

Behind the scenes of Hairy Potter

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This is a request from my friend, so please comment!

1. Watching Hairy

Harry started running. Ron said it was near the end of summer, when Harry went to stay at the Burrow before school started. He needed to burn energy, I think. I assumed he'd drop the habit once we got back to Hogwarts, where he can ride his broom, but he came down early the day after the Sorting Feast wearing shorts and a T-shirt and left through the portrait hole. I put down my textbook and went to the common room window. A few minutes passed before I saw him, small and distant, jogging around the lake path.

"Morning."

I turned to find Ron. He was smiling, but then his eyes slid past mine and his smile faded. He watched Harry a moment, then shook his head and asked if I was hungry, and we went to get something to eat.

The next morning Ron came downstairs behind Harry. He also wore shorts, a T-shirt, and his Chudley Cannons hat, turned around backwards. His expression was determined. He seemed prepared for an argument, but Harry didn't speak, he just nodded at me and left through the portrait hole. Ron followed.

I sat down by the window, and after a few minutes saw them step onto the path around the lake. Ron struggled at first to keep up with Harry, but after a lap, he seemed to reach his stride. They ran for an hour. When they came back, both were puffing and sweat-drenched. They went to shower, and I returned to my book. When they came down again, we left for breakfast.

It's become their routine to run every morning, and mine to watch from the window. Harry is a natural athlete, compact and quick. Ron is less graceful, but his long legs allow him to cover a lot of ground. They run well together. I don't think Ron asked Harry if he wanted a running companion, but I get the feeling Harry likes the company. I enjoy watching them.

A lot of things have changed since last year. Ron and I are a couple now, although we both get embarrassed if anyone actually uses the word "couple". We wrote almost daily over the summer, sometimes a quick note, and other times the envelope would be so stuffed I'd marvel that Pig could stay aloft. Before school started, Harry and I went on holiday with the Weasleys. Ron and I talked a lot and took walks on the beach, holding hands. He even let me beat him at chess, although I yelled when I realized what he'd done. Feeling this way is scary and strange, but wonderful. We still argue, but making up is more fun than it used to be. During class, he likes to whisper things to make me blush. If I stay too late at the library, he comes after me and insists I go to bed. I like that.

Pavarti asked why Ron and not Harry. I thought a moment then told her I don't care for the way Harry ties his shoes. She looked scandalized and rushed off, probably to tell Lavender how horrid I am. I know it isn't nice to bait people, but it was a rude question, and to be honest, I don't have an answer. I love both Harry and Ron, just differently. They share many of the same qualities, but it's Ron who makes my insides quivery, and over things that seem insignificant, like the way he bites his lip when he's considering a chess move or the way he smells when he

hugs me. I adore him, even when he's being a prat. I also adore Harry, but it's not the same and I have no idea why. For all I know, maybe what I told Pavarti was right. Maybe it is the way Ron ties his shoes.

Another thing that's changed is that people don't treat Harry the same. Before this year, Harry reminded me of a cinema celebrity. Other students didn't necessarily want his friendship, but they liked the idea he knew their name, that at Christmas they could tell their families "Sure, I know Potter - yeah, scar's there, right on his forehead. Nice bloke. You should see'm play Quidditch." Cedric's murder changed that. Now, association with Harry is feared. Some Gryffindors have remained loyal, but most students turn their heads away when Harry walks by. I overheard a Hufflepuff tell a group of first years to avoid Harry because knowing him can get you killed. I wanted to yell at her, but I didn't, because being with Harry is why Cedric is dead. Harry and I don't discuss this, or much of anything else that happened last year, but I know it bothers him. It bothers me.

While Harry's admirers have dwindled, our immediate circle of friends has grown. After just the three of us for the last four years, it's a bit strange, but not unwelcome. Neville was easy to get used to. I'm ashamed to think I used to feel sorry for him; he's improved so much since our first year. There's Fred and George, who're still big teases. This is good for Harry, but I mostly get teased about Ron. Lastly, there's Ginny; I've spent so much time in the company of boys that she's taken a bit of getting used to. Last week she complimented the color of my jumper, and I just stared at her; I'm so used to Ron and Harry not noticing that sort of thing that I didn't know what to say. She's especially good for Harry. When he looks particularly low, she's suddenly interested in how he found the Snitch during the last Quidditch match, or she must hear exactly which model of broom he thinks is fastest. Before long, Harry is drawing diagrams in the air with his wand while Ginny looks on, fascinated. I don't think Harry remembers Ron once telling us that Ginny doesn't really care about Quidditch. I'm not going to remind him.

The six of us watch Harry. We try to be discrete, but he's not stupid. He knows it's not coincidence when Ginny and I turn up at the Quidditch pitch on nights Ron stays late to practice, or when Fred goes to the library to study at the same time as he. Harry doesn't complain, though. I'd like to think he tolerates us because we somehow make him feel safer, but Ron says it's because he knows we need to feel like we're doing something. So Harry pretends we don't watch him, we pretend he isn't in danger and we all pretend the world isn't falling apart. It's harder than it sounds.

It's winter, and Ron and Harry are still running. They've traded shorts and T-shirts for heavier clothing. Although it's snowing lightly, they're undeterred. I sit in my usual spot by the window, ignoring my book, and track their progress around the lake. They pass the greenhouses, where Professor Sprout prepares for the day's classes, and the clover field at the far end of the lake, where temporary stands were erected for the second task of the Triwizard Tournament. They run by the trail that leads into the Forbidden Forest. I lose sight of them when they run behind the hedge that marks the trail to Hagrid's cabin. When they re-emerge, they stop by an oak tree close to the castle. They're breathing hard. Leaning against the tree, they exhale great clouds of steam into the cold air. Ron is wearing his beloved Chudley Cannon hat, now sweat-stained and frayed from use. Harry has on a warmer knit cap. When he pulls it off, black hair sticks out in all directions. He looks tired, and for the moment, content. They know I'm watching, so they look up at the window and wave. I doubt they can see me, but I smile and wave back.

It's been a hard year. Hagrid hasn't been heard from since this summer, when he left with Madame Maxime to find the last of the giants and ask for their help. Professor Snape narrowly escaped with his life when it was discovered he was spying for Professor Dumbledore. The Ministry is in shambles. Voldemort hasn't tried for Harry, yet, but his mark is seen in the sky almost nightly. The Daily Prophet obituary column has moved to the front page.

I go back to my book and re-read the last several pages. When I look up again, I see they've turned and started back around the lake, taking this lap at a slower pace. It's snowing harder now, and they must feel good; Ron pretends to trip and stumbles into Harry; Harry retaliates by reaching up to flip off Ron's hat, which Ron catches without missing a stride.

I close the book and prop my elbows on the windowsill.

I really do enjoy watching them run.