Her hands slip over his shoulders, her fingers sliding through his thick hair.

Harry eases into her, his thick, heavy cock almost painful at first. She doesn't know how Ginny can give this up, how she could refuse to have Harry inside of her like this. Millie loves the feel of him, the soft grunt he makes with each small thrust, his prick pressing deeper until his balls are hot against her wet arse and she can barely breathe from wanting him so desperately.

"I've wanted this all evening." Harry's voice is raw. She pulls him into a kiss. Her hips roll against his, one leg hooked around his arse. He needs this. Needs her.

Her fingers trail along his jaw. "Then fuck me," she whispers, and Harry rises up on one elbow, looking down at her. His fingers catch her tit, squeezing gently the way he knows she likes as he moves inside of her.

Millie gasps when Harry's thrusts quicken. His fringe falls into his eyes, sticking to his damp forehead, and she arches against him. Her body aches, tenses. The headboard slams against the wall, a steady, echoing thump that sets the rhythm for their ragged breath and low groans and the sharp slap of slick, flushed skin

"Millie," Harry chokes out, and his fingers grip her breast harder. "Mils. I can't—" Her kiss muffles his cry as she drags his mouth down to hers, her tongue sliding against his as his body shudders above her.

He turns his head from the kiss, breathing hard, and she watches a flush spread over his throat and up his cheeks. His head jerks back and he rears up, slamming into her, lifting her arse from the bed with each thrust, his fingers digging into her hips as he pulls her towards his cock. Harry's body is beautiful, lean and tight and golden, and Millie reaches for him, saying his name as her hands slide over corded muscles.

"Oh, Christ," he says, his body arching over her. Millie rocks her hips up, tightening herself around his prick, and then he's coming with a groan, his body jerking against hers.

He falls and lies gasping against her for a moment before he slides his hand between them. "Don't move," he says into her ear with a soft laugh, and Millie moans when his fingers brush her aching clit. He's not gentle—she doesn't want him to be—and she twists against him as he rubs her, her hands clenched over his shoulders, her breasts pressed against his chest.

“Fuck,” he whispers, and she knows she’s tightening herself around his cock again, but she can’t help herself. She’s close, and she screws her eyes shut, her breath catching as she arches up.

A whimper escapes her when his fingers press harder against her warm wetness; he swears into her hair, his breath ragged and rough, and his hips buck into hers. Her body shakes. She digs a foot into the mattress, her body rutting against his hand.

“Harry,” she cries out, and she comes hard and fast, her thighs clenching his hips.

They collapse against each other. Harry laughs softly, and when he rolls away, his prick sliding from her, Millie feels empty. Bereft. He pulls her against him, slipping his leg through her wet thighs. His damp hand slides over her hip, and he kisses her, a long slow, languid brush of lips and tongue.

“Jesus, you’re beautiful,” he murmurs, and for now Millie believes him. She’ll come to her senses in the light of day, but she needs these moments, curled around Harry, listening to his sweet lies.

“Stay.” She looks up at him, and he nods. Relief seeps through her. Some nights he leaves after an hour or two. She hates that. Tonight she wants to pretend the lies are true. Tonight she wants to believe that a girl like her could actually end up with the hero. If only for a few hours.

He brushes her dark curls away from her cheek. “She won’t expect me back.” His mouth twists. “She’s probably not there either.”

Millie leans her head against his shoulder and closes her eyes. “If you’re good,” she says, “you’ll wake up with your prick in my mouth.”

Harry snorts and kisses her neck. His hand curls around her breast. He likes sleeping that way. “Isn’t that how you normally get me out of bed?”

She smiles. “Shut it and go to sleep. We’ve a meeting in the morning, remember?”

It’s not until Millie’s nearly asleep that she remembers she hasn’t taken her potion today. She tenses.

“What’s wrong?” Harry murmurs sleepily.

Millie shakes her head. “Nothing.” Harry mumbles something and tightens his hand around her tit.

It’ll be fine, Millie tells herself. One missed dose does not an emergency make, particularly when one is thirty-nine.

She nestles against Harry and falls asleep to the steady rhythm of his quiet snores.

## two

“You knock, and I’ll follow with a Blasting Curse,” Harry says under his breath.

Millie gives him a look--or at least looks where she thinks he is; she never can tell with Disillusionment Charms--then glances back at the row of narrow townhouses crowding this grimy Mancunian side street. “That doesn’t follow protocol and you know it.”

They’ve been tracking MacDougal all morning on suspicion of Gringotts fraud. Millie hopes they catch him before the goblins do.

Harry just laughs. “It does if we don’t tell Kingsley.”

“He’ll find out anyway,” Millie says grimly, and she pulls one of the Extendable Ears from her ear. “The bastard always does.” She grips her wand and pushes open the iron gate, sidestepping a Muggle tyre that’s propped against the fence. She can hear the soft clank of the gate closing that lets her know Harry’s behind her.

“Careful,” he murmurs, and she snorts.

“That’s rich coming from you.”

Smoke rises from the crumbling chimney, disappearing into the wet, grey sky. The stone steps to the door are slick with rain and mud, and Millie’s foot slips, catching her off balance. Her hand hits the door with a soft thud.

They both still, barely breathing, and through her remaining Extendable Ear Millie can hear the scrape of a chair against a wooden floor, then the clatter of heavy boots running.



Harry swears and blasts the door off its hinges. "Go," he says and Millie's inside, her Disillusionment gone as she races down the hall after a tall, bearded boy half her age who turns a corner.

A Stinging Hex hits the wall beside her, exploding in white light, and Millie ducks.

"Expelliarmus," she shouts. A wand clatters against the wall and she catches it as it sails by. Harry's running past her, shouting a Stunning Spell.

Millie can hear the thud of a body hitting the floor. The lingering stench of fried cod and onions drifts from the open door. Her stomach roils, and she closes her eyes, fighting back a sudden wave of nausea.

*Not again*, she thinks. She flattens her hands against the grooved panelling behind her and tries to breathe.

"Done and dusted," Harry says as he steps out of the kitchen. "He'll be out for a while--" He breaks off, looking at her, a furrow between his brows. "Mils?"

Millie barely makes it to the loo. Harry's beside her, smoothing back the curls that have escaped the tight knot at the back of her neck. She shudders, her whole body tensing as she brings up what little breakfast she'd managed to choke down this morning. The floor's cold and filthy beneath her knees, and there's mud on her scarlet robe.

"Are you okay?" Harry asks.

She nods, pushing herself up and staggering over to the sink. The water's cold against her tongue, and she spits it out, desperate to rinse away the acidic taste of bile and sick.

"I'm fine."

The speckled mirror snorts at her. "Whatever you say, duckie. Look like you've seen a ghost, you do. Paler than pale, and really you could stand to lose a stone or two, couldn't you--" It humphs when Millie glares at it. "Just speaking truth."

Millie sits on the edge of the bath, breathing slowly. The tile is streaked with mildew and soap. The smell makes her stomach lurch again. "It's just a virus," she says. She doesn't believe herself either.

"Maybe you should go home--"

"No." Millie cuts Harry off sharply. "Don't coddle me, Harry. I'm not your fucking wife."

"Right." He steps back, eyes cold, jaw tight. "How could I forget."

Millie looks away, wiping her hand against her mouth. "I'm fine," she says again, and she stands up. "Besides, it'll take both of us to bring MacDougal in and you always cock up the paperwork."

When she brushes past Harry, he flinches away. She squares her shoulders, pretending she doesn't care.

Slytherins are quite good at lying. Even to themselves.

She presses her lips together.

Especially to themselves.



Photo by Samuel Peters

## three

Millie stands at the window, looking down at the St Mungo's courtyard below. Children run down a gravel path between bushes heavy with summer roses, followed by laughing mediwitches in pale blue robes, silver pocketwatches pinned just beneath white pin-tucked yokes.

Her fingernails bite into her palms. It's been nearly a month since the MacDougal incident, and she's still nauseous every day. Not even a weekend in bed has helped. She's been living off ginger beer and digestives, hiding them in her desk, and brushing off invitations to join the rest of her fellow Aurors for drinks at the Leaky after work. They've stopped asking now, and Millie's barely speaking to anyone, especially Harry. They talk work, and that's it. She's even blocked him from her Floo.

When he'd pulled her into a storage closet two weeks ago, she'd pushed him away before he could kiss her.

"Don't," she'd said, and he'd just looked at her, his mouth a thin line.

"Are you going to tell me what I've done?" he asked.

Millie just shook her head, as she slipped away from him. "It's better this way."

"Mils." Harry caught her arm. "I need--"

"You need your wife," Mille'd said as firmly as she could. "And your family."

"My wife is far more interested in shagging Viktor Krum at the moment."

They'd fallen silent at the sound of voices passing in the hall. Harry had watched her, his hair ruffled and cheeks flushed.

“Are you going to leave her?” Millie had asked finally.

“You know I can’t.” Harry had tugged at his fringe, frustrated. “Lily--”

“Has six more years in Hogwarts.” Millie had just looked at him. “Six more years before you’re free, and really, Harry, I don’t even know if you want to be.”

He’d caught her hand, pulling her closer. “You know I do. But my kids--”

Millie’s heart twisted. She barely stopped herself from pressing her hand against her stomach. “I know,” she’d said.

“Let me come see you tonight,” he said quietly. His thumb had traced small circles on her wrist.

“No.”

“Millie.”

She’d steeled herself. “I’m done, Harry. Find someone else to fuck.”

She’ll never forget the stricken look on Harry’s face as she walked out of the closet, closing the door behind her.

Four days later Kingsley had broken their partnership at Harry’s request. Millie’d just nodded when he told her. *It’s better this way*, she reminds herself each morning when she sees Harry across the department, his head bent to Grace Ackerman’s. She just turns and walks the other way, ignoring the whispers of the entire force.

The door opens, and she turns. Draco enters, his green Healer’s robe fluttering open, his hair loose around his shoulders. He looks like Lucius, she thinks, only less mad.

“Well?” Millie asks, and her voice is tight. She wraps her arms around herself. She knows how long the test takes. Draco’s been gone far longer.

The look Draco gives her is sober. He holds out a phial. It gleams dark purple.

Millie knows what it is, even as her fingers close around it. It’s warm against her palm. She’s used this potion before. Twice. Once after a mishap with a contraceptive potion just after Hogwarts. Neither she nor Greg had been ready to be parents. And again after a one-night stand with a visiting French diplomat. She’d been thirty-four and a rising star in the Auror department thanks to her partnership with Harry. She wasn’t about to ruin her career.

She sits in one of the armchairs, her body sagging. It’s hard to breathe. “I’d hoped I was just ill.”

“You knew you weren’t,” Draco says flatly. He takes a seat behind his desk. “Two missed menstrual cycles and what was obviously morning sickness...”

“I’m nearly forty.”

“And obviously still fertile,” Draco snaps. He runs a hand through his thinning hair. “I assume Potter’s the father.”

Millie nods. Only Draco and Pansy know of her affair. It’d taken an argument with Harry and two bottles of wine for them to pry it out of her though. They’ll never tell. As much as they’d love to ruin Harry, neither one of them would ever put her through the ensuing scandal. She takes a deep breath. “This complicates things.”

Draco doesn’t say anything for a moment, then he leans back in his chair, studying her. “He won’t leave Ginevra. He’s too dullishly middle-class.”

“I don’t expect him to.” Millie turns the phial between her fingers, then sighs and pushes herself out of the chair. “I need to get back to work.”

Draco stops her at the door. “You’re at nine weeks, Millie,” he says quietly. “That potion won’t work after twelve. Ministry’s orders. If you wait later than that, we have to come up with a health reason for issuing another abortifacient.” He picks up a quill, rolling it between his fingertips. “I’ll do that. Whatever we have to say on your medical records. They won’t question it if I sign off.”

“I know.” Millie meets his gaze evenly. “Thanks.”

“One of the perks of being Healer-in-charge of obstetrics.” Draco hesitates. “If you decide instead you require an anti-nausea potion I can owl one to you.” He scowls at her. “But I’d strongly encourage you not to be a fucking Gryffindor about this.”

Millie turns the doorknob. “I’m perfectly capable of making this decision, Draco. I’ve done it before.”

“Not with Potter.” Draco’s nostrils flare. “He seems to inspire stupidity.” He glances back at Millie, laying the quill on his desk blotter. “Don’t make a foolish choice for his sake.” His face softens. “Underneath that stoic exterior you’ve cultivated, Millie, you’ve always been too bloody soft. You just don’t let on, but we all know it.”

She knows he’s concerned for her, but it still rankles. She knows what’s at stake. “I’m capable of taking care of myself, thanks.”

Draco sighs. “You’ve more to lose than he does; he doesn’t even have the balls to leave his travesty of a marriage, and I don’t want to have to hex the sodding Chosen One because he’s hurt you. I’d rather avoid Auror notice.”

“Doesn’t matter.” Millie opens the door. “I ended things with him.”

Draco looks surprised. “When?”

“Two weeks ago.” She looks back at him. “When I realised I was probably pregnant with his child.” Before Draco can answer, she strides out of the office, her scarlet Auror robe swirling around her ankles, the phial warm in her inner pocket.




Photo by Nicholas Smale

## four

Millie splashes water on her face and looks up at herself in the mirror, the harsh light from the lights above etching every wrinkle into her face. She's still pale, and her face has rounded out more than usual in the past thirteen days, softening the squareness of her jaw. She looks tired. She *is* tired.

The potion Draco gave her is still sitting on the windowsill of her bedroom. She hasn't brought herself to drink it yet. She still has time. Another full week. No need to rush her decision.

There's a flush of water, and then a stall door opens behind her. Millie nods at the woman who steps up to the row of marble sinks. "Laura."

Reaching for the soap, Laura glances over at her. Her brow furrows. "Feeling all right, Millie?"

"Fine," Millie lies smoothly, ignoring the flip of her stomach. The morning sickness has eased off some this week, but she's still struggling to keep her lunch down. "Just a bit under the weather."

Laura dries her hands and leans against the sink, her Auror robe half-open. "Sorry to hear about you and Harry."

Millie shrugs. "Partnerships go sour."

"But the two of you..." Laura shakes her head. "Grace is an utter bitch, you know."

"I know." The whole office knows. Grace's been through three other partners before Harry. Millie thinks Kingsley must have been mad to throw them together. Then again, he'd stuck her with Peregrine Boswell, the most inately timid wizard in the whole department. It wasn't going well, to say the least. "It won't hurt him." She sounds more bitter than she'd like.

Laura gives Millie a too-shrewd look. "It's just I thought maybe you and Harry..." She picks at the sleeve of her robe. "Well. That's not a happy marriage, he has, I'd say."

"I wouldn't know." Millie turns. Laura catches her arm.

"You work with Aurors," she says softly. "There are some things you can't hide."

Millie refuses to meet her gaze. It had always been clear it'd be impossible to entirely hide their affair; Harry'd counted on their colleagues' embarrassment to keep them quiet. *We're British, after all*, he'd said cheerfully one night, sprawled across her naked as she'd read from a dossier. *And quite good at ignoring anything we'd rather not know about*. She stares into the mirror, watching a flush creep up her cheeks.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"The way you look at him." Laura drops her hand. "The way he looks at you."

Millie closes her eyes. The words hurt more than she thought they might, and her breath catches in the back of her throat.

"He doesn't look at me," she says after a moment. Her voice is raw. Rough. It's been weeks since Harry's even glanced her way. When Laura touches her shoulder she jerks back, her eyes flying open.

"Millie," Laura says, and it's the pity in her gaze that infuriates Millie the most.

"I don't know what you think," she says sharply, "but I'd advise you to keep your damned opinions to yourself, Laura Madley, or every bloody Slytherin in this building will have your guts for garters by morning."

Laura steps back, the warmth in her face dissipating. "Message received."

When the door slams behind her, Millie slumps, her fingers tight on the edge of the sink, and curses herself as the tears well up.



Photo by clarkswoods

## five

Kingsley is calm when she tells him why she's requesting to be taken out of the field and placed at a desk.

"Is it Harry's?" he asks bluntly.

"Does everyone know about us?" Millie twists her mother's wedding ring around her right index finger. It's one of the few things she's kept. Her brother has the family house now. He'd asked Millie if she wanted anything else after their parents' deaths. She hadn't. They'd never been close, any of them; her mother had only had eyes for her father and he'd spent his life preoccupied with his job at the Ministry. There'd been no regard for the children. She and Dickie both had grown up wild, barely supervised and desperate for someone--anyone--to notice them. Even terrorising Slytherin--and in Dickie's case Ravenclaw--hadn't gained Philippa Bulstrode's attention, much less Nigel's.

She's kept the ring only because she can remember sitting in her parents' bedroom as child, her messy curls falling in her face, watching as Mother dressed for a dinner party. She'd been thrilled when her mother had taken the ring off, handing it to her to play with. It'd been warm still, and Millie'd twisted it around her thumb, delighted by the slick slide of metal across her skin.

It's one of the few happy memories she has of her mother. She wonders what Philippa would say about an illegitimate grandchild. Probably forcefeed her the abortifacient herself, she thinks. Especially when she found out that the father was Gryffindor.

Kingsley leans back in his chair with a sigh. "Those of us who pay attention."

Millie looks back at him, her chin raised. "I'm not going to apologise for what I did."



"I'm not asking you to." He steeples his fingers and presses them to his mouth. "You've decided against a potion."

"Yes." Millie doesn't look away. Draco's potion had expired yesterday. She'd poured it down the loo this morning. It wasn't something she'd deliberated on. She'd just allowed it to happen, made a choice by not making a choice.

Kingsley frowns, but he sits forward, his quill hovering over the personnel transfer request form. "Does he know?" At the shake of her head, he drops the quill. "You *will* tell him before I sign this."

"That has nothing to do with you--" She breaks off when Kingsley's hand slams against the desktop.

He glares at her. "The hell it doesn't." His mouth tightens. "I'm not some bloody agony aunt, Millicent, desperate to tell you how to live your sodding life, because frankly, I don't particularly care what any of you lot get up to once those robes are off. But I'll be damned if you're going to lie to him--"

"I didn't say I was going to lie--"

"My department is not going to implode over this." Kingsley's eyes narrow. "Tell him."

Millie takes a slow breath. She grips the arms of her chair. "Fine."

Kingsley pushes the paper back across the desk at her. "Deal with it."

"I said I would." She stands, then stops before she reaches the door. "Just so we're clear, I wasn't going to keep it from him."

"You'd best not," Kingsley says quietly. "You're not cruel."

Millie looks away. "Maybe I am," she says, her hand on the doorknob. "I'm not getting rid of the problem, after all."

Kingsley doesn't stop her as she leaves.

## six

“I’m pregnant,” Millie says flatly.

Harry sits down, his legs giving out. “You’re not.” His face is blank. He won’t look at her.

“Nearly fifteen weeks.” Millie stares at the MLE logo etched into the tiny window in the conference room. *Ignorantia juris neminem excusat*. Kingsley’s promised her a new office, a corner one, with two long paned windows overlooking the atrium below. She just has to get through this conversation.

“Jesus.”

Millie glances back at him. “It’s yours.”

Harry blinks slowly. “I’d assumed.” His voice is soft. Gentle. It’s all Millie can do not to throw herself at him, to beg him to take her back. Instead she folds her arms across her chest with a wince. She’s not showing yet, but her breasts ache. Draco’s told her that’s not uncommon. He’s not happy with her for this decision. She’s not certain she’s happy with herself either.

“I just wanted to be clear.” Millie sits across from him. “In case you thought--”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Harry looks at her. “You’re not a whore.”

Her shoulders stiffen. “Would it matter if I was?” She sighs and tucks a stray curl behind her ear. “I don’t expect anything from you, of course. I’ve enough money to take care of the baby myself--”

“Mils,” he says.

Millie ignores him. "I know it's mad. I know the sensible thing would be to abort, but I've done that twice now, and while I don't regret either decision--God knows I was in no place to have a child back then--it's just now..." She bites her bottom lip and trails off.

"I didn't know you wanted kids." Harry rubs his thumb over the polished surface of the conference table, leaving behind a smudge. He wipes it away with his sleeve.

"Neither did I." Millie's hand drops to her stomach. In the past week she's stopped thinking of it as a foetus. It's odd. Draco'd called her a damned fool, but the gentleness in his eyes when he'd cast the spell that let her see the baby for the first time undercut his sharpness. It's a stupid choice, she thinks. She's too old and too cold to be a mother. The brat will probably spend the majority of his adulthood telling his Mind Healer how wretched she was. Still, the moment she'd seen the tiny hand clenching inside of her, her heart had skipped, and she'd known what she wanted.

She has no idea how she's going to tell Pansy.

Millie sighs. "I'm almost forty. This might be my only chance for..." She waves a hand towards her stomach. "This."

"That makes it more dangerous." The concern on Harry's face makes her look away.

"It's a risk I'm willing to take. Draco says--"

Harry sits up, his jaw tightening. "Malfoy knows it's mine?"

"Of course he does," Millie snaps. "Everyone knows about our affair, Harry. Kingsley. Laura Madley. They all know we've been shagging. I've told my friends what we've been doing, and don't you *dare* judge me for that. I've played the other woman long enough for you."

He glances away. "But Malfoy..." His lips press together, forming a thin line. All these years and they still dislike each other. Millie's never entirely understood it. She doubts she ever will.

"Draco's my friend and my Healer." Millie swallows, annoyed at the lump in her throat. She hates the hormones surging through her. "He's kept our secret long enough already."

When Harry looks back at her, his eyes dark behind his glasses, it's all she has not to let the tears seep out. Instead she squares her shoulders and lifts her chin. She won't let him see how vulnerable she is. That's what had got them in this mess to begin with. One night, one pub, one death of a colleague, taken down next to them by a Killing Curse that had barely missed Harry's shoulder. They'd got pissed together, going through an entire bottle of firewhisky before Millie had turned to Harry, cheeks wet, and told him if he ever came that close to an Unforgiveable again, she'd kill him herself.

His response had been a kiss, wild and desperate, that had led them to her flat, to her bedroom, to her legs wrapped around his hips as he'd fucked her into her mattress, their cries and gasps echoing through the room, nearly drowned out by the slam of the headboard against the wall. He'd told her he needed her, that he'd dreamt of doing this for months, that he could come just from the sight of her tits alone. No one had fucked her the way Harry had, revelling in her body, making her feel beautiful, sexual, *wanted*.

She'd fallen in love with Harry that night. He'll never know, of course. Millie's no fool. She's just a brilliant fuck, a way of escaping his marriage. She might have the Saviour of the Wizarding World's cock, but his heart--that's an entirely different matter.

While she might be less complicated than Ginny Weasley, she knows she can't compete with long legs, a pretty face and a small waist. Sooner or later, Harry will come to his senses and realise he still wants his beautiful wife. Sooner or later, Ginny will do the same. However much they both fuck around, neither seems willing to give up on their marriage, and Millie's smart enough to realise this. Not smart enough, though, she thinks ruefully, to do what would be best for them all.

More fool, she.

"This will derail your whole career," Harry says.

"I know." Millie is oddly sanguine. It doesn't matter if she's one of the best field Aurors in the department; there's no way the Ministry would put a single mother in that amount of danger. Kingsley had been clear on that.

Harry runs his hands over his face, pushing his glasses up his forehead. They catch on his cropped fringe. "You've worked for years--"

"I want this baby," Millie says firmly. "I know the sacrifices. But I'm not asking you for anything. I just thought you should know."

Harry drops his hands and looks at her. "You were on a potion," he says.

"I missed a dose." Millie's fingertips trace small circles over the swell of her stomach. She's grateful for her extra weight; it'll take her a bit longer to start showing. "And you hate condoms."

Harry gives her a small smile. "Yeah." She knows he's thinking about the way he felt inside of her, and her breath catches and warmth spreads through her body. She wants him again. Here. Now. Spread across the table, his cock hard inside her as he leans down to suck her breast, her thighs tight against his hips as she bucks against him--Christ. Her body thrums, tight and tense.

She looks away before he can see what she wants. Harry's always been good at that.

Harry leans forward, his elbows on the conference table. "This changes everything. I'll leave--"

"No." Millie's voice is sharp. Her cheeks are flushed, she knows, and there's a warm ache in her groin. "You won't."

He looks down at his hands, folded in front of him. "Ginny and I haven't shared a bedroom for two years. You know that." His mouth twists. "Evidently everyone knows it. I'm surprised it hasn't been in the *Prophet* by now." He glances up at her. "I suppose I should be grateful no one from the office has run to them."

"I'm sure they have," Millie says dryly. "Pansy knows Barnabas Cuffe through her father. You really should thank her some day."

“Oh.” Harry pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

Dust motes glitter in the stream of sunlight through the narrow window. Millie watches them swirl above the table. “She didn’t do it for you.”

He nods. “I know.”

They’re silent for a long moment, then Harry shifts with a sigh. His chair creaks. Millie can smell the faint sandalwood from his cologne. It makes her want to weep. She can’t afford to miss him, not now, not with everything.

“I’ll talk to Ginny,” he says quietly.

Millie shakes her head. “Don’t be an idiot. This has nothing to do with your marriage. You still have Lily and Al and Jamie to think of, and this child doesn’t need you. *I* don’t need you.”

Harry’s up out of his chair. “That’s a lie.”

Millie watches him warily as he walks around the table. “I don’t need you, Harry. I never have.”

“Liar,” Harry says, and he’s pulling her out of her chair, his hands tight on her hips. “I can always tell, Mills,” he whispers. His breath is warm against her lips.

Millie shakes her head. She doesn’t pull away. She can’t. Her fingers splay against his chest. The wool of his robe is soft against her palm. “Harry…”

Harry kisses her, and her body is on fire. Millie presses against him, her hips rocking against his until he groans.

“Merlin, I miss you,” he mumbles, his mouth sliding wetly across her jaw. His hands slip up her sides, over her tits, and Millie twists her fingers in his robe,

“You shouldn’t.” She lets him step her back against the conference table. The edge presses into her arse.

Harry buries his face in her hair. “Don’t care.” He grabs her hips and lifts her onto the table. She kisses him again, her breath coming in sharp, short huffs.

“Ward the door.” Millie knows she’s a fool to give in, but she wants him more than she can say. One last time.

He flicks his wand towards the door silently, and she can feel the quick frisson of wards setting. The others will talk, of course, but right now she doesn’t give a damn.

It only takes a moment for their fumbling fingers to open their robes, to push Millie’s skirt to her hips, and then Harry’s there, between her knees, kissing her as he pulls her knickers to one side. His knuckles brush her soft, wet flesh, and Millie bites her lip.

“Hurry.” She digs her fingernails into his arms and spreads her thighs wider as she shifts to the edge of

the table. Harry tugs at the zip of his trousers with his other hand, breathing hard as he pulls his cock out. He strokes it once, twice, rubbing the swelling head through her wet slit.

When Harry presses into her, Millie gasps, clamping her knees to his hips. He catches her mouth with his. "Quiet," he murmurs with a smile, and his practiced hand unbuttons her blouse, sliding through the gape to cup her breast, kneading it through the lace of her bra.

They move together slowly, silently, watching each other. Harry's eyes are heated and dark behind his skewed glasses; he rolls her nipple between his fingers as he leans in to kiss her. Millie drags her teeth across his bottom lip. He groans and his cock slides deeper.

Millie cants her hips, presses her sensible shoes into Harry's arse. "More," she says, and Harry pushes her backwards, against the slick polished wood. He leans over her, his hands on either side of her shoulders, and rocks into her, steadily fucking her across the table.

They've done this before, both of them, late at night in a deserted office. Then they didn't care who might have heard. Now, however, they fuck almost soundlessly, their kisses muffling gasps and groans and grunts.

She's missed this. She won't admit it to him. Her hands slide up his arms, over his shoulders. "Harry," she mouths against his hair. He smells musky. Sweaty. She turns her head and kisses him again, arching into the thrusts that knock her shoulders against wood.

"God," Harry says roughly, "I love pregnant sex. Ginny was always--"

Millie pulls him into another kiss. "Harry, shut it. Just fuck me."

Harry tilts her hips, changes the angle of his strokes. She shudders, the pressure on her clitoris building. A drop of sweat slides down his temple, across his flushed cheek. "Come on," he whispers. He pulls at her, tugging her up against him, his hands on the small of her back. He fucks her in quick, hurried strokes guaranteed to send her over the edge.

They do.

Millie cries out; Harry catches her mouth with his, his hips still snapping against hers. Another few strokes, a long, desperate kiss, and he comes, shaking against her, his face pressed into her hair.

They cling to each other. Millie's body aches and throbs. She closes her eyes, holding Harry tightly. She doesn't want to let him go. Doesn't want to push him away.

His hand slides over her stomach, smoothing across the bunched fabric of her skirt. He turns his head. Kisses her jaw.

"Our baby," he whispers, and the quiet joy in his voice makes Millie ache.

She knows what she has to do. It's better this way.

Slowly, carefully, she pulls his hands away and slides off the table. Her thighs are wet with spunk. She pulls down her skirt, straightens her blouse. It takes her a moment to twist her curls back up into a messy bun at the nape of her neck.

Harry watches her. "Millie," he says. His voice is weary.

Millie looks back at him. His cock is limp against his trousers; his robe hangs crookedly from one shoulder. The table behind him is smudged with their handprints and worse.

"I have to go, Harry," she says quietly. She buttons her robe. "This was a mistake."

Harry catches her hand. "We're having a baby, Millie."

"I'm having a baby." Millie pulls away. A flick of her wand disables the wards on the door. She's always been able to unwind Harry's work. Kingsley had sworn it made them perfect partners. Millie's not so sure.

She doesn't look back as she steps out of the conference room into a blessedly empty hallway.

Behind the door, she can hear the crack of wood splintering.

She flinches and walks on.



Photo by alexbuss

## seven

“Wine, Millie?” Blaise asks, holding out a glass.

Millie shakes her head. “Not tonight.”

Blaise sits down on the sofa next to her, a frown creasing his brow. “Our Millie, not drinking?” He sets the wineglass aside and crosses his long legs. “Whyever not?”

“Yes, Millicent,” Draco says dryly from his chair near the hearth. “Whyever not?” He lifts his glass of wine to his mouth.

She glares at him. They’re gathered at Blaise and Pansy’s flat in Mayfair to celebrate Greg’s birthday. She’s surprised Draco’s managed to leave Astoria’s side for the evening--the two of them are sickeningly coupled and have been since the birth of Scorpius thirteen years ago. Still, birthdays are sacrosanct and have been since the end of the war when they were the ragtag remnants of their Slytherin year. Daphne and Theo had drifted off after a year or two, Daphne to marry a pureblood wizard from New York, Theo to take a position at Gringotts in Berlin. At least once a year one or the other of them ends up in London with just enough time free to squeeze in a drink at one of the Savoy bars—much to Draco’s irritation. His relationship with his sister-in-law is lukewarm at best, and he’s never forgiven Theo for abandoning them for goblins.

Tracey Entwhistle--née Davis--lives in Shropshire with her husband Kevin, but she only keeps in touch with Millie and Greg lately. Millie’s certain if they weren’t Olivia’s godparents they would have drifted into receiving a Christmas card every December and nothing more, the way the others have.

So it’s just the five of them now, gathering throughout the year, with bottles of wine and a photograph of Professor Snape. They all have a copy; Draco had passed it around when he’d found it in a box at the



Manor. None of them care that he was a spy for the Order; to them he'll always be the one professor who believed in them, the one who took care of them, the one who protected them as best he could.

He watches her now, suspiciously, from his frame, and Millie can't stop the guilty flush. Snape had always been able to see through her easily.

"Leave her alone," Greg says amiably. Tall and broad, he's stretched across Pansy's favourite white chaise, his feet propped on a huge black velvet cushion at the end. He's unbuttoned the top two buttons of his shirt, and his robe hangs open. Millie's fairly certain he's finished an entire bottle on his own.

Draco shrugs and finishes his wine. "You might as well tell them. You're five months gone."

Pansy sets a bottle of wine down with a thud and sits up on the other sofa she's been banished to. Her feet are bare, the toenails perfectly polished a dark purple. "Five months what?" She keeps her voice light, but Millie knows her well enough to hear the edge.

"Oh, my God," Blaise says. His eyes narrow as he studies Millie. "You're pregnant."

The room's silent. Millie sighs.

"Yes." She gives Draco a pointed look. He ignores her. "And as my Healer--who might I point out just broke patient-Healer confidentiality--has mentioned, I'm five months along."

Pansy counts on her fingers. "November." She takes a long drink of wine. Her hand trembles slightly.

Millie nods. She glances at Greg. He's studying his glass, his face closed off. "Greg," she says softly.

He looks at her. There's a flash of pain in his eyes. She knows why. He'd wanted her to keep his baby. "It's Potter's then," he says after a moment. "Unless you've shagged someone else lately."

She looks at him in surprise. She hadn't realised he knew too.

Greg shrugs. "I'm not that thick, Millie." He takes a sip of wine. "Besides I heard you and Pansy talking once."

Millie looks at Blaise. "You don't seem shocked either."

He raises his hands. "Pansy told me last Christmas."

"The bastard insisted, darling," Pansy says from the sofa. "You know how he is. Uses sex as a weapon."

Blaise smirks at his wife. "It works so well on you."

Pansy throws a cushion across the room at him.

Millie sighs. The baby moves, and her hand goes to her stomach.

Draco notices and sits up. "A kick?"

“I’m still not used to it,” she admits. It’s been two weeks now that she’s been feeling it move inside of her. “It’s a bit active.”

Draco snorts. “Potter.”

Pansy sets her glass aside and stands up. “I’ll see what’s keeping the house-elves with the food,” she says, and she doesn’t look at Millie.

When she’s gone, Blaise touches Millie’s hand. “Don’t worry.” His eyes are sad. “She’ll be fine.”

“I know.” Millie still looks at the door that Pansy walked through. She knows they’ve been trying for a baby for ten years. Pansy’s never been able to carry to term. She’s miscarried four times now, all in the first trimester. “I didn’t want to say.”

“Better now, than if you kept it from her,” Draco says quietly.

Millie pushes herself off the couch. “I should check on her.”

They don’t stop her as she leaves.

“Pans,” she says, pushing open the door to the kitchen.

There’s a soft noise, and Pansy turns, clutching a handkerchief in one hand. A house-elf peers at her, his worry evident. Pansy’s blinking hard, and Millie just holds her arms out.

“I’m not angry,” Pansy chokes out, letting Millie pull her close. “I just--” She breaks off, pressing her face against Millie’s shoulder.

They stand together for a long moment, arms wrapped around each other. Pansy, her best friend and fierce protector since they were six and had met beneath the forsythia at one of Philippa’s garden parties, had been the one she’d called when she first realised Greg had got her up the duff at nineteen. Entirely calm and completely withholding judgement, she’d made the arrangements for Millie to see a Healer for the potion, she’d been the one to stay with her while it took effect, and she’d lied to Millie’s mother about what they were doing. Millie has always loved her for that. She always will.

She strokes Pansy’s hair, rocking her gently.

Pansy pulls back with an annoyed huff, wiping the handkerchief across her eyes and smearing her mascara slightly. “I’m an idiot,” she says with a small smile. “I’m happy for you, really.”

“I know.” Millie brushes Pansy’s dark hair back from her cheek. They look at each other.

“A baby.” Pansy laughs and catches Millie’s hand, squeezing. “My God, I never thought I’d see you as a mother.”

Millie smiles. “Neither did I, to be honest.”

Pansy gives her a shrewd look. “What about Potter? He’s married.”

“Don’t be so bourgeois.” Millie leans against the counter, much to the house-elves dismay. Pansy shoos them away with a snap of her handkerchief. “I want him to stay married. I intend to do this on my own.”

“He knows?”

“Of course he knows.” Millie doesn’t volunteer that he’s only known a few weeks. “He agrees.”

Pansy arches an eyebrow. “Does he?”

“I’m not asking for support,” Millie says defensively. “He doesn’t even have to tell Ginny.”

“That’s not what concerns me.” Pansy picks up a plate of olives. She gives Millie a pointed look. “Have you ever considered the fact that Potter’s children mean so much to him that he’s willing to not upset them by divorcing their mother? Think about it, Millie. You’re expecting him to stay away from this baby?” She shakes her head as she starts towards the door. “Bit naive, really.”

Millie follows her silently, pondering the truth of Pansy’s assessment.



Photo by Tom Leuntjens Photography

# eight

“Millie.”

She looks up from the stack of paperwork on her desk, and she blinks twice, trying to refocus from the long lines of tiny handwritten numbers.

Harry’s at her door, his wand dangling from one hand. He looks a bit lost.

Millie’s fingers tighten on her quill. She shifts in her chair, trying to get comfortable. At seven months, she’s more than showing now, despite loosening her tailored Auror’s robes, and the baby’s taken to pressing on her bladder or kidneys, spiteful little brat. The office has been whispering behind her back for weeks, and Laura Madley’s given her more than one speculative look. Millie reminds herself to start a rumour about Laura nicking biscuits off the tea cart, just for spite.

“Did you need something?” she asks, keeping her voice cool.

Harry steps into the office. When he starts to close the door behind him she stops him with a sharp *Leave it*. He hesitates, but does.

“I’d like to talk,” he says. He twists his wand between his fingers absently. The roll of magic from it makes her nauseous.

“Stop.” She flattens her palms against the top of her desk, breathing slowly. The baby kicks her, hard.

Harry blinks at her, then stills. “Sorry.” He tucks his wand back in its holster. “Magic made Ginny ill too.”

“It’s not magic,” Millie says tightly. Her lunch threatens to come up on her. “It’s you.” She waves one hand at him. “All that power--” She exhales, and the nausea subsides.

A flush rises on Harry's cheeks. He moves closer, and his eyes drop to the swell of Millie's belly. "Is it..."

"He's fine."

"He." Harry looks up at her.

Millie's been certain from the beginning she was carrying a boy. "Draco confirmed it a few days ago."

A small smile curves Harry's mouth. "Another one." He steps around the corner of the desk. "Can I..." He doesn't wait for an answer before he kneels next to her chair and lays his hand on the hard bump beneath Millie's robe. The baby twists inside of her, kicking once, twice, hard enough to take Millie's breath away.

"Are you all right?" Harry asks. He hasn't moved his hand. Millie can feel the press of the baby's foot against her skin. Harry traces the small protrusion before it disappears.

She nods, her fingers digging into the arms of her chair. "He's a right bastard when you're around."

Harry moves his hand. "Is that why you've been avoiding me?"

"Not entirely." Millie wishes she had a cigarette now. It's been three years since she's smoked, but Harry makes her nervous.

His fingers brush her arm. "Then why?"

"You know why." She gives him an exasperated look. "You've heard the whispers."

Harry just looks at her. "And I'm not denying them either."

"Circe." Millie leans back in her chair. The baby stretches and kicks again. She doesn't know why he's always so active when Harry's nearby. It's been this way for weeks, though. Pansy thinks it's recognition. Draco's told her that's utter bollocks. "Why?"

"Because he's my kid too." Harry's mouth takes on a stubborn line. "You can't expect me to act as if he isn't."

Millie glares at him. "We fucked," she says under her breath. "We did not have a relationship--"

"The hell we didn't." Harry grabs her chair and turns her to face him. "Do you think I was shagging anyone but you?"

"You should have." Millie looks away. Her heart twists. "It was just sex."

Harry stands up. "You're a stubborn bitch, Millicent Bulstrode."

"I don't want you any more, Harry," she says quietly.

He stops at the door. "I really could give a fuck." His gaze drops to her stomach. "I'm not walking away from my kid." The door slams behind him.

Millie closes her eyes.

Pansy was right. The thought terrifies her, and she cups her hands around her swollen belly. The Wizengamot would give him custody if he asked. She knows that as well as he does.

The baby kicks, and Millie sits up, mouth tight. She'll be damned if she'll let that happen.



Photo by f.clerc

## nine

Greg sets a cup of tea and a plate of hot scones in front of Millie and sits down across the table from her. “How are you feeling?”

“You don’t even want to know.” She watches steam rise in pale curls from the tea. “I’m up all night either being bruised by kicking or having to waddle to the loo.” She reaches for a scone and butters it. Greg’s a brilliant cook; he always has been. He refuses to allow a house-elf to touch his Aga.

“It won’t be long now, though,” he says gruffly, lifting his teacup.

Millie bites her lip. “Five weeks.” She looks up at Greg. “I’m not ready.”

“No one ever is.” He watches her. “You remember what Draco was like before Scorpius arrived?”

She shudders. Draco had nearly hexed Astoria’s Healer in the middle of St Mungo’s once. “Yes, well, he wasn’t actually facing the prospect of squeezing a baby through his legs.”

Greg snorts. “Let’s be glad of that.” He twists his teacup between his hands. “Have you spoken with Potter?”

“No.” She picks at the end of a scone. “Pansy’s given me the name of a solicitor in case he tries anything legally.” She leans back in her chair, wiping her fingers on a napkin. “I don’t think he will though. This pregnancy may be an open secret, but at least it’s not in the papers. Yet.”

“Give it time.” Greg sips his tea. Through the window behind him, Millie can see the trees in the back garden, their leaves beginning to turn red and orange. A faint breeze ripples them, sending the branches swaying against the clear blue autumn sky.

Millie touches his arm. "I know this isn't easy for you."

"Most things aren't." Greg sets his cup down and looks at her. Millie wonders what life would have been like if she'd kept their baby. If they'd settled down together. Greg makes a decent living as an estate agent for Gringotts' holdings, and when his father dies there'll be the house in Berks that will go to him. He'd have been a good father, loyal, stable, predictably dull and easily controlled. They could have been happy, she thinks. Or at least pretended to be.

"Do you ever think what might have..." Millie trails off. She runs a finger around the gilded rim of her teacup. It once belonged to Greg's grandmother. She'd been a Yaxley.

Greg takes a scone, turning it over in his hand. "Sometimes." He looks at her. "I see you now and think that could have been mine."

Millie's silent for a moment. "Are you still angry with me?"

"Not much." Greg breaks the scone, scattering crumbs across the table. "Wasn't really my choice, was it?" He shrugs. "Anyway, it's better that it's Potter's, I suppose. I'd have bored you soon enough."

Millie takes a sip of tea. She doesn't know what to say.

He glances up at her as he bites into the scone. "You shouldn't fight him, you know." He brushes the crumbs away. "You're cutting off your nose to spite your face."

"I'm not."

Greg rolls his eyes. "Look, Millie. I don't like Potter. None of us do. He's an arrogant git like the rest of those bloody Gryffindors, and I know what he thinks of me. Thick, dull Goyle. Just like the rest of them." His mouth twists. "And maybe I am, but even I notice you're miserable right now, and don't say you're not because I know you better than that."

Millie stares down at her plate. "It's just difficult."

"Because you're making it difficult." Greg bumps her jaw with two knuckles, nudging it up. His eyes are sympathetic. "You've always done that, you know."

She gives him a small, tight smile. "I know."

"Maybe you should talk to him more," Greg says. He reaches for the marmalade. "Seems that way to me at least. I wouldn't want my mother and father not on speaking terms."

"He's married."

Greg shrugs. "Didn't bother you when you were shagging him. Don't see why it should now."

He has a point, Millicent concedes. She takes the marmalade from him.

"I'll think about it," she says.





Photo by OprahHatParty

# ten

It's nearly noon the next Saturday when the knock on Millie's door comes.

She pushes herself off the sofa with a groan, wrapping her dressing gown around her swollen middle. She's four weeks out from her due date and she feels like a grounded Hippogryff. She's barely made it to the hall before the house-elf Pansy's lent her is at the door, opening it.

Ginny Potter stands on the stoop, her fiery hair gleaming in the sunlight. Millie's suddenly aware of her unwashed curls and the butter stains on her overstretched Tutshill Tornados jersey. Her heart thuds against her chest, and she clenches her fists, her fingernails digging in to her skin.

He's told her. Someone's told her.

Millie wraps her arms around her enormous belly, feeling fiercely protective.

"Might I come in?" Ginny asks, looking over the head of the house-elf to Millie.

She nods, and the manners her mother taught her kick in. "Blinken, some tea, please. In the sitting room." The house-elf closes the door behind Ginny and disappears.

Millie can feel Ginny following her as she manoeuvres back to the sitting room. She's grateful that it's tidy at least, save for the pile of newspapers at the foot of the sofa. "Please sit," she says, lowering herself slowly onto the sofa again. The baby kicks in protest.

Ginny takes off her robe and sits on the edge of an armchair. She's impeccably dressed in a pair of black wool trousers that make her legs look impossibly long and a black turtleneck. Her hair's cropped short; her pale skin is flawless. She's stunningly beautiful.

They regard at each other carefully. Millie fights back a mad urge to laugh. The wife and the mistress together at last. How horribly cliché.

“Well,” Ginny says finally. “This is a bit unconventional, I think.”

Millie doesn’t answer.

Ginny looks around. “Your house is lovely. I’ve always thought Kensington would be a wonderful place to live.”

“I like it.” Millie glances towards the side table where her wand lies. It’s a stretch, but she could grab it if necessary.

Ginny catches her look. “I’m not here to cause a problem,” she says gently, and she leans forward, her elbows on her knees. “It’s not as if I haven’t known about you and Harry.”

This takes Millie by surprise. “He didn’t say.”

“He wouldn’t,” Ginny says wryly. “That’s one thing you get used to with Harry. He spent so many years keeping secrets that he can’t stop now.” She grimaces. “After a while it’s rather infuriating.”

Millie’s mouth twitches. “I know.”

There are wrinkles at the corners of Ginny’s eyes that deepen when she smiles. “I can imagine you do.” She twists a thin silver bracelet around her wrist. A snitch charm hangs off it. “And I suspect you know quite a few things about him. And me.”

“Some,” Millie admits. “Enough to know that neither of you are happy.”

“I could be.” Ginny hesitates, then sighs. “It’s not my choice to stay married, you know. It hasn’t been. Harry just thinks...” She stares down at her hands, at the gold band on her left hand.

Millie studies her. “He doesn’t want the kids to suffer.”

“He never has.” Ginny looks up. “I don’t hate you, you realise. Not any more. I don’t even hold any animosity towards you. Whether or not I wanted to admit it, Harry and I were over long before he slept with you.”

“You had the first affair, he said.” Millie feels odd. She rubs her palm over her belly, uncertain as to whether she’s trying to calm the baby or herself.

Ginny nods. “The first of several.” She brushes her hair back from her eyes. “I suppose I didn’t give him much choice. I was desperately unhappy before I slept with Neil. And now there’s Viktor...” She trails off and sighs before she looks back at Millie. “But you were Harry’s only one.” Her eyes drop down to the swell of Millie’s stomach.

“This wasn’t on purpose,” Millie says. “And I have no intention of causing problems for your family.”

"I know." Ginny gives her a tight smile. "But you know how Harry is. He can't walk away from his children. Any of them."

"So he told you about this." Millie can feel the baby move. Her hand smooths over the silk of her dressing gown.

Ginny watches her. "He was upset about not having anything to do with your child. Family's important to him. He never really had one when he was growing up."

Millie's quite aware of this fact. They'd spent hours, she and Harry, lying in bed, talking about their difficult childhoods. "The cupboard."

There's a flicker of surprise in Ginny's eyes. "He told you."

"We didn't just fuck," Millie says, and she knows the irony of her statement after what she's flung in Harry's face for months. She hesitates, twisting the tie of her dressing gown around her finger. "Do you still love him?" It's an impertinent question to ask her lover's wife, but she needs to know.

Ginny's quiet for a moment. The door rattles, and Blinken brings in a tea tray, setting it on the side table. He pours a cup for Ginny and hands it to her, before pouring another for Millie. She rests the teacup on her bump. At Ginny's raised eyebrow, she shrugs. "The baby likes the warmth."

"So did Al." Ginny takes a sip of tea. "It calmed him down. I thought he'd bruise all of my ribs with his kicking."

Millie huffs in amusement. "I'm fairly certain with the amount I've sworn at this one that his first word will be 'Fuck.'"

Ginny laughs, then looks down into her cup of milky tea. "As for your question, I suppose I'll always love him. At least in some way. I have since I was eleven, you know." She leans back in her chair and crosses her legs. Her black boots are polished, and the heels are impossibly high. Just looking at them makes Millie's back ache. "We're absolute shit at being married though. I wanted to leave once, when Lily was three. Harry talked me out of it. Said we could work on it. We did, and eked out another six years before I couldn't take it any longer." Her eyes are sad. "It's not easy being Harry Potter's wife."

Millie shifts on the sofa, turning to rest her swollen feet on an ottoman. "You were a bit of a bitch."

"I can be." Ginny lifts her teacup. "But I don't think you're sunshine and buttercups either."

That makes Millie smile. "Never have been. Harry's a masochist." She waves towards her stomach. "Does this bother you or are you just ridiculously Gryffindor?"

"Oh, I exploded four cushions when he told me," Ginny says calmly. "Feathers all over the sitting room floor. I think he was afraid I was going to turn my wand on him next." Her eyes narrow. "I don't like being made a fool of, and frankly, it would have been perfectly fine with me if you'd aborted and gone on shagging him. This complicates things."

Millie doesn't apologise. "It was my choice to make."

Ginny sets her teacup aside. “Which leads us to another choice, you and I.” She folds her hands over her knee. “Harry’ll never be able to make a proper decision--he’s absolute balls at anything he thinks will hurt someone he cares about--so we have to do it ourselves.”

“I’m not asking for anything.” Millie raises her chin. “I’ve made that quite clear.”

“The thing is,” Ginny says, “that I don’t want to go through this charade any longer.” She looks over at the chimneypiece and the photos that line it: family, friends. One of Harry in his Auror uniform, his eyes bright and his smile wide over a foaming pint. It’s a few years old. Millie knows the day it was taken, both of them crowded into a back table at the Leaky with their other colleagues after a raid in Scotland that they’d been planning for months. It’d been just before they’d started sleeping together.

Ginny stands and walks over to the hearth. She picks up the picture, tracing a finger along the curve of younger Harry’s jaw. He smiles perplexedly at her. “In another life,” she says quietly, “I’d beg him to stay. I can still remember the smell of the roses in Mum and Dad’s back garden on our wedding day, you know. Nineteen years. Christ.”

Millie watches her. Ginny’s face is reflected in the mirror above the fireplace. She looks tired. Worn almost.

“Viktor loves me.” Ginny sets the picture back on the chimneypiece. “In a way that I think Harry and I were far too young to understand. Perhaps it’s not fair to him or to you or to the children that Harry and I have been hanging on to each other.” She looks over at Millie. “Perhaps it’s not even fair to us.”

“Perhaps,” Millie says carefully, and Ginny smiles.

“I think I understand what he sees in you.” Ginny reaches for her robe. “I should go. I don’t want to tire you.” She stops Millie when she starts to rise. “Stay, please. I remember how hard it was to move about this close to the end.”

“There’s Floo powder on the hearth.” Millie looks up at her. “You’re not awful, you realise.”

“It depends on whom you ask.” Ginny shrugs into her robe and buttons it. “I just don’t see any sense in fighting with you over something I know is broken beyond repair.” She glances over at Millie. “You love him. I don’t even have to question that. It’s written all over your face.”

“I--” Millie breaks off. She can’t argue with the truth.

Ginny scoops a handful of powder from the tin on the hearthstone. “Think about what you’re doing, Millicent. Don’t hurt him because you’re afraid of being hurt yourself.” The look she gives her is melancholy. “I think that’s a lesson we both should take to heart.”

“Viktor,” Millie says.

“I can be a fool, too.” Ginny throws the Floo powder into the fire. “We’re not so very different, you and me.” She smiles, and it lights up her face. “Owl me sometime. We should have coffee.”

A whoosh of air stirs Millie’s hair as green flames pull Ginny away.

For a long while, she sits silently in the sitting room, her thoughts tumbling together.



Photo by insightimaging

# eleven

The last person Millie expects to see sitting in Draco's office is Harry.

Neither of them are speaking. Harry's tense, perched on the edge of his chair in jeans and a charcoal jumper. It's been too long since she's seen him out of his uniform. Draco drums his fingers against his desktop. When he sees her, he stands.

"You're late."

Millie shuts the door behind her sharply. "I wasn't aware anyone else would be here." She slides her coat from her shoulders and hangs it on the coatrack.

Harry pushes himself out of his chair. "I asked Draco if I could come." His eyes trail up and down her body. "You look good."

"I look like a beached whale." Millie frowns at Draco. "What on earth possessed you--"

"A visit from Ginevra," Draco says calmly. "She was rather persuasive."

Millie swears to herself that she'll strangle Harry's wife with her bare hands the next time she sees her. She sits in the chair next to Harry with a sigh. "Since when did you start listening to Gryffindors?"

Draco shrugs. "Temporary madness, I suppose." He eyes Harry. "Nevertheless, she did suggest that, all things considered, this might be an acceptable place for you both to talk." He hesitates, his gaze flicking towards Millie. "I didn't disagree."

Millie remains silent, glaring at him.

“Don’t make this harder on yourself than it already is,” Draco says softly. His hand falls on her shoulder. “Potter may be a complete tit and an adulterous bastard--” Harry makes a protesting noise that Draco ignores “--but you’re bloody miserable without him. We all know it, and we all think you should speak to him. Even Pans.” He scowls at Harry. “I’ll give you five minutes, and if she hexes you, well, I told you so.”

The door closes behind him, leaving them alone. Millie doesn’t say anything; she just stares out the window, watching pale sunlight filter through grey clouds.

“Are you going to talk to me?” Harry turns towards her.

Millie shakes her head. She knows she’s being petulant, but she doesn’t care. She’s terrified.

Harry sighs and leans back in his chair. “Christ, you are so...” He groans. “Millicent. Look at me.”

She doesn’t. He places a hand on her arm. She wants to flinch away, but she can’t. “Don’t,” she says after a moment.

They’re silent. Harry doesn’t move his hand.

Millie finally looks at him. “You told your wife.”

“What else would I do?” Harry’s fingers slide down to twine with hers. “There’s going to be another Potter in the world. I thought she deserved to know.”

“You might have warned me.”

Harry just gives her a look. “You weren’t speaking to me, remember?”

Millie hates it when he’s logical. “Are you fucking Grace?”

“Ackerman?” Harry barks out a laugh. “Not bloody likely.” His thumb strokes across her palm. “You’re the only partner I’ve wanted to shag.”

She pulls away. She doesn’t want to be mollified.

The clock behind Draco’s desk ticks softly. Harry stands up and walks over to the window, looking down at the garden below. “Ginny’s leaving,” he says. She can see the tightness of his jaw. “We went to Hogwarts last night to tell the kids.”

Millie’s breath catches. “Oh.”

Harry turns and leans against the windowsill, his arms crossed over his chest. He looks exhausted. “They weren’t surprised. Well. About Ginny and me at least. Seems like we didn’t do too well at hiding the state of our marriage.”

“Children see more than you expect,” Millie says. She thinks of her own childhood and how even then she’d known that nothing her mother could do would keep her father from straying.

“Well, Jamie’s a bit furious with me about the baby.” Harry just looks at her. “Lily’s thrilled. Al’s…” He hesitates. “Al’s quiet.”

Millie tenses. “You told them too.”

“We thought they should know.” Harry pushes himself off the windowsill and walks towards her, his eyes fixed on hers. “Ginny told them about Viktor. She’s moving in with him, you know.”

“Is she?” Millie can’t look away.

Harry squats next to her, his hand reaching for hers again. His eyes crinkle as he smiles. “We plan on causing an enormous scandal.”

“I see.” Millie bites back a laugh.

“Do you?” Harry kisses her knuckles. “Ginny thinks you should move in with me too.”

Millie stills. “Pansy can’t keep that out of the papers.”

“I said we wanted to cause a scandal.” He looks up at her. “Viktor’s keen if you are. He thinks it’s time to shake society up a bit.”

“It’s not very wise.” Millie lets him turn her hand, lets him press his mouth to her wrist. She shivers. “Your reputation will be in tatters.”

Harry slides his palm over the swell of her stomach. The baby kicks happily against his hand. “I don’t think I care. Besides, isn’t it respectable to live with the mother of your child?”

“Not if you cheated on your wife with her,” Millie says dryly. “Skeeter will have her red-tipped claws in you.” She pauses. “And me.”

“Do you care?”

Millie considers. “Not particularly.” She touches Harry’s cheek. His dark stubble is rough against her fingertips. “But I don’t have a pedestal to fall off of.”

“It was always lonely up there.” He turns his head and kisses her fingertips. “Ginny also says I love you.”

Millie stills. Her heart clenches. “It seems Ginny says a lot of idiotic things.”

“She’s not wrong.” Harry looks up at her. “I do love you.”

“You don’t know what love is.” Millie traces the angle of his jaw.

“Neither do you,” Harry says quietly.

Millie looks at him. There are dark circles under his eyes, and his hair needs cutting. She brushes his fringe back off his forehead. “She told me I love you too.”

Harry laughs softly and leans his head against the arm of her chair. "Ginny seems to be commanding both armies."

"Your wife is a formidable woman," Millie agrees.

"Ex-wife." Harry shifts, moving between Millie's knees. He smooths both hands across her belly. "Tell me you love me."

Millie doesn't hesitate. "I do. God help me."

Harry grins up at her. "Tell me you'll move in with me."

She shakes her head, and his face falls. "You'll move in with me," she says calmly. "The nursery's already set up."

Harry's eyes soften. "I haven't seen it yet."

Millie takes his hand. "I could be convinced to give you a tour."

"Oh, don't make me ill," Draco drawls from the doorway. "Am I to take it the both of you have settled your differences, thus making my life much less difficult when it comes to the question of registering the birth of your brat?"

"More or less." Millie looks over at him. Draco's leaning against the door frame, his arms crossed, a small smirk on his face. "But I'm insisting on Bulstrode-Potter."

Draco winces. "If you must."

Harry rolls his eyes. "I suppose I have to put up with him."

"If you're going to force Granger on me, then yes." Millie eyes Harry. He sighs.

"I *am* standing here," Draco snaps. "And might I remind you who in this room is actually going to bring your whelp into this world, Potter? *Merlin*. You truly are an utter imbecile."

Harry grins at Millie. "This is going to be interesting."

She shakes her head, trying not to laugh. "To say the least."





Photo by sweethardt

## twelve

“So when will it be your turn in front of the vicar, you two?” Bill Weasley sits down at the flower-bedecked table in the Burrow’s back garden, a flute of champagne in his hand. “Mum sent me over to inquire.”

Millie leans against Harry, his arm draped around her shoulders. His tie is loose, his robe half-opened. She looks over at him, eyebrow quirked, and he shakes his head. “Not for a very long time, mate.” His fingertips trace small swirls over Millie’s arm. “I think we’re both perfectly content living in sin.”

“Hear, hear,” Millie murmurs, and she lifts her wineglass to her lips. Lily sits across the table, her two-year-old brother in her lap. Nicholas throws his dark head back and laughs at the faces his sister is making at him, his chubby hands twisted in her bridesmaid’s dress. Millie’s still surprised at how quickly Harry’s children had taken to their new sibling. Even Jamie had come around by Nicholas’s first birthday. She thinks she has Ginny to thank for that.

Her eyes drift to the dance floor, where Ginny’s swaying in Viktor Krum’s arms. They’re still scandalising society, all four of them, though Viktor’s been making suggestions about marriage lately. Millie’s been by the jewellers to look at the ring he’s thinking of. It’ll be perfect for Ginny.

Pansy remains horrified that she’s friendly with Harry’s ex. “It’s just not done, darling” she mutters each time she’s forced to socialise with Gryffindors, but she puts on a grim smile when Millie kicks her sharply beneath the table. Draco, on the other hand, remains a complete tit. Harry just laughs and tells her he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Millie’d made certain they all had invitations to Teddy’s wedding to Victoire. Only Greg has bothered to come, and Millie’s suspicious that a newly divorced Susan Bones has something to do with his presence.

“Mummy,” Nicholas says, and he leans across the table towards her, his arms outstretched. Millie sets her wine aside and reaches for her son. Harry watches indulgently as Nicholas curls up in her arms, his thumb in his mouth.

“They grow up too damned fast,” Bill says wistfully. His gaze drifts across the white tent to his daughter, draped in white silk.

Millie hates the thought of that. She’d rather keep Nicholas like this, soft and plump and sleepy on her lap. It surprises her how content she’s become, surrounded by Gryffindors and her one Slytherin stepson. There are times Al is a welcome antidote to all the sentimental lions. She suspects he’s grateful to her for the same reason.

Nicholas leans his head on her shoulder and yawns.

“Do you want me to take him?” Harry asks, and she shakes her head. Harry smooths back Nicholas’s hair, only to have his hand batted away by his annoyed son. He snorts. “Rather like you in the mornings.”

That earns him a glare. “Watch yourself,” she says. Harry just laughs. “You’re a wretch.”

“And you love me,” he says smugly.

Millie purses her mouth. “Keep telling yourself that, Potter.”

When Harry leans in to kiss her, she can’t stop her smile. Sometimes, she thinks, despite one’s best efforts, heroes do fall for girls like her.

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