

# MR & MRS WEASLEY

*and the Babysitting Incident*



A.I. ROWLING

LLM-GENERATED

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## — CHAPTER ONE —

# *Summer Things*

The Prophet owl came on Sunday morning with the paper and something else besides, tucked into the string, folded small, with *Personal* written across it in the night desk's handwriting.

Molly had the kettle in one hand and a frying pan in the other and a gnome stuck halfway through the cat flap, so she read it with the kettle.

*For the night desk — please forward to Mrs M. Weasley, the Burrow. Personal.*

*MUM — They've all come in their summer things. It's winter here. Jumpers please for Harry, James, Al, Lily, Ron. Sizes as last Christmas. Hermione's fine, obviously. Urgent.*

*Love, G.*

Molly read it twice. Then she put the kettle down on the frying pan, which was on the stove, which was on, and went to get her needles.

"Arthur!"

Arthur was in the garden, where he had been since dawn, doing something to a fence post with the air of a man who would rather be doing something else to something else. He came in with mud on his knees.

"They've gone in their summer things," said Molly. She had the knitting bag out of the dresser and was already going through it. "All of them. To the World Cup. In *Argentina*. In *July*."

"Well, it's July," said Arthur reasonably. "It's hot."

"It's *winter*, Arthur. It says so. Ginny says so. It's the other end of the world."

Arthur stood very still in the kitchen doorway. His whole face lit up.

"*Winter?* In *July?* Well, of course, of course it would be, it's the — oh, *Molly*. Do you know, the Muggles have a word for it. It's to do with the angle of the—" He held up a mud-covered hand, flat, and tilted it. "The world goes round the sun at a sort of *slant*, you see, and so when it's our turn to—"

"I don't need to know how, Arthur. I need wool."

She'd found it. Red, a great deal of red, the good red, left over from Christmas. She dumped it on the kitchen table, and took out her wand, and the needles came up off the table by themselves and started, clicking, with that small busy sound she'd been hearing in this kitchen for forty years.

Harry. James. Al. Lily. Ron. She counted on her fingers.

Hermione was fine, obviously. Of course she was. Hermione had probably packed for three climates and a flood.

Molly looked at the list again, and frowned, and wrote a sixth name at the bottom in pencil. *Teddy*. Nobody had asked. Nobody ever did ask for Teddy. That was exactly the point.

The gnome in the cat flap said something rude. Molly Stunned it without looking round and started casting on.

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The needles knitted all Sunday and all Sunday night.

They knitted while Molly made the lunch and while she ate it and while she did the washing up, which did itself. They knitted while she went round the garden with a sack, de-gnoming by hand because the girls were coming on Tuesday and she wasn't having the place overrun. They knitted when she went to bed, clicking away in the dark kitchen, and they were still knitting when she came down at six on Monday. The jumpers were piled up on the end of the table, soft and red and getting taller.

Ron's was maroon. Ron's was always maroon. Molly wasn't entirely sure why any more. It had started as a mistake, forty-odd Christmases ago. Nobody had ever asked her to stop.

She did an H for Harry, and a T for Teddy, and nothing on the children's. The children were cheering for Bulgaria, apparently. Ginny's reports had been full of Viktor Krum for weeks, and Harry had always had a soft spot for him. So the jumpers were Bulgarian red, and that was that.

On Monday afternoon, with one jumper still to go, the red ran out.

Molly turned the knitting bag upside down on the table. Nothing. Not a strand. She'd used the last of it on Lily's, which was tiny, and there was nothing left for Albus but the grey she kept at the bottom of the basket for darning Arthur's socks.

She looked at the grey for a long time.

Then she set the needles going on it anyway, and went to find Arthur.

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Arthur's shed was at the bottom of the garden, past the hen-house, round the side of the pond. It had once been a shed. It was now, as far as Molly could tell from the outside, mainly plugs.

She didn't go in. She hadn't gone in for years. Whatever he did in there was his business, and as long as it didn't catch fire, fly, or end up in the *Daily Prophet*, she'd decided a long time ago that it could stay his business. She'd said no to a telly in the house once, back when the children were small and he'd come home with one under his arm and a look on his face, and he'd put it down and never asked again. As far as Molly was concerned, that had settled it.

She knocked on the door.

"Yes?" Something clattered inside. "Yes, dear, what is it?"

"I need a map."

There was a short, surprised silence.

"A map of what?"

"Bulgaria."

Arthur came out, pulling the door shut quickly behind him in a way Molly didn't notice at the time, with a Muggle atlas under his arm. It was enormous, and blue, and older than Bill. He opened it for her on the garden bench, and turned the pages, and there it was, a small shape on the edge of a sea, lumpy at the top.

Molly copied it. She sat on the bench with a pencil and the back of Ginny's note and copied it carefully, the coastline, the border, the bumpy bit at the top, and then she went back up to the kitchen and got out the last scraps of red, the bits too short for anything, and knitted it by hand.

It took her an hour and a half. It was small, and a bit lopsided. When she'd sewn it onto the front of the grey jumper, anyone could have seen it was Bulgaria.

She held it up. She was pleased with it.

"Lovely," said Arthur, from the doorway, sincerely.

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On Monday evening she sat in the kitchen with a cup of tea and the last of the jumpers folded in front of her, and looked at the clock.

She didn't mean to. She never meant to. It was just there, on the wall where it had always been, and her eyes went to it the way they went to the windows when it rained.

It had nine hands. Arthur's and hers, both at *Home*. Bill's, Ron's, George's, Charlie's, all together at *Travelling*, which was the World Cup. Ginny's at *Work*, where it had been since April. Percy's at *Work* too, because Percy's was always at *Work*.

Fred's hand pointed where it had pointed for sixteen years. Molly didn't look at it for long. She never did.

It was a good clock. It had been made before any of the grandchildren were born, though, and there wasn't room on it for any more hands, and so on a quiet evening, with a cup of tea, Molly could look at it for as long as she liked and it would tell her nothing at all about any of them. Victoire and Dominique and Louis. Milly and Lucy. Fred and Roxanne. Rose and Hugo. James and Albus and Lily. Teddy, who had never been on anybody's hand and belonged to all of them. Or Harry, come to that, who had never had a hand of his own. Molly turned her cup round on the table. Whether they were warm. Whether they were all right.

Nothing on the clock moved. Everybody was where they were supposed to be.

Molly finished her tea, and put the cup in the sink, and went up to bed.

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The Prophet came on Tuesday morning at seven.

She read it in her dressing gown at the kitchen table, waiting for the porridge, and got as far as page five, and stopped.

It was Rita Skeeter. Of course it was. There was a photograph of the stand at the World Cup, the Potters' box, all of them squinting into the sun, and underneath it a great deal of Rita. Heroes in the high seats. Tents flattened. Harry with *threads of silver*, and a cut on his face, a nasty one, *provenance unknown*, and what had *really* happened in that maze. Ginny, who had abandoned her husband and children for three months, and whose qualifications, apparently, the jury had considered and rejected.

Teddy. *Snogging*. Victoire. Breathing through their ears.

Molly read all of it. She read the bit about Ron's hair, and the bit about Hermione's, and she read what Rita had said about Bill, twice, with her mouth getting smaller.

Then she put the paper face down on the dresser, very flat, with her hand spread on top of it, as if it might try to get up.

A cut. On Harry's face. *Provenance unknown*. What did that mean? What did it mean, *unknown*? Had he been hurt? He'd been *hurt*, and Ginny hadn't said, and

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The porridge boiled over.

Molly dealt with the porridge. By the time she'd dealt with it, and cleaned the stove, and dealt with the gnome that had come back in through the cat flap to see what the smell was, it was eight o'clock, and the jumpers still needed wrapping, and Percy would be here at eleven, and there wasn't time to write to anyone about anything.

It was Rita, anyway. Molly had believed Rita once, years ago, about Hermione, and sent the poor girl a tiny Easter egg, and never quite forgiven herself for it, or Rita. Rita wouldn't know *provenance* if it bit her.

She wrapped the jumpers in brown paper and string. On the top, in big round capitals, she wrote MUM, so they'd know, and underneath, smaller, WEARTHEM.

She thought about putting a note in about the cut. She thought about it for quite a long time.

Then she didn't.

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Percy and Audrey came at five to eleven, by Floo, with two little girls, two small cases, a box of the girls' things from home, and a piece of parchment.

"This," said Percy, before he'd even brushed the soot off, "is the routine."

He pinned it to the dresser himself, with a drawing pin he'd brought for the purpose, directly on top of the face-down Prophet. Molly read it over his shoulder.

*1. Bedtime: 8 o'clock (Molly), 8 o'clock (Lucy). No exceptions.*

*2. Vegetables at every main meal.*

*3. No unsupervised flying.*

*4. No sweets before lunch.*

*5. No television.\**

*\* Not applicable at the Burrow. Included for completeness.*

"There isn't a television," said Molly.

"I know, Mother. It's for completeness."

Audrey, behind him, caught Molly's eye for a moment, and something went across her face that might have been a laugh, and then she looked at the floor and it was gone. Molly liked Audrey. She had never been sure how much Audrey said at home, but she'd always suspected she laughed at a good deal of it quietly.

The girls were already off. Lucy, who was six, had gone straight out through the back door without taking her coat off to look at the hens. Milly, who was eight, had stopped in front of the routine and was reading it, moving her lips.

"Gran," she said. "It says eight o'clock."

"I can see that, dear."

"It says *no exceptions*."

"I can see that too."

Milly nodded, satisfied.

"Molly," said Percy, "your coat."

Two people turned round.

"Milly," said Audrey, very patiently, as if she'd said it a thousand times, and Milly took her coat off and hung it up on the correct peg.

Percy checked the time for the Portkey, at the Ministry, at half past eleven. He checked it again. He looked at his watch, and then at the clock on the wall, and then back at his watch, and then at the parcel on the kitchen table.

"Is that it? For Ginny?"

"Jumpers. For all of them. Harry, and the children, and Ron, and Teddy." Molly picked it up and held it out, and then held on to it a moment longer than she needed to. "Make sure they get them. Today. It's cold there."

"I'm aware it's cold there, Mother." Percy took the parcel in both arms. "I've read the briefing. I shall hand it to Ginny personally."

There was a loud squawk from outside, and then another, much further up. Molly went to the back door.

One of the hens was on the roof.

Not on the hen-house roof. On the roof of the Burrow, three storeys up, on the crooked bit next to the chimney, standing on one leg with its feathers all on end and an expression of total outrage. Lucy was standing in the yard directly underneath it with her hands over her mouth.

"I only *wanted* to hold her," said Lucy. "She wouldn't *let* me."

Molly brought the hen down with a flick of her wand, put it back in the run, put Lucy's coat back on, buttoned it, and turned round, all in one movement, without breaking stride.

"Does she do that a lot?" she said to Audrey.

"Only when she really wants something," said Audrey.

"Mm," said Molly.

In the kitchen, Milly was explaining to her grandfather that he was sitting in the wrong chair.

"That's Gran's chair. You're the other side."

"Is it?" said Arthur, who had been sitting in that chair for forty-four years. "Is it really?"

"It's the one nearest the stove. Gran always sits nearest the stove, because of the cooking."

Arthur got up and moved to the other side. He was, Molly noticed, in a very good mood. He had been in a very good mood since Friday, when he'd come home and announced he'd taken the whole week off to help with the girls. He'd never in his life taken a whole week off for anything. She'd put it down to the girls.

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Percy and Audrey went at a quarter past eleven, through the fireplace, Percy holding the parcel against his chest like something classified.

The kitchen was suddenly quiet. The needles, with nothing left to knit, had started on a scarf of their own accord, out of the grey. The clock ticked. Somewhere upstairs the ghoul was banging the pipes. Milly was sitting at the table very upright, with her hands folded, as if waiting to be told what the next thing was. Lucy was on the floor under the table, doing something to the cat.

Molly didn't trust it.

She counted the girls: two, both in sight. She counted the hens through the window: eleven. There had been ten yesterday. That was a problem for later.

She put the kettle on.

Arthur came and stood by the stove, which was on her side, with his hands in his pockets, looking out of the window at the long green afternoon. The sun was high and hot and it wasn't going to go down, Molly knew, until nearly half past nine.

"Lovely long evenings, this time of year," he said.

"Mm."

"Light till all hours." He was very casual about it. He turned to Milly. "What time do you usually go to bed, in the summer, dear? When it's light like this?"

"Eight o'clock," said Milly. "It says. No exceptions."

"Of course," said Arthur. "Of course it does."

He went on looking out of the window, at the long light over the garden, towards the bottom of it, where the shed was. He was humming.

## — CHAPTER TWO —

# *The Other World Cup*

At eight o'clock, according to the routine, the girls went to bed.

At eight o'clock, according to the sky, it was the middle of the afternoon.

The sun was still up over the orchard, big and gold and in no hurry. The birds were all still going. Somewhere down the lane a Muggle was mowing a lawn. Molly drew the bedroom curtains, which made the room go a sort of warm orange instead of a sort of bright yellow, and tucked Lucy in, and tucked Milly in, and said goodnight, and went downstairs.

"It's *light*," said Lucy, from upstairs, at a volume that went through two floors.

"It's bedtime, dear."

"It's not *night*. It's *light*. You can't go to bed when it's light, it's not *allowed*."

"It says eight o'clock," said Milly, from the next bed along. "It says no exceptions."

"I don't *care* what it *says*—"

Molly went back up. She did the curtains again, and a charm on the curtains so they'd stay shut, and a softer one on the room so the birds sounded further off. She sat on the end of Lucy's bed for a while, and Lucy lay with her eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling as if she might be able to see through it to the sun.

At twenty to nine Molly gave up for the time being and went to see to the hens.

Arthur was in the kitchen. He'd been in and out all evening, in and out of the garden, a great deal of in and out, and he was in his dressing gown now, which was unusual for him before ten.

"I'll settle them," he said, "if they're still awake. You go and do the hens."

"You'll *settle* them?"

"I'll settle them," he said. "Go on."

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The hens didn't want to go in. The hens never wanted to go in on a light evening, and it was no use explaining the fox to a hen. Molly chased the last three round the run with her wand out and her apron flapping while the sky went slowly from gold to peach, and when she finally counted them in there were eleven again, and she still didn't know where the eleventh had come from.

It was one of the plain brown ones. It looked at her with total innocence.

"Lucy," said Molly to the hen, darkly, and shut the door on it.

She stood in the garden for a moment afterwards, getting her breath. It was the time of day she liked best, this time of year, when everything went quiet and gold and you could hear the whole valley at once. She could hear the lawnmower down the lane. She could hear the stream. She could hear, faintly, from the kitchen, a man's voice she didn't know, talking very fast and very excitedly, and then a sort of roar, like a crowd.

She could hear Lucy.

She went back up the garden a great deal faster than she'd come down it.

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The television was on the kitchen table.

It was a big square grey one, the old kind, with a curved glass front and a wooden bit round the sides, and it was sitting on her table between the fruit bowl and the teapot as if it had every right to be there. There was a wire coming out of the back of it. The wire didn't go into anything. It just went a little way across the table and stopped in a tangle, and the tangle was glowing faintly, and fizzing, and smelled of Arthur's wand.

On the front of it, in bright green and yellow, a great many men were running about on a great deal of grass.

Arthur was sitting on the bench in front of it, in his dressing gown. Lucy was on one side of him in her nightie with her knees up. Milly was on the other side, also in her nightie, sitting very straight, with her hands folded, and an expression of such suffering on her face that it could have been painted.

Molly stood in the doorway.

Arthur looked round, and saw her, and his face did the thing it had done the night she'd asked him, very quietly, whether that Ford Anglia in the shed could fly.

"Molly! Molly, you're just in time. It's only just started. It's *Brazil*, you see, Brazil against Germany, and it's the *semi-final*, and it's the Muggle World Cup, the other one, and I thought, well, the girls should see it, because it's — well, it's historic, Molly. It's *history*. For their education. And it's still *light*, you see, so it's not really — it's not really *bedtime*, as such, in the—"

"Arthur."

"—in the *spirit* of the—"

"*Arthur*."

"It doesn't even need eckeltricity," said Arthur desperately. "Look! I've made it go without. I've been working on it for *months*."

"Months," said Molly.

"I only borrowed it from the shed."

"From the *shed*."

"It says eight o'clock," said Milly, in a very small, very firm voice. "It says no exceptions. It says no television. There's a *footnote*."

"Thank you, Milly," said Molly, not looking at her. She was looking at Arthur. "Arthur Weasley. I said no television. I said it when Bill was in nappies. I said it in *this kitchen*. And you have had one in the *shed* for—"

"Can they see us?" said Lucy.

She'd climbed down off the bench and gone right up to the set, so close her nose was nearly on the glass, and she was staring at the little running men as if they were fish in a tank.

"No, dear," said Arthur, distracted, glancing between her and Molly. "No, it only goes one way. We can see them. They can't see us."

"*Why?*"

"Well, it's just — it's how they're made. They're only for looking *in*."

Lucy thought about that. She put both hands flat on the glass.

"I want them to see *me*," she said.

And on the screen a man kicked the ball, and it went in, and a noise came out of the set like the whole world shouting at once, and Lucy screamed "*LOOK AT ME!*" at the top of her voice with her hands on the glass, and the picture jumped.

It only jumped a bit. Like a hiccup. And in the bottom corner of the set, where Molly hadn't noticed anything before, a tiny red light came on, and stayed on.

Nobody paid it any attention. Germany had scored.

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"*There*," said Arthur, as if he'd arranged it personally. "*There*, you see, Molly, *eleven minutes*, a goal in eleven minutes, and it's *Germany*, which nobody expected, and the man said—"

"I don't care *what* the man said."

"—the man said it was the—"

"Arthur, these girls should be in *bed*."

"Of course," said Arthur. "Of course they should. Absolutely. After half-time."

Molly opened her mouth to say what she thought about half-time, and shut it again, because on the screen the men in yellow were all standing about with their hands on their heads, and the German ones were running about hugging each other, and a small man in the crowd was crying into a flag, and something about the small man made her stop and look.

She didn't sit down. She stood behind the bench with her arms folded, so that everyone would know she wasn't sitting down.

Twelve minutes later, Germany scored again.

"*Oh*," said Arthur.

A minute after that, they scored again.

"*Oh my word*," said Arthur, half out of his seat.

Molly found she'd unfolded her arms. The man on the television was making a noise that wasn't quite words. The men in yellow were standing in a little group in the middle of the grass, looking at each other, like people who've come home and found the house gone. The crowd had gone completely quiet. Molly had watched enough Quidditch with seven children and a daughter who played it professionally to know what she was looking at. It was a team falling to pieces in front of sixty thousand people.

She sat down on the end of the bench.

"Just to see," she said. "Just for a minute."

Two minutes later, Germany scored again.

"*FOUR*," shrieked Lucy, who couldn't count very well yet but knew what was happening. She was back up on the table now, on her knees, with her hands on the set, waving at the screen with both arms. "FOUR! FOUR! LOOK AT ME!"

Milly had given up suffering and was watching with her mouth slightly open, in spite of herself. The needles were clicking away at the scarf on the other end of the table. The clock ticked. Outside, the sky had gone the colour of the inside of a shell, and the sun was going, and the light was finally, slowly, starting to go with it.

"What does the *red* one do?" said Arthur.

He was holding the little black box that went with the set, the one with all the buttons on it, and he was looking at the red light in the corner, and then at the box, and then at the light again, with a small frown.

"That light shouldn't be on," he said. "I don't think. I don't remember it being on before."

He pressed the red button.

The football didn't go away. It went thin, the way the garden goes thin in the window glass when somebody lights a lamp indoors.

And over it, faint and flickering, there was a kitchen.

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It was their kitchen.

Molly knew it at once and didn't believe it at all, both at the same time. It was their kitchen, seen from the table, from about where the television was, laid over the football like a reflection, with little men in yellow running straight through the fruit bowl. There was the clock on the wall behind, with its nine hands. There were the knitting needles on the end of the table, clicking away at the grey scarf all by themselves. There was a small girl in a nightie on her knees at the front, very close, with her hands up, waving. There was another small girl with her mouth open. And there was an old man in a dressing gown, holding a little black box, turning his head slowly towards the front of the picture, with an expression of total horror on his face.

The old man was Arthur.

The small girl waving was Lucy. On the screen, Lucy was waving at them. In the kitchen, Lucy was waving at the screen. She'd just seen herself.

"That's *ME*," Lucy shrieked, with total joy. "*I'm ON IT!*"

"That's *us*," said Milly, in a whisper, and went white.

For about four seconds Arthur didn't move at all. He just sat there, with the little box in his hand, looking at himself looking at himself.

Then his face changed. The horror went out of it, and something else came into it, something Molly had seen a handful of times in forty-four years, usually in the war. He sat up, and put the little box down, and his voice when it came was very quick and very quiet.

"Molly. It's sending. It's not receiving, it's *sending*. It's been sending since the red light came on."

"Sending *where*?"

"I don't know. Everywhere it can reach." He was already pulling his wand out of his dressing-gown pocket. "Every set that's tuned to the — oh, *Merlin*, every set in range that's got the football on, it'll have gone out on top of the—"

Molly didn't wait to hear the rest.

She came round the bench and scooped Lucy off the table in one arm, nightie and all, kicking, and with her other hand she pulled her wand out of her apron pocket and pointed it at the television.

"Molly, don't hex it, you'll—"

For one second, on the screen, she saw it: a great big furious arm, in a flowery apron sleeve, coming straight at her out of the picture, holding a wand.

Then she hexed it.

There was a pop, and a smell of hot dust, and the screen went black. The red light went out. The tangle of wire on the table gave one last fizz and went still.

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It was very quiet after that.

The needles went on clicking. The clock went on ticking. Lucy, under Molly's arm, had stopped kicking and started to cry, not because she was hurt but because it had been the best thing that had ever happened to her and it had stopped. Milly was sitting on the bench, with her hands folded so tight her knuckles had gone pale.

Arthur was staring at the black screen. His lips were moving slightly. He was, Molly knew, doing sums.

"How far?" she said.

He didn't answer straight away.

"Not far," he said at last. "I shouldn't think. It's only a set. It's not a — it's not a *station*. Just the valley, I should think. The village." He rubbed his face. "Any set in the village that had the football on. For, what. Fifteen minutes. Twenty."

"*Twenty*—"

"Since the first goal."

"Every set in the village."

"I *think*," said Arthur. "I don't know. I'd have to — I don't *know*, Molly."

Outside, the sun had gone. The garden was grey and blue, and the first lights were coming on down in the village, and the birds had finally, finally stopped.

Molly carried Lucy upstairs. Milly followed, without being told, holding at the banister.

She put them to bed in the half-dark. Lucy was asleep inside two minutes, cried out, one hand still up by her face as if she was waving in her sleep. Milly lay very straight, on her back, with the covers pulled up to her chin, staring at the ceiling.

Molly was at the door when she spoke.

"Gran."

"Yes, dear."

"This will have to be reported."

She said it exactly the way Percy said things. The same words, in the same order, with the same small, certain drop at the end. She was right, too. Molly knew she was right. She'd sat in enough kitchens during the war with enough Ministry people to know exactly what the rules said about Muggles seeing a wizarding kitchen on their televisions.

She didn't answer. She just said "Goodnight, dear," and shut the door.

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Arthur was still at the kitchen table when she came down, sitting in front of the dead set, in his dressing gown, in the dark. He hadn't lit a lamp.

Molly lit one.

She looked at him. He looked at her. There wasn't anything to say, and they'd been married long enough not to need to say it, so neither of them did.

After a while he put his hand out on the table, palm up. After a longer while, she put hers in it.

"I'll need to go into the village in the morning," he said.

"*We* will," said Molly.

## — CHAPTER THREE —

# *Nothing to Report*

Arthur took the television apart on the kitchen table at eleven o'clock at night, under the lamp, with his sleeves rolled up and his dressing gown tied tight and a row of tiny screwdrivers laid out in front of him in order of size.

Molly sat at the other end of the table and watched him. She had made tea. Neither of them had drunk it.

He was good at this. She always forgot how good he was at it until she saw him do it. His hands, which dropped cups and lost keys and once, memorably, posted a letter in the dustbin, went very steady and very sure. He took the back off the set. He looked inside for a long time, with his wand lit and held up close, muttering. He touched things, very lightly, with the tip of it, and listened to them.

"It's not mine," he said at last.

"What isn't?"

"The charm. The one that did it." He pointed his wand into the back of the set, at something Molly couldn't see. "Mine's all there, just as I left it. It's all *going in*. But there's something else on top of it, something that wasn't there this afternoon. And it's all going *out*." He sat back. "It's Lucy's. She's turned it round. Like a sock."

"She's *six*."

"She wanted very badly to be on the telly," said Arthur. "And she's a Weasley." He said it with a sort of pride that he clearly felt was not appropriate and couldn't help. "You remember what Fred did to Ron's teddy bear."

Molly remembered. She didn't say so.

He started undoing it. It took a long time. Molly watched him pick Lucy's magic out of the set, a bit at a time, the way you'd pick burrs out of a dog's coat, carefully, not to hurt it.

"Arthur," she said. "What happens now?"

He didn't look up.

"It depends," he said, "on whether it's happened."

"It *has* happened."

"It's happened. But has it *happened*?" He put the screwdriver down and looked at her. "Molly, I did twenty years in Misuse of Muggle Artefacts. Do you know how many things actually happened, in twenty years, that nobody ever found out about? Hundreds. Thousands. A thing only *happens*, as far as the Ministry's concerned, if somebody makes it happen. If there's a complaint. A witness, a wizard one, who comes forward. A Muggle report that goes up through their people to the Liaison Office. Or somebody at Improper Use of Magic picks something up on the instruments and decides to bother following it up."

"Will they? The instruments?"

"In a wizarding house? They can't tell who's done what in a wizarding house. Never could. They'd see magic at the Burrow, and there's always magic at the Burrow." He picked the screwdriver up again. "What they can't ignore is Muggles who've seen something. If the Muggles complain."

"Then we'll *stop* them complaining," said Molly. "We'll go down there tonight. You know the charm. A little Memory Charm, on anyone who—"

"No."

He said it so quietly and so flatly that she stopped.

"No," he said again. "I won't. Not on people whose only crime is watching the football in their own front rooms. I won't go into their heads, Molly." He was looking at the set, not at her. "And anyway, a Memory Charm's a thing. It leaves a mark. Somebody can find it, afterwards, if they go looking. You can find a thing that was *done*. You can't find a thing that never happened."

Molly looked at him for a long time.

Then she picked up her cold tea, and drank it, and made them both some more.

At a quarter to two he put the back on the set, and wrapped it in an old blanket, and carried it down the garden to the shed in the dark, and came back without it.

---

The Prophet owl came at seven.

Molly was at the stove. The owl came in through the kitchen window like it did every morning, and landed on the back of a chair like it did every morning, and she dropped a plate.

It was only the Prophet. She paid it, with her hand shaking, and it went. She turned every page of the paper, all the way through, twice. There was a great deal about the World Cup, and Ginny's name at the top of the match report, and a small nasty paragraph from Rita about Ron's hat, and not one single word about Devon.

The second owl came at half past seven, a Prophet owl again, with a folded note in its string with *Personal* on the outside in the night desk's handwriting.

Molly didn't drop a plate that time. She dropped the porridge spoon.

*For the night desk — please forward to Mrs M. Weasley, the Burrow. Personal.*

*MUM — Jumpers arrived. Everyone warm. Ron asks why is his always maroon.*

G.

Molly read it, and sat down on a chair rather quickly, and laughed, and couldn't stop for a while, and Milly came down the stairs in the middle of it and stood in the kitchen doorway watching her with her head on one side, like a small, serious owl.

"Are you all right, Gran?"

"Perfectly all right, dear. Your Uncle Ron's jumper was maroon."

Milly considered this.

"Why is that funny?"

"It isn't," said Molly, wiping her eyes. "It isn't a bit. Eat your porridge."

---

It went on like that all morning.

At nine, a shadow went across the kitchen window, bird-shaped, and Molly spun round from the sink with her wand halfway out. It was the brown hen. The eleventh one. It was on the roof again. Nobody could say how.

At ten, an owl came with a letter for Arthur, and Molly held it in both hands for a full minute before she could bring herself to look at the envelope. It was from a man in Ottery St Mary who had a Muggle wireless for sale.

At a quarter past ten, a small tawny owl she didn't recognise landed on the gatepost, and she went out into the yard in her apron to face it. It looked at her, and then at the hens, and flew off. It hadn't been carrying anything. It had just been an owl.

Every time, Milly watched her. She had a small notebook with a pencil tied to it on a string, the kind Percy had had at her age, and every time Molly jumped, Milly wrote something in it.

"What are you writing, dear?"

"Things," said Milly.

Lucy had woken up entirely cheerful and not the least bit sorry, and asked, at breakfast, when they were going to be on the telly again. She asked again at nine. She asked again at half past ten, from the top of the garden wall, where she wasn't supposed to be.

"Never," said Molly.

"But why?"

"Because Granddad's broken it."

"I didn't break it," said Arthur, from behind the Prophet.

"Because," said Molly, "it's *broken*."

---

At half past twelve they walked down to the village.

All four of them. Molly had put her foot down about that. Arthur was not going to go into a Muggle public house on his own and ask Muggles what they'd seen on their televisions, not in a thousand years, not while she was alive to stop him. And she wasn't leaving the girls in the house on their own with a shed full of plugs and a hen that could fly.

Arthur had dressed for the occasion. He had on a Muggle anorak, which was sensible, and zipped up, which was sensible, and a pair of trousers and some shoes, which were sensible. He also had, pushed up on his forehead, a pair of bright blue swimming goggles, because he'd once read in a Muggle magazine that people wore them when it rained.

It wasn't raining.

Molly looked at the goggles. She looked at Arthur. She decided she didn't have the strength.

"Now," she said to the girls, at the gate. "When we get to the village. Not one word. Not one *single* word. About the television, or the kitchen, or anything. Do you understand?"

"Not one word," said Lucy solemnly.

"Milly?"

Milly looked at her for a long, grave moment. Then she nodded, once.

---

The Catchpole Arms was dark and low and smelled of beer and old carpet and chips. There was a television in the corner, high up on a bracket, with the news on, and on the news, over and over, men in yellow were standing on grass with their hands on their heads.

There were about a dozen people in. None of them looked round when the door went. They were all talking about the football.

"*Seven*," a big man at the bar was saying. "Seven—one. *Seven*. I've been watching football fifty years, and I have *never*—"

"Five in eighteen minutes," said somebody else.

"Five by half-time," said a third. "*Five*."

"*Brazil*," said the big man, as if he was at a funeral.

Arthur went to the bar. He ordered a half of something by pointing at the pump nearest him, and paid for it by holding out a whole handful of Muggle coins flat on his palm for the landlord to pick from, which the landlord did, looking at the goggles. Molly sat the girls down at a table by the window with a bag of crisps each, which Lucy stared at as if she'd never seen one before, and sat down herself with her handbag held on her lap in both hands.

"—no, but did you see the *other* thing?" a woman by the fruit machine was saying. "Last night. When the telly went funny."

Molly stopped breathing.

"What, the kitchen?" The big man hardly looked round. "Yeah, for a bit. Some old boy in a dressing gown." He turned back to the bar. "Anyway. Kroos. *Two* in two minutes. Fifty years I've been watching football—"

"Face on him, though," said the landlord, and laughed. "Like he'd seen a ghost."

Beside the bar, Arthur's ears went slowly, steadily red.

"There was knitting," said the woman by the fruit machine, to nobody in particular. "I swear there was knitting."

"There was a dog in it," said a man called Dave.

"That was a *kid*, Dave."

"It was waving at me."

"Dogs don't wave, you muppet."

"This one did," said Dave.

"And then somebody switched it off," said the big man, over his shoulder. "Just a big arm. Like my nan's."

Molly sat very still, with her hands on her handbag and her face perfectly pleasant, and did not look at her arm.

"Advert," said the landlord. "Got to be. One of them new ones. They do all sorts now."

"It was four pints," said the big man, and everybody laughed.

"*Should* somebody ring somebody?" said a thin man in the corner, who hadn't spoken before. "Like, the telly people?"

There was a pause.

"Ring *who*, you wally?" said the big man. "And tell 'em *what*? 'Hello, I'd like to report that Brazil got beat seven—one on my telly. Oh, and, by the way, what's the deal with the kitchen?'" He shook his head. "They'd have me sectioned."

Everybody laughed again, harder. Even the thin man.

"My brother over in Ottery St Mary, he watched the whole match, clean. Not a flicker, mind," said the landlord, wiping a glass.

Arthur, at the bar, let out a very long breath through his nose.

"Still say 't was a dog," said Dave.

"Sharp as a marble, our Dave," said the landlord fondly.

At the table by the window, Lucy had her mouth open, with a crisp halfway to it. Her eyes were very big. She put the crisp down. She turned round in her chair towards the bar, towards Dave, and took a breath, and opened her mouth wider, and—

Milly put her hand over it.

Just like that. Without looking. Flat, over Lucy's mouth, firmly, while she went on eating her own crisps with the other hand and looking out of the window.

Lucy made a muffled noise. Milly didn't take her hand away. After a moment, Lucy shut her mouth, and Milly let go, and wiped her hand on her skirt, and went on looking out of the window.

Molly looked at her granddaughter. Her granddaughter didn't look back.

---

They walked home the long way, up the lane, in the sun. The hedges were full of dog roses and the verges were full of bees, and Arthur had taken the goggles off and was carrying them.

"Well," he said, after a long time.

"Well," said Molly.

"Nobody's complaining." He counted on his fingers. "Nobody's reported it. Nobody's going to ring anyone. Nobody thinks it was anything but the football and four pints. It didn't get past the village. And the set's in the shed, and it's fixed, and it won't do it again." He looked at the sky. "There'll be a paragraph in the local paper on Thursday. There's always a paragraph. And nobody at the Ministry has read the *Ottery Gazette* since about 1952."

"So what happens now?"

"Nothing," said Arthur. "That's the point. Nothing happens. There's nothing to report."

Behind them, on the lane, Milly had stopped walking.

Molly turned round. Her granddaughter was standing in the middle of the lane with her notebook in her hand and her face set in a way Molly had last seen on Percy, aged about eight, the day he'd found out about the Easter egg Fred and George had eaten out of his pocket.

"There is," said Milly.

"Is what, dear?"

"There *is* something to report," said Milly. "There's *everything* to report."

She didn't say anything else. She put the notebook back in her pocket and walked on past them, up the lane, towards home, very straight.

Molly looked at Arthur. Arthur looked at the hedge.

When they got to the Burrow, there was a bird on the gatepost, big and grey, and Molly's heart went straight up into her mouth, and she had her wand out before she'd thought.

It was a pigeon.

## — CHAPTER FOUR —

### *Quiet Week*

Milly came down after supper on Wednesday with a roll of parchment, a quill, a bottle of ink, and a ruler, and put all four on the kitchen table in a straight line.

"I've been thinking," she said.

Molly put down the tea towel. Arthur, at the other end of the table, put down the *Prophet*, slowly, like a man lowering a shield he suspected he was going to need.

"If I don't tell Dad," said Milly, "and I'm not going to tell Dad, because you asked me not to, and Lucy's not going to tell Dad, because I won't let her—"

"Thank you, dear."

"—then there still has to be a report." She said it patiently, the way you'd explain something to a younger child. "Because something happened. And when something happens, there's a report. That's what the rules are *for*. Otherwise it's like it didn't happen, and it *did*." She put her hand flat on the parchment. "So I'm going to write it. A proper one. And then nobody has to read it."

Molly looked at Arthur. Arthur looked at the parchment.

"Nobody at all?" he said.

"You can lock it up," said Milly. "As long as it's written down."

There was a short silence.

"I think," said Molly, "that's very fair."

Milly nodded, as if that was the correct answer, and uncapped her ink.

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It took her an hour and forty minutes. She did it at the kitchen table in her best handwriting, with the ruler for the lines, stopping every so often to look something up in her notebook. Lucy sat opposite and watched her with her chin on her arms. Molly did the washing up by hand for once, so as to have somewhere to put her face.

When it was done, Milly blotted it and turned it round.

### *INCIDENT REPORT*

*Written by: Molly Weasley (the younger), aged 8*

*Place: The Burrow (the kitchen)*

*Date: Tuesday, 8 July*

### *PERSONS PRESENT*

- 1. Granddad (Arthur Weasley). In his dressing gown.*
- 2. Gran (Molly Weasley). Came in later from the hens.*
- 3. Lucy Weasley, aged 6.*
- 4. Me.*

### *SEQUENCE OF EVENTS*

- 1. At 8 o'clock we went to bed, as it says in the Routine (Rule 1).*
- 2. It was still light.*
- 3. Granddad came up and said did we want to see something historic.*
- 4. I said it was past bedtime.*
- 5. Granddad said it was education.*
- 6. There was a television (Rule 5)(see footnote). It came from the shed. It works on magic.*
- 7. Brazil lost.*
- 8. Gran said she was not sitting down. Then she sat down. She said just for a minute. It was more than a minute.*
- 9. Lucy wanted to be on the television and then she was on it.*
- 10. The whole village saw our kitchen and Granddad's dressing gown.*
- 11. Gran hexed it.*

### *ACTION TAKEN*

*Granddad fixed it. We went to the pub. We had crisps (Rule 4 does not apply, it was after lunch). Nobody is going to ring anybody. I put my hand over Lucy's mouth.*

### *FURTHER REMARKS*

*Granddad knew it was against the rules and did it anyway, because he wanted to.*

*Signed: M. Weasley*

*Responsible adult:* \_\_\_\_\_

Molly read it, and handed it to Arthur without saying anything.

Arthur read it. He read it all the way to the bottom, and then he went back and read item 8 again, and glanced at Molly, and then he read *Further Remarks* again, and stopped.

He didn't say anything for a while.

"Is that fair?" said Milly. "Is it accurate? It has to be accurate."

"It's accurate," said Arthur.

He took the quill from her. He signed his name on the line at the bottom, *Arthur Weasley*, in small, careful letters, not the big scrawl he used on everything else. When he gave the quill back, he didn't look at anyone.

"I want to sign," said Lucy.

"You're not a responsible adult."

"I'm a *person present*."

Milly thought about this, and saw it was true, and gave her the quill. Lucy signed underneath, very large, a *L* and a *U* and then a drawing of a face with its hand up, waving.

Molly took the report. She rolled it up, and tied it with a piece of wool from the knitting bag, and opened the top drawer of the dresser, the one that stuck. She put it inside, at the back, behind the good napkins.

"Now," she said to Milly. "Think of a word. A secret one. Don't say it out loud."

Milly thought. Then she stood on tiptoe, and whispered it in Molly's ear.

Molly very nearly laughed. She didn't. She shut the drawer, and put her wand to it, and said the charm, and the word, very quietly, and the drawer gave a small click, like something settling.

"Only you and me," she said. "And only if we have to."

Milly nodded. She looked at the drawer for a long moment, and then she picked up her ruler and her ink and her quill, and went up to bed, at eight o'clock, exactly.

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The *Ottery Gazette* came out on Thursday.

Arthur went down to the village for a copy first thing, and came back with it under his arm, and sat on the bench in the garden in the sun and went through it, page by page, while Molly watched him from the kitchen window with her arms in the sink.

It was on page nine. He showed her, afterwards. It was very small.

#### *TV INTERFERENCE DURING BRAZIL ROUT*

*Several viewers in Ottery St Catchpole experienced brief interference to their television pictures during Tuesday evening's World Cup semi-final between Brazil and Germany. A spokesman for the broadcaster said no faults had been reported in the area and suggested the problem was likely to have been a local reception issue. Germany won the match 7-1.*

That was all of it. Molly had never been so pleased to read anything boring in her life.

Arthur got the kitchen scissors out of the drawer, and cut the paragraph out, very neatly, all the way round, and took it off down the garden, whistling, towards the shed.

Molly watched him go. She knew perfectly well what was in the shed. It was under a tarpaulin in the corner, behind the plugs, and it was going to stay there, and she was going to know it was there, for the rest of her life.

He came back up the garden twenty minutes later without the clipping. He came in through the back door, and saw her standing at the sink, and stopped.

She looked at him across the kitchen. He looked back.

She thought about the drawer in the dresser, and the piece of parchment behind the good napkins, with his name on it.

So did he. She watched him think about it.

Then she turned back round to the sink, and he went and put the kettle on, and that was the end of that.

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The final was on the wireless at six on Friday.

It was past bedtime by the time it finished. It was past bedtime by quite a long way. Molly knew it, and Milly knew it, and Milly sat at the kitchen table in her nightie with her hands round a mug of cocoa and looked at the routine on the dresser, and then at the wireless, and then at her grandmother, and said nothing at all.

The whole of the Burrow's kitchen was full of the World Cup. The roar of the crowd, a hundred thousand people on the other side of the world, came out of the old wireless so loud that the plates on the dresser rattled. The Wizarding Wireless Network had a man in the press box, talking so fast he kept running out of breath.

"Bulgaria," said Arthur, who had read every word of Ginny's report on the semi-final three times and had gone soft on Viktor Krum entirely. "Come on, Bulgaria."

"Brazil," said Lucy, immediately, because Granddad had said Bulgaria.

"Brazil," agreed Milly, after a moment's consideration, for the same reason.

The Veela danced, and the man on the wireless went completely quiet for almost a minute, and Arthur said, "What's happened? Has something happened?" and Molly said, "Nothing's happened, Arthur," in a voice that made him stop asking. Brazil scored first, and the girls screamed. Bulgaria scored, and Arthur cheered. Then Brazil scored three times in a row, and the man said forty points to ten, and Arthur put his head in his hands.

Then the Snitch came out, and both Seekers went for it, and lost it in the sun, and the man said the sun was very low, it was always low there, it was winter, and it was right in their eyes.

Molly thought about the jumpers. Four red jumpers in a stand at the bottom of the world, with the sun in their eyes. One maroon. One grey. She hoped they had them on.

Two hours in, a Brazilian Beater hit Krum on the head, and the wireless made a noise like everyone in the stadium had been hit at once, and Arthur stood up and said "Foul!" and the man on the wireless said no, not a foul, an accident, and Arthur sat down again, muttering.

And then at a quarter to nine, with the kitchen gone gold with the evening and the long light still coming in through the window over the sink, Krum caught the Snitch.

The man on the wireless completely lost his voice. The crowd didn't. Arthur was on his feet, arms in the air, shouting, and the girls were on their feet, booing, as loudly as they could, and grinning while they did it.

One hundred and seventy to sixty.

"He's crying," said the man on the wireless, when he got his voice back. "Viktor Krum is crying. On his broom. I don't mind telling you, so I am."

Arthur sat down, still smiling, and wiped his eyes.

"Silly old thing," said Molly, and gave him a tea towel.

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They all came on Sunday.

Molly had told them one o'clock, and they started arriving at half past twelve, through the fireplace, one after another, in a great sooty tumble of luggage and noise. Harry and Ginny and the children. Ron and Hermione and theirs. Percy and Audrey last, and a little stiffly, from the Ministry, to collect the girls.

They were all wearing the jumpers.

It was twenty-four degrees in the garden. Harry had on his red one with the H, and James had his, and Lily had hers with a Bulgarian flag drawn on the front of it in felt-tip. Ron had his maroon one on, and was already quite pink. Molly had never loved any of them more in her life.

"We wore them *all week*," said Lily, flinging herself at Molly's middle. "Gran, it was *freezing*. It was winter. In *summer*. And the moon was upside down. Luna said it was looking at us from the other side for a change."

"Did she, darling? And was it?"

"Yes," said Lily, with total confidence, and ran off to find the hens.

Molly half heard the rest of it, all through lunch, in pieces, the way you do when fifteen people are talking at once. Viktor Krum's enormous hand. A Japanese firebird the size of a teacup that had set fire to a man's hat. The Veela, which Ron didn't want to talk about. The stadium, which was bigger than anything. The Bulgarian Beater who'd taken a Bludger for his captain.

"And there were these things, the Brazilian ones, the Curupiras," James was saying, with his mouth full, "with their feet on *backwards*, Gran, *completely backwards*, and one of them—"

"James," said his father.

It wasn't loud. James stopped, and looked at him, and then went back to his potatoes. Across the table, Albus had gone very still.

Molly looked at Harry. His face had healed. There wasn't a mark on it. You'd never have known.

"Your face, Harry," she said. "I read in the paper. Rita said—"

"Rita," said Harry. That was all. He smiled at her, the smile he'd had at twelve, when he'd come to the Burrow for the first time and she'd asked him if he was eating properly. "It's fine, Molly. It was nothing."

Molly looked at him for a moment longer than she needed to.

Then she passed him the gravy.

---

Albus came to her when she was doing the pudding, on his own, and stood in the kitchen doorway.

He was in the grey jumper. It had a hole in the front, right in the middle, neat, where the Bulgaria had been. Anyone who'd ever looked at a map could see it was the shape of Bulgaria. The coastline. The bumpy bit at the top.

He looked at her, and waited, with his chin up, to see what she'd say.

Molly looked at the hole for a long time.

"Well," she said at last. "At least you kept the jumper."

Albus considered this. Something in his shoulders came down.

"It's warm," he said.

"It's meant to be."

She gave him the biggest bit of pudding. He didn't say anything about it.

---

Percy collected the girls at five.

He checked the routine on the dresser before he took it down. He folded it and put it in his pocket. He asked Milly if everything had gone according to it, and Milly looked at him with perfect gravity and said, "Nearly everything," which appeared to satisfy him completely.

Lucy had her coat on and her case in her hand and was standing by the fireplace, jiggling. She looked up at her father, and her whole face lit up, and she opened her mouth.

"Dad! Dad, on Tuesday, we went on the—"

Milly looked at her.

It wasn't a big look. It was just a look. Molly had seen it before, many times, on a small serious boy with glasses, thirty years ago, across this same kitchen, the look that meant *I will tell Mum*.

"—on the swing," said Lucy. "In the garden. It was good."

"How nice," said Percy.

Ginny was leaning against the dresser with a cup of tea, still in Harry's spare jumper because she hadn't had one of her own, watching all of it with her quick eyes.

"Were they good, Mum?" she said. "Anything happen?"

Molly opened her mouth.

Arthur got there first. He was at the sink, with his sleeves rolled up, drying a plate that didn't need drying. He didn't turn round.

"Quiet week, dear?" he said.

"The quietest," said Molly. "Nothing out of the ordinary."

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By eight o'clock they'd all gone, and the house was quiet, and the sun was going down gold over the orchard the way it did in July, taking its time.

Molly was at the kitchen window with the last of the tea, and the needles clicking away beside her on the table at something new, and she was looking down the long garden, past the hens, round the side of the pond.

Under the door of Arthur's shed, very faintly, there was a light.

It was a flickery sort of light. Blue, and then green, and then blue. It was the kind of light you'd get, Molly supposed, if somebody had a Muggle television set in there, very quietly, on, with the sound turned right down, and a Muggle football match going on inside it, somewhere on the other side of the world.

She looked at it for quite a long time.

Then she drew the curtains, and sat down at the table, and picked up her knitting.