Intermezzo

by irislock [archived by thequidditchpitch_archivist]

Summary

Love was the easy part.

Notes

Note from Annie, the archivist: this story was originally archived at The Quidditch Pitch, which went offline in 2015 when the hosting expired, at a time I was not able to renew it. I contacted Open Doors, hoping to preserve the archive using an old backup, and began importing these works as an Open Doors-approved project in April 2017. Open Doors e-mailed all authors about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this creator, please contact us using the e-mail address on The Quidditch Pitch collection profile.

Author's notes:

This story was written for the seventh wave of the hpgw_ficafest on LiveJournal. It contains Harry/OC, Ginny/OMC, and an implied Ginny/Luna relationship.

Many thanks to my beta Antosha and Brit-picker chocolate for their support and help. Any remaining errors are mine.

Reviews are eagerly solicited!
Chapter 1

September 1, 2003, 7:15 pm

Harry had checked his watch at least three times in the last half hour, but this was the first time that the date had struck a familiar note in his brain. All of the Hogwarts students would be back at school now, enjoying the feast and talking excitedly of their summer with friends. Wait, England was ahead by five hours, so they would all be asleep. Or was it behind by five hours and they were still on the train? He never could remember which way the time changed when he was on a mission.

The mission, right. It had a mission codename, but really, this was more like an assignment, a task. A chore, now that he thought about it. Harry sighed and checked his watch again.

Where in the hell was she?

Ginny was really not the sort of witch to spend thirty minutes in the loo getting ready for a party.

Harry began to pace. He was glad he wasn’t on a broom; hovering a hundred and fifty feet in the air for that long would get quite uncomfortable, especially with no Golden Snitch to distract him. Instead, he was on a magic carpet, disguised by a Disillusionment charm and quietly suspended outside Room 511 of the Flamingo Hotel. Not very speedy, but good for surveillance work.

In retrospect, taking, no, asking, for this assignment had been utterly daft. Why he thought it was a good idea to be this close to Ginny and watch her parade around with some other bloke (American, no less) must have involved some good firewhisky and an Obliviation hex, he thought wryly. But he knew he hadn’t been Obliviated. The memories were still there.

March 2, 2003

Hermione, Ron's new bride of three months, had thrown a wildly successful surprise party for his birthday. Harry and Ginny had been the last to leave except for George, who had passed out on the sofa. They Floo’d back to Harry’s flat sometime after two.

“You’ll stay, won’t you?” Harry asked as he shrugged off his cloak and helped Ginny with hers.

“Yeah, but don’t expect any action tonight. I’m knackered and just a little too pissed.”

Harry recalled the following morning so vividly that it felt like being in a Pensieve. They’d both slept in and woken to bright sunshine streaming into the room. He was rock hard, and when Ginny turned from the spooned position she’d been in to nuzzle against his chest and flick her tongue playfully around his nipple, he knew she was randy, too. Their lovemaking was a long, slow fuck. It was something they’d been perfecting – taking their time, enjoying lots of foreplay. When he entered her, it wasn’t the clumsy poking of their first times together, or the frantic rutting of the many times after that, it was an agonizingly slow stroke that he knew both stimulated Ginny’s clit and reached deep inside to elicit the most exquisite sounds from her. They pulled back from each other and met again in a languorous, intentional coupling that left them both completely drained and energized at the same time.

The rest of the morning had been nearly as good. They showered, and Ginny made breakfast while Harry made coffee. The sunshine had given way to a dull drizzle, and they spent hours reading The
Sunday Prophet and playing chess before heading to the Burrow for Sunday dinner, something they did nearly every week.

Later, Harry thought he should have known it was too good to last. Someone, he couldn’t now remember who, though he suspected it was Bill, asked casually during dinner that day when Harry was planning to propose to Ginny. The usual buzz of conversation halted, and Harry felt for a moment like he’d been on the receiving end of a Petrification charm.

“Uh, dunno. Hadn’t thought about it, really,” he mumbled around a mouthful of potatoes.

Ron was looking determinedly down at his plate, and Harry could not bear to chance a glance at Ginny. Surprisingly, it was Mr. Weasley who came to his rescue.

“Well, of course not. You’re still young. Only out of Auror training two years now. You’ve got plenty of time.”

Everyone who stayed after dinner had jobs assigned, and doing the dishes generally fell to Harry and Ginny. They were in the kitchen, alone, when she brought it up.

“Have you really never thought about it, Harry?”

“About what?” Trying to buy time or play stupid was hopeless, he knew, but he couldn’t seem to stop himself.

“Getting married.” She gave him a sidelong glance, but her tone was still friendly.

He shrugged. “Not really, I guess. Seems like we just got through Ron and Hermione’s wedding. Merlin, I didn’t think I’d survive all the planning and arguing and last minute jitters...”

“But, Harry,” Ginny said very patiently, “that’s different. Having a wedding is not what marriage is about.”

“Well, you can’t be married without a wedding,” he said stupidly.

“I know,” said Ginny, impatience now lacing her voice. “But being married is not about dresses, and flowers, and who sits where, and what china you pick, it’s about being together. Sharing a life together. Maybe having children together.”

Harry felt a surge of bile in his throat at the mention of children and swallowed hard to keep himself from getting sick into the tea towel. He loved Teddy, he really did, and he cherished the weekends they spent together, but he was quite happy not to be responsible for him on a daily basis. Being a godfather seemed a lot easier than being a father.

He managed to recover enough to say in an almost normal voice, “But we are together, Ginny. We do share things.” He pointed the tea towel toward the green jumper she was wearing, one her mother had knitted for him. “And...and...” He was now waving the tea towel in the air, literally flailing “- and you’re way too young to have children anyway. And some people never have children.” He thought of Sirius.

“Mum was pregnant with Charlie by the time she was my age,” Ginny said to the suds in the sink. Drawing a breath, she turned to face him fully. “But that’s not the point. I’m not in any hurry to have kids, Harry. Really. And certainly not seven of them. Maybe just one or two - someday.”

“Fine, someday,” he huffed. He set the tea towel to its intended purpose of drying the dishes Ginny
had washed. Calmer now, he took a step toward her. “Look, Ginny things are great between us. I like everything the way it is. Why would we want to change it?”

She took another breath and continued.

“Because I think I’m ready for more. The last five years have been so wonderful, Harry, really. But I keep thinking it could be even better. I know we’re together, but we’re not together together. We have separate flats and separate bank accounts - we don’t go shopping or do laundry or –”

“Since when do you do laundry?” Harry cut in. “I’d be happy to bring over my dirty robes if you’ve developed a sudden interest,” he shot at her.

“Harry.”

“Honestly, Gin. If that’s what you’re thinking – that you’re missing out because we don’t fight like Ron and Hermione about you leaving clothes on the floor or me spending too much on furniture - then I’d say we’re well out of it.”

“Harry.”

“I mean it.”

“I don’t think you do. You know that Ron and Hermione are really happy.” She paused and gave him a small smile. “They would be a lot less happy if they didn’t have something to bicker about.”

She had a point. Ron was undeniably and annoyingly joyful; he walked around Auror headquarters lately like he’d just won the lottery. Harry had once made the mistake of asking Ron why he fought with Hermione so much. With pink ears and muttered undertones, Ron replied, “Because she’s bloody sexy when she gets into a good rant.” Harry felt his cheeks heat at the memory and looked determinedly down at his feet.

“Hey,” Ginny said, striking a conciliatory note as she grasped both of his hands. “I’m not trying to pressure you or anything. Nobody is more surprised than I am that I’ve been thinking about this stuff. It’s just – well, of course my career is important to me, but....I just... Will you at least think about it?”

He drew her close for a hug. “Yeah, sure.”

The subject dropped for now, he asked, “Are you coming to the flat?” By some unspoken convention, "the flat" was Harry's place; "your place" was Ginny's flat that she shared with Luna. Because Harry didn't have a flatmate, it was at his flat that they spent most of their time together. They’d discussed moving in together more than once, but keeping separate living arrangements allowed them most of the benefits of living together without incurring the wrath of Molly Weasley.

“Not tonight, Harry. Mum and I are going to work on something for the new baby. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I’ll see you first,” he said, just before kissing her and disappearing into the fireplace in a flash of green flame.

It was an old joke. They’d been talking about their first kiss one day, and Harry had said, “I just looked around the Common Room, and I saw you.”
“I saw you first,” said Ginny. “You walked through the portrait hole, and I started running toward you, and I just couldn’t stop.”

**March 20, 2003**

Harry was in a meeting so tedious he was wishing he’d dug up Percy’s cauldron bottom report to bring along for some interesting reading. Instead, he asked himself why it was that he was so averse to the idea of marriage. He started by thinking of people he knew that were married; maybe finding some good role models would be inspiring.

The Dursleys – he shuddered. No inspiration there.

Mr and Mrs Weasley – hmmm. He loved them both, no doubt. And they loved each other, Harry was sure. But he didn’t like to think about himself and Ginny in the same mold – he working in a Ministry office all day and coming home to a chaotic house. And the thought of raising children that were even a little like George and Fred. Hero of the Wizarding World or not, he wasn’t sure he was up to that.

His parents – well, he supposed they loved each other, though he had precious little proof of it other than his own existence. What he knew of them came mostly from what their friends remembered, and that was probably tainted by later events. After all, he wondered, if not for his fascination with the Dark Arts, Snape might have been Lily’s first choice.

Harry had had not a little difficulty accepting the fact that his mother had some positive feelings for Snape. Other than the obvious consequence of his not being born, he wondered how differently things would have been if she’d married him instead. Or worse, what if Voldemort had spared Lily and Snape had ended up as his stepfather? The implications were too horrible to even think about.

Regardless of their love for each other, his parents had still ended up dead when they were younger than Harry was now. Snape got to live longer, but was just as dead.

Come to think of it, being married and in love had not been any great lot for Remus and Tonks, either. Remus was downright miserable when Harry had first found out about their marriage.

True, there was no war now to threaten a young marriage. In a weird way, maybe it was easier to get married during a war the way his parents or Bill and Fleur had. Like Ron had said, “Now or never, isn’t it?”

On the other hand, Harry thought, knowing that you could die at any moment made contemplating marriage that much harder in his view. It had been hard enough to leave Ginny to go and fight Voldemort. He wasn’t sure he could have done it if they’d been a little older, and married. The responsibility of being bound to someone like that was a bit overwhelming.

Then again, his Auror work was dangerous on occasion, and professional Quidditch had been rated the fourth most hazardous occupation by the Ministry the previous year. Would Ginny want him to quit his job if they got married? Surely not. Would he want her to quit? Well, if she wanted kids, he didn’t think she could very well play while pregnant.

And why was marriage such a big deal anyway? Dumbledore wasn’t married, nor Professor McGonagall, nor Sirius. *Well, said a little voice in his head, not many dating opportunities in Azkaban are there?* He wondered, not for the first time, what Sirius’ life would have been like if he
hadn’t been sent to Azkaban. He was handsome and popular – maybe he would have found a girlfriend - or a boyfriend, Harry thought with a smile.

Kingsley wasn’t married, or even Charlie. His list of happily unmarried people was getting longer than his list of happily married (and not dead) people. He was still grinning as the meeting finally, mercifully came to a close.

Sitting in his flat alone later that night, reviewing his mental lists again, he had to admit that not having a role model for a good marriage was a point, or at least an excuse, for not wanting to take the plunge. It wasn’t that he didn’t love Ginny. He did. But love was easy. Love had led his mother to sacrifice herself without a thought and Dumbledore to protect him at the cost of Sirius Black’s life. Love for his friends had enabled him to face Voldemort more calmly than he would have thought possible.

Hadn’t he always wanted a family? Wasn’t that what the Mirror of Erised showed him all those years ago?

Yes. The love and the want were there. Loyalty, too; after all, he’d been friends with Ron and Hermione for almost half his life. He knew that would never change, but he also knew that it was different to being married.

Constancy was the problem. Loving and living with someone day after day for years and years no matter what. That was the hard part. When it came right down to it, he had to admit that he was afraid. Afraid that he wouldn’t be good at it, for long enough. He had many talents, but maybe being a good husband just wasn’t one of them. He would feel awful if he broke Ginny’s heart again but worse if there were a marriage bond involved. It was unnerving to think that the thing he wanted the most was the one thing he was most afraid of having because it could be lost.

He wasn’t too surprised when he came out of the shower the next day and was greeted with the aroma of frying bacon and fresh coffee. Ginny hadn’t spent the night, but she did this sometimes – showed up and cooked for him. Ginny and her mother were different in many ways, but the desire to keep him fed seemed to be genetic among Weasley women. He heard the sound of eggs cracking as he toweled off and dressed for work before coming into the kitchen. Planting two promising kisses on her neck, he took the plates from the counter.

“Mmmm,” he said, crunching his bacon. “I love you.”

“Good,” she said somewhat distractedly. “Maybe that will help.” He noticed that she was dressed very nicely, wearing a dark green sweater that he’d bought her for her birthday last year, and she wasn’t eating. Ginny was always hungry for breakfast.

“What’s this about?” he asked unnecessarily. He was pretty sure he knew, and damn it all, his Gryffindor courage was nowhere to be found.

“I was going to cook you dinner and have candles and wine and everything,” Ginny began, “but I thought I’d get too nervous to eat. Somehow I thought I’d be braver at breakfast.”

She drained a glass of pumpkin juice and looked evenly at him.

“Will you marry me, Harry Potter?”

He could tell she was nervous as she sat there chewing her lip, and he felt no small amount of
affection. She looked so lovely in the morning light; she had even curled her hair. He wondered idly if she was wearing the lingerie he’d also gotten her for her birthday under her clothes. He never found out.

He watched the look on her face change from hopefulness to anxiety. When it was clear that he didn't have a ready answer, she said, "You said you'd think about it."

"And you said that you weren't trying to pressure me."

Her face flushed, and her look of anxiety was rapidly changing to one of anger. "That was three weeks ago, Harry!" She stood, hands clenched at her sides, chest heaving.

"I thought," she said through gritted teeth, "that you would have thought about it by now. I even thought that maybe you were getting hung up on picking out a ring, which I don't care about, or figuring out how you were going to ask me, and maybe I was saving you the trouble. Which was obviously stupid of me. We've been together since the war; Harry, you either want to get married or you don't. " Her right hand was twitching dangerously close to her wand.

He didn’t actually say no, but he didn’t say yes either. He couldn’t remember everything he did say, but he clearly remembered the heartbroken look on her face.

“I guess that’s it, then.”

“Look,” he said desperately. “Can we talk about this later? I have to go to work.”

“I never figured you for a coward, Harry.”

As he grabbed his workbag, Harry mumbled something about having an early meeting and paperwork to do. “I’ll see you later, okay?” He turned to face her with his hand on the doorknob. “We can—”

“Not if I see you first,” she spat, and then she was gone.

After a few unproductive hours, Harry returned to the flat. He didn’t really expect her to be there, but he wasn’t prepared for how completely she had left. The chill in his spine began when he hung up his cloak in the closet and noticed that her spare cloak was no longer hanging there. Not only that, but all of her scarves, hats and mittens were gone too. The bedroom had been stripped clean of her clothes, even the Harpies t-shirt that had been under the bed for a month. Only his toothbrush in the bathroom. A few trailing locks of hair were all that could be seen of her in the picture of them taken at Ron and Hermione’s wedding. Her books and magazines – all gone.

The chill turned into a cold terror the longer he roamed around the flat. She’d punctuated her absence by leaving his freshly pressed laundry atop a crisply made bed newly outfitted with clean sheets. His cupboard was full of his favorite foods, and there was cold butterbeer in the fridge. The kitchen was in a rare state of cleanliness.

In the oppressive silence, everything around him screamed that she loved him, and hated him, and she wasn’t coming back. He grabbed a butterbeer and sat down.

He slept on the sofa that night and congratulated himself the next morning on how well he was handling it. Maybe being single wasn’t so bad, after all. He shaved, just like always, and stepped into the hot shower. He opened the shampoo, and when the flowery scent that he knew so well
assaulted his nose, he threw the bottle, hard, against the wall. This had the effect of splattering shampoo everywhere and drowning him in her scent. *Damn her! She took every other bloody fucking thing of hers, why did she have to leave that?* He leaned his forehead against the wall and wept.
Chapter 2

Author's notes:

Harry and Ginny try to move on after their break-up.

My apologies to anyone who had technical difficulties reading the first chapter - I think it's all sorted now.

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September 1, 2003 7:30 pm

Thinking about it now, he was angry and sad all over again. Another fifteen minutes had passed, and still Ginny was nowhere to be seen. He wondered just how long he would wait on this silly carpet before going into her room to check on her. A decidedly bad idea, he scolded himself, and against protocol, too.

April 1, 2003

He hadn't seen her again until George’s birthday party at the Burrow, a party he would not have attended save for the explicit invitation from George. He had refused to talk to Ron, or anyone, about it, but everyone seemed to know that he and Ginny weren’t together. He spent so much time with a dull ache in his chest these days that he was unprepared for the fresh hurt of seeing her. There were enough people to buffer him for most of the party, but when Molly asked him to stay and help clean up, he knew she was setting him up.

Alone in the kitchen, again, they worked silently for some time. There was a great, gaping wound between them, and safe topics of conversation were in short supply.

“That was a great play you made against Puddlemere last week. Wood sounded furious.” In fact, Oliver Wood had broken his broomstick in frustration at being unable to save a goal from Ginny.

“He was,” she smiled at the memory. “But you know Oliver. It wasn’t personal. He found me afterward and --” In the slight pause that followed, Harry’s mind began racing. What had Oliver done with her after the game? “-- and tried to talk me into trying out for the England team again.”

“You got another invitation?”
Ginny nodded.

Harry was both relieved and proud. Trials for the national team were by 'invitation only'; this was the second year she'd been asked to try out.

“You should. You’ve been playing really well.”

“Not much else to do,” she muttered to herself. And then to him: “You’ve been at my games?”

“Um, no” Harry admitted. ”But I listen on the wireless – and Ron talks about you all the time.”

She accepted this without further comment.

“I don’t know,” she said later. “It’s an awful lot of work. And this is a World Cup year; competition will be really tough.”

Harry remembered her earlier attempt well. He had hardly seen her in the weeks leading up to trials; she was either practicing or reading playbooks. When he did see her, she was either asleep or brewing some Strengthening potion. And he hadn’t minded. He hadn’t even minded comforting her afterward. He had been disappointed for her, but also a tiny bit happy that he could have his girlfriend back. After her initial devastation wore off, he cheered her up by telling her she could still be the star player on Team Harry; it was silly enough to get a laugh and a comfort shag.

“Ginny, if you make it, you will be the second youngest player ever to earn a spot on an international Quidditch team. And the youngest witch. There’s nothing to be ashamed of if you don’t. And you can still be the star player on -” He stopped himself “-the Harpies. But you’ll make it this time. You won’t have me to distract you.”

There was a long pause in the conversation, the only noise the gentle clinking of glasses and plates and drawers opening.

“So, I suppose you haven’t changed your mind,” she said at last, in a carefully neutral tone.

“Nah. I still love you.” That earned him a fleeting smile from her.
“And you still won’t marry me.” It was a statement.

What could he say? It’s not you, it’s me. That was horribly lame. I’m afraid I’ll be a bad husband sounded just as bad even if it was closer to the truth. He’d started, many times, over the last several days to write her or go to her, but he hadn’t because he knew that he could not tell her what she wanted to hear.

Her silence in the last days had unnerved him a little. She had not shown any of her usual tenacity about the matter, and he was actually a little relieved that she’d brought it up now. At least it meant that she cared enough to give him another chance.

After some time, she looked him straight in the eye and said, “I won’t ask again, Harry.”

He shrugged, but held her gaze. “Okay.” Agreed. Quaffle to Team Harry.

How many people were at this party anyway? Dirty dishes just kept appearing. He could swear he’d dried that bowl twice already.

“How’s your work?” she finally asked.

“Okay. I’m going on assignment in France next week.”

“Hphmh.”

“What?”

“Going to look up Gabrielle while you’re there?”

“Gabrielle who?”

“You know, Fleur’s sister. She’s of age now. And she probably doesn’t want to get married.”
“Ginny, you know I have no interest in –“

Lips tightly pursed in determination, Ginny waved her hand dismissively. “I’m sorry, Harry. I didn’t mean to sound like that. Forget it.”

“Any cake left?” said Ron as he burst through the kitchen door.

May 2, 2003, 11:15 pm

Harry was on the sofa in front of a cozy fire, preparing a lesson for the trainees and trying to decide whether or not to have a third Butterbeer when there was a violent knock at his door. He leapt from the sofa when he heard the anguished voice coming from the other side.

“Harry! Harry! Oh, please, Harry, are you there?”

Hearing her panicked voice, he couldn't help but throw open the door.

“Oh, thank Merlin,” she said as she practically fell into a kitchen chair and buried her head in her hands.

“What happened?”

He sat down in the chair opposite her and waited for an answer, but she only shook her head. As the silence stretched on, Harry began to worry. She was dressed in nice robes, but there was a rip in one shoulder, and she looked deathly pale beyond that curtain of hair. He knew somehow that trying to get her to talk before she was ready was useless.

“How about if I make some tea?” he suggested. She nodded. Rummaging around for two clean cups, Harry was rather embarrassed at the state of his kitchen, but she didn’t seem to notice. He was running water into the teapot when she said, “I was on a date.”
Harry bristled; she had come to rub it in his face that she had a date? “Ginny, I –“

“- and it didn’t go too well.” She paused. “Actually, it was a disaster.”

Ah, so she came to tell him she had a bad date. And that was his fault for not marrying her and saving her from bad dates? He was about to tell her that he really didn’t think he was the person to talk to about her social life, but the look on her face stopped him. There was more color in her cheeks, but he noticed that there was a fresh scratch on her chin.

“I know you’re probably not the person I should be talking to. But this was the closest place to Apparate to and there isn’t really anyone else –“

“Isn’t Luna home?” he interrupted.

“No. She left on an expedition yesterday. I’m sorry, Harry. I’ll go if you want.”

You already did he wanted to say. Instead, he kept his lips tightly clamped and retrieved her favorite tea from the cupboard. Closing the door just a little too loudly, he set the tea down and handed her a damp rag. “Here. You’re bleeding.”

“I am?” she said with alarm as she felt the cut on her face and began cleaning it with the cloth. “That damn filthy toerag! I should’ve used more than an itching hex on his bits – he’s lucky to still have them.”

Harry squirmed uncomfortably at the sound of this – he imagined it was worse even than a Bat-Bogey Hex. In spite of himself, he was curious. He’d made Ginny pretty angry before, but she’d never used either of those on him.

“Oh, never mind who it was. He thought he could just side-along Apparate me back to his flat after dinner and shag right there. I said no, but he got – insistent. There was a bit of a struggle – I guess that’s when this happened” – she touched her chin again – “and then I managed to get my wand back, hexed him, and came here.” She leaned over the table and laid her head down on her arms.
Harry served her tea – she only took milk in her tea when she was upset – and sat again. He wasn’t sure what to say. A murderous rage had erupted somewhere at the thought of anyone hurting Ginny, but he was more inclined to make sure she was really alright. He had a nearly insurmountable urge to hold her, and kiss her, and comfort her, and shag her himself right there on the floor and tell her to hell with any other blokes....

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Not your fault,” she replied crisply. She lifted her head. “It’s my own damn fault for agreeing to go anywhere with such an idiotic Neanderthal.”

“Where did you, uh, find him?”

“Work.”

“But the Harpies are an all-witch team,” he observed.

“He’s an Assistant Manager at the Stadium. Seemed nice enough, but...” Her bottom lip trembled a little, and a tear ran down her cheek. She wiped it impatiently with the rag, smearing blood on her face and making things look worse. Taking the rag from her, he pressed the teacup into her hands.

“Drink it.” He rinsed the rag as she took a few sips.

She was quite a sight. Wild hair, torn robes, blood-smeared face. He knelt down in front of her and began carefully cleaning her face. “Are you – alright?”

“Yeah, I am. He was just an arse really, and I shouldn’t be so upset...” Harry disagreed with this; from the looks of things, she should be even more upset than she was.

“He was – I’ve never – I haven’t felt – so – powerless – since – well, Tom - and the diary.”

Harry’s stomach felt leaden. They hadn’t spoken of it in years, but she had told him all about that
year, and he knew that she wouldn’t have been able to say those words to anyone else.

“Do you want me to stab him with a basilisk fang? I will, you know.”

She laughed a genuine laugh. “Oh, Harry. Still my hero, and we’re not even – no, no, I don’t want you to end up in Azkaban on my account.”

“Not to worry. I could make it look like official Auror business.” He made a mental note to look up the bloke Ginny had been out with and do a little investigating on his own.

“Thanks, but no. That hex should keep him out of commission for a while. But –” She looked around the room nervously. “I really don’t want to be alone tonight. Could I sleep on your sofa? If it wouldn’t be too awkward?”

Harry couldn’t believe his luck, but he didn’t know if it was good or bad. He found himself answering without giving it much thought.

“Sure, you can stay, but take the bed. I’ll sleep out here.” He didn’t tell her, but he slept on the sofa most nights anyway. The sheets on his bed were the ones she had put there over two months ago.

“No, Harry. I insist.” They got busy, clearing his notes from the sofa and table and getting out blankets. Ginny sat, legs curled under her, sipping her tea and staring at the still lit fire. “Thanks, Harry. For everything.” He lingered for a moment at the end of the sofa wondering what to do.

Sitting by her was dangerous, but he most fervently did not want to go to bed alone, knowing she was in the next room.

“You can sit for a bit if you like,” she said, answering an unspoken question. He did, close to her but not touching. “You’re a good friend, Harry. And a pretty good ex-boyfriend.” They talked carefully. He told her about France and emphasized that he’d been too busy to contact Fleur’s family; she told him she had decided to try out for the England Quidditch team in a couple of weeks. She put her head on his shoulder somewhat tentatively, and he put an arm around her. They sat like that for a long while until her breathing became soft and rhythmic.

When he woke, her scent lingered on his shirt, and he could smell something else too – something with vanilla and maybe cinnamon. He looked around blearily and saw Ginny was gone. The kitchen was still a disaster, but there were freshly baked scones on the counter. And a note:
May 31, 2003

Harry burst through the door of his flat, sweaty and elated. His amateur Quidditch team had won their first match, and he hadn’t been this excited in a long time. Merlin, it felt so good to fly like that again. He’d seen the Snitch almost immediately, but the other Seeker hadn’t and Harry delayed getting it just for the pure joy of playing again.

Ron had asked him several times over the years to join the Aurors' team in the Ministry’s amateur league, but he’d always demurred. One Quidditch player in the family was enough, he’d said. Curious that he’d use that language so carelessly then, when now... well, never mind. Now, he didn’t care about the after-work practices or weekend matches that previously would have intruded on his time with Ginny. When the team’s Seeker had been sent on a long term assignment in Italy, Harry had jumped at the chance.

He grabbed the bottle of pumpkin juice from the fridge and flicked on the wireless with a wave of his wand before heading to the shower. Muggle Music Hour was on; Ginny had first introduced him to it, but it had become a favorite program of his as well.

Once clean and dressed, he had some time to kill before meeting the team at the pub for a victory pint, and he glanced through the post. A front page photo on The Daily Prophet caught his eye. It was a picture of Ginny and a blonde bloke holding hands. Underneath, the caption read:

“More than teammates? Ginevra Weasley, 21, and Scott Morgan, 25, leaving the Ministry of Magic on Friday after the press conference in which they were both named to the England Quidditch Team. Miss Weasley of the Holyhead Harpies is the youngest witch ever to play for England. Both will play in the position of Chaser. Mr Morgan, originally from America, plays for the Kenmare Kestrels. England will compete for the Quidditch World Cup this August in Romania. See related story and team photo, page 2.”

Harry sat, stunned. Could it really be true? He knew the Prophet wasn’t always a reliable source of information, but she was most definitely holding his hand in a more than friendly way.

As if to magnify his pain, strains of a slow ballad drifted into his ears:
But I’m lonely now
And I don’t know how
To get it back to good

He hit the wireless rather forcefully, and when the noise didn’t stop, he picked it up and banged it on the table several times. At last, it was just a mass of springs and wire and bent metal, irrevocably damaged. Sort of like he felt.

He was on his third shot of firewhisky when Ron showed up at the pub.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he demanded.

“About what?”

“Ginny.”

“Making the team? I just found out myself, mate. She couldn’t tell anyone but Mum and Dad until after the press conference.”

“No. Him.”

“Oh.” Ron flushed. “Well, I just found out about that, too. But even if I had known, I wouldn’t have said anything.”

“Why not?”

“Because of this,” Ron picked up the fourth glass of firewhisky Harry had poured and held it away from him. “Look, she’s my sister and I love her, and I promised Hermione I’d stay out of it, but it’s not worth killing yourself over.”

“Give me that.” Harry snatched his drink back and downed it before Ron could protest.
Harry had a vague sense of deja vu when he woke the next morning. There was a tangle of black hair in his face, and it felt like it did when he was small and his hair grew back overnight after one of Petunia’s savage cuts. This hair seemed really long, though. And his mouth, well, someone had taken that and put a wool scarf in its place. His head was throbbing, and why did he feel so dizzy?

“Mornin’, love,” said a thoroughly unfamiliar, deep, husky voice. “Ready for another go?”

A hand, which he presumed belonged to the voice, touched his cock. He tried closing his eyes, but the dizziness got worse, so he turned his head slightly in the direction of the voice and brushed the hair away.

It was a woman. Under the circumstances, he supposed he should be grateful for that. What was her name – D something. Dorcas? Delores? Delilah? Delphi? Maybe. Her ministrations were beginning to coax his cock to life, and images started floating through his mind, swirling like the clouds of smoke in Professor Trelawney’s classroom. Her – this – Delphi – was a cousin or somesuch of one of the Aurors on the team, visiting from – somewhere. He had foggy recollections: snippets of conversation, then groping and grabbing in the bathroom, a hastily rented room above the pub and then desperate, angry kisses, ripped clothes, muttered contraceptive charms and then thrusting, thrusting, thrusting, so hard he had to be hurting her, but she just said “That’s it, baby! Fuck me through the mattress! Oh, Merlin, yes, yes!” And when, at last, he arrived at his own unavoidable release, he’d bitten his lip clean through to keep from shouting Ginny’s name.

He was going to be sick. Soon. Mumbling hurried apologies, he turned over, grabbed his glasses and wand from the floor, and with one swift movement summoned all of his clothes, Apparated directly to his own loo and vomited all over the floor.

By late afternoon, things hadn’t improved much. He was dressed and prone on the sofa with an icebag on his lip. A glass of water sat on the table, mocking him.

Ron appeared briefly with some hangover potion and pot of soup from Hermione (“For when you feel better.”) Harry wasn’t sure he would ever feel better enough for Hermione’s soup, but the potion was welcome.

“Not coming to the Burrow, today, then?”

Harry groaned.
“I’ll tell them. Just as well, I expect. Ginny will be there. It’s sort of a party – for her making the team and all.”

Harry had not thought it possible to feel worse, but there it was.

Ron looked at him sympathetically. “Cheer up mate. Daphne went back to Greece today. She said to tell you she had fun. Looked like she meant it, too,” he laughed.

Harry groaned again. “Go away.”

June 30, 2003, 8:35 am

With Ginny safely away at some Top Secret Quidditch training center, Harry’s life had resumed some normalcy. He had easily accepted invitations to the Burrow knowing that she would not be there. He had spent a lot of time with Teddy, teaching him to fly, taking him to the zoo and trying to guess what the snake was saying. They had spent a weekend at Shell Cottage after little Dominque was born. He had even taken Teddy to Hogwarts to show him what it was like and visit Neville. He had kept busy with work and Quidditch, and he was very careful to stay away from firewhisky. As the summer wore on, though, talk of the Quidditch Cup was becoming more frequent, and it was clear that all of the Weasleys were going. Since the games were in Romania, they were making an extended trip of it and staying with Charlie at the dragon sanctuary.

Could he go and watch her, knowing that, to her, he was little more than another spectator? Could he face all of her brothers in one box seat? He hadn’t even congratulated her on making the team.

Kingsley solved his problem. He was summoned to the Minister’s Office early one Monday morning and told that the latest intelligence indicated that some radical Dark Arts groups were planning a “disturbance” at the World Cup. All participating countries were increasing their security efforts. Harry was sure he’d be sent to attend on business.

“Interestingly,” Kingsley continued, “it appears that these groups are getting some support, financial and otherwise, from suspected criminals in America. I want you to go to the States and head up the investigation there.”

It was a plum assignment in some ways – he would be in solely responsible for the investigation – but far from the action.
“Don’t you think it would be better to have me in the field? Where you think the disturbance will be?”

“Ah,” said Kingsley in his deep baritone. “If you weren’t personally involved in the case, perhaps, but given your involvement with Miss Weasley, I don’t think so.”

“We aren’t involved anymore. Sir.”

“Yes, well, be that as it may,” Kingsley tapped his two forefingers together in front of his face as if in thought, “I need you in the States.” The decision had been made.

“Yes, sir.”
Chapter 3

Author's notes: Ginny finally gets out of the loo; Harry begins his assignment in the States.

September 1, 2003 7:45 pm

Harry looked up to see Ginny emerge, finally, from the loo, wearing only chocolate brown knickers edged in creamy lace and a matching bra. Those were new. He walked straight off the edge of the magic carpet and only barely caught himself in time.

She looked bloody gorgeous. Her hair was swept up in a complicated arrangement similar to the way it had been at Bill and Fleur’s wedding. So that’s what had taken so long. Toned and a little pink from spending the day in the sun, she stood in front of the open wardrobe in her hotel room. She finally selected the dark blue robes. Not new. He liked the green ones better, but these were very flattering. She started at what must have been a knock at the door and finished dressing quickly.

From his vantage point, Harry could clearly see the wizard at her door. He was shorter than Harry, but lean. He had cropped blonde hair, brilliant blue eyes and a smile Harry thought was calculated to charm. He looked a little like a handsome Draco Malfoy, except that Draco never smiled.

He put his arm around Ginny and softly kissed her cheek. It was familiar and intimate, and any doubt Harry might have had was instantly dispelled. Clearly, they were sleeping together.

Ginny grabbed a small handbag from the bed and glanced out the window. Her gaze lingered for a moment, and Harry had to remind himself that he was well concealed. She was looking right at him. The moment passed, and she left the room, Scott’s arm possessively at her back.

Harry signaled headquarters that Chasers Weasley and Morgan were en route to the banquet. He headed for the Carpet Pavilion at the North End of the Flamingo Hotel, opting for the scenic route along the beach. Harry’s experience of tropical vacations was limited to the post cards Aunt Marge had sent to the Dursleys. Knowing that Aunt Marge enjoyed them rather quelled any desire he might have had to go on one.

The island, though, was undeniably lovely. A soft breeze swept through his hair as he weaved through palm trees and skittered just above sand dunes. Wizards had frequented the island long before the Muggles settled there, and the Flamingo Hotel was a glamorous destination well-known throughout the European Wizarding world. To Muggles, though, it appeared to be a run-down hotel slated for condemnation by the village council.

It was dark by the time Harry arrived at the Pavilion, and Harry rang the bell to alert the clerk. Magic carpets were banned in much of Europe, but they were allowed on the island as a tourist attraction. A series of unfortunate and unsavory accidents had resulted in severe restrictions on their usage, and Harry mused over the rules posted on the wall while he waited.

Carpets may be rented no earlier that 15 minutes before sunrise and must be returned no later than 15 minutes after sunset.
No more than two witches and/or wizards are allowed on a carpet at a time.
Witches and wizards must remain clothed at all times while on carpets.
No potions of any kind are allowed on carpets.
Carpets may not be flown above 100 feet.
Carpets may not be flown faster than 10 miles per hour.
Carpet usage is restricted to the designated section of beach.
A 100 Galleon fine will be assessed for failure to observe the above rules.

The rules took all the fun out of flying the carpets, Harry thought. He was strongly reminded of Professor Umbridge and all of her ridiculous decrees.

Given that the sun had set half an hour ago and that there was no response to his repeated bell ringing, Harry gave up. He charmed the carpet to roll itself up and levitated it behind him.

The Provisional Headquarters of the England Quidditch Team Auror Detail was confined to two adjoining hotel rooms. They were sparsely furnished and cramped. The first room had a couple of desks littered with scraps of paper, a chess set, and some cards, a few chairs, a fridge for snacks, and a wireless radio. The other room had several camp beds and a few trunks. Aurors on Quidditch detail worked 12 hour shifts and spent most of the rest of the time sleeping, eating or at the beach.

Harry walked into the first room and set the rolled up carpet in the corner. He checked for messages from the Shift Chief, Marcus Anderson, and, seeing none, laid on one of the camp beds.

“Oi! Potter! Aren’t you supposed to be at the banquet?” asked Will Hennessey. He was a new graduate of Auror training on his first assignment.

“I don’t think so. Floyd and Hendricks are going.”

“Floyd’s not. He headed into the Muggle village about half an hour ago. Some pub there he wanted to go to. Said you’d cover for him.”

Damn. “Can you go?” Harry asked.

“No, sir. I’m sorry, but I go on at 10 for 12 hours. There’s a regulation against working more than 12 hours at a time on security detail.”

Harry started to argue over this and could have in fact ordered him to go, but he didn’t. He was a newbie after all, and it wasn’t his fault that Harry’s ex-girlfriend happened to be at the banquet.

“Alright. Just let me go change.” His dress robes were still in his trunk, unpacked from his month in the States.

Ten minutes later, Harry was trying to straighten the tie to his dress robes. It didn’t matter whether he did it by hand or magic, he had never got the hang of it.

The last time he had worn his dress robes was at a reception for a visiting dignitary shortly after he arrived in the States as a guest of the American Magical Ministry. It was there that he first met Audrey.

July 10, 2003, 7:45 pm

“Your tie is crooked.”

“I know. Thanks. It’s not the first time.”
“Here. Let me help.” She set her drink down and made quick work of his tie.

“I’m Audrey Abbott, Special Assistant to the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister. But you can just call me Audrey.”

Harry smiled and took a sip of his wine. She was almost as tall as he was and had dark brown hair and bright green eyes. The thought occurred to him that someone looking at them might think they were brother and sister.

“Harry. Harry Potter,” he said, shaking her hand.

She quickly gave him the run down on most of the other guests in the room. She turned out to be a distant cousin of Hannah Abbott’s and knew something of the war with Voldemort.

Talking with her was the highlight of Harry’s week. He discovered upon arrival in the States that Kingsley had in fact sent him into temporary exile. He was his only staff, save for the services of Brian the errand boy, a fifth year student on summer holiday from the American Wizarding Academy. He had a desk to himself in a room with eleven other desks, all used by Aurors.

On his first day, the desk had been piled two feet high with files. Most of them were dossiers on people associated with the Quidditch World Cup; players, managers, and the like. There were also several folders on known Dark Arts organizations and their members. Most exciting of all, there were rolls and rolls of parchment detailing banking transactions for some of the wizards, witches, and organizations deemed most suspect. Goblins did not control the American wizard banking system so it was much easier to get information.

Harry had dutifully started going through the files. He noticed that there was no file for Ginny, but he read Scott Morgan’s several times. Harry learned that Scott's mother was British and had even played for the Harpies for a season before she married and moved to America. That explained how he came to play for England. As much as Harry disliked him, his file was clean, and he had pretty impressive Quidditch statistics.

It was dull, tedious work, but he didn’t have a lot of choice about it. The other Aurors in the office seemed nice enough, though they weren’t there often. Occasionally, Harry would take a few files and work in the library, just for a change of scenery. The most direct route took him by Audrey’s office, and he stopped in to say hello one day the week after they’d met. Friendly chatting had led to a dinner invitation; she took him to the American equivalent of the Leaky Cauldron where they talked at length over fish and chips and pints of beer.

Seeing her safely home, he gave her a casual hug and quick kiss on the cheek. “I had a great time, Audrey. I haven’t laughed this much in ages.”

“Me, too.” She kissed him back, full on the mouth, and he was a little stunned when her tongue pressed against his lips. She wasn’t being bossy, but the message was unmistakable.

“Um,” he said as they broke apart. “I’m not very good at this.”

“What? Kissing? You were doing just fine, Harry.”

“No. I mean...being...involved. I’m not good at relationships.”

“It doesn’t have to be a relationship, Harry. I’m not looking for anything serious; it’s just supposed to be fun.” She kissed him lightly on the nose and smiled wickedly. “Now, why don’t we go inside and get to know each other a little better?”
“Um, that sounds nice, Audrey, really. But...”

"I'm on the potion, if that's what you're worried about."

"No, it's not that," he said. Ginny thought the contraceptive potion affected her playing so she didn't take it during the season. Consequently, Harry was very good about remembering the right charms at the right time.

Grabbing hold of her hands, he took a deep breath. “It's just that I’m a little out of practice. Could we take it slow?” He couldn’t believe those words were coming out of his mouth. What was wrong with him? He didn’t want to commit to Ginny, but he didn’t want to have guilt-free sex with a beautiful, smart witch because – well, why, exactly? What sort of idiot turns down an offer like that?

Regretting the words as soon as he spoke them, he looked at her.

She looked a little crestfallen but didn’t let go of his hands.

“Just how slow? You’re only here for a month, Harry.”

He laughed, or tried to. “How about if I take you out tomorrow? Dinner?”

She smiled back. “And dancing. Okay, pick me up at 7:00. You can use the Floo from your hotel.”

And so it began. For the next three weeks, he and Audrey had dinner and sex nearly every night. They often went out – in her company, he sampled Thai, Indian, Mexican, and half a dozen other cuisines either at restaurants or at Audrey’s flat – for she proved to be quite a good cook too.

She was like Ginny in some ways: friendly, intelligent, funny, and easy to talk to. But it didn’t bother him. There were enough differences that he could be with her and not be constantly reminded of Ginny. She had a lot of different scents; sometimes lavender, sometimes vanilla, sometimes something fruity. Her shampoo reminded him of coconuts. It changed often enough that he didn’t associate her with any particular smell. She was rather obsessively tidy and had little interest in Quidditch.

She taught him to dance. She started with the more traditional Wizarding dances, then moved onto Muggle ones. He learned the formal movements of the waltz and foxtrot pretty easily, and he even tangoed a bit, but he hated the thought of doing it in public and balked when she tried to take him out dancing. One night, she plied him with mead until his head was quite foggy; next thing he knew, he felt the familiar pull of apparition and then she was pulling him onto the dance floor at a gay bar. Every time he tried to sit down, he got propositioned, so he finally gave up and stayed out on the floor with her. It was kind of fun.

She was an adventurous and enthusiastic lover. He got out of her bed to get a drink of water one night, and when he came back, she was on all fours on the bed.

“You want to fuck me in the ass, Harry?” Until that moment, Harry had never so much as given it a thought.

His cock gave an answer before he could voice it. “Yeah. I do.”
Author's notes: Harry and Ginny see each other again.

September 1, 2003 8:00 pm

Shaking the memory from his head and giving up on his tie, he headed into the banquet hall. Soup was being served to all of the guests, and he saw Anderson motion to him from across the room. He spotted Ginny as he walked; she was at a table near the front.

He spoke with Anderson just long enough to report for duty and get his station assignment; his eyes never left Ginny. Harry had the Invisibility Cloak tucked into his robes, but he was fully visible as he walked back across the room in a path that took him directly by her table. Scott was standing up; he kissed her hand briefly before heading in the general direction of the loo. Ginny’s gaze followed him for a moment and then someone on her left spoke, and she turned her head.

Their eyes met, and Ginny’s soup bowl crashed to the floor. She dived under the table to retrieve the bowl and emerged with her face glowing like the setting sun.

Harry was at her side in a flash, wand drawn and uttering charms to repair and refill the bowl. “I haven’t seen you blush like that in a long time.”

She appeared utterly befuddled. “Harry?” Others at the table had sprung to her assistance, and soon everything was set to rights. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw Scott returning and decided to make a quick getaway.

“Save me a dance,” he whispered just before dashing out of sight.

August 13, 2003, 8:15 am

It happened unexpectedly on a Wednesday. Harry had just walked into the office when Brian the errand boy ran to his desk from across the hall, panting, “Did you hear? Did you hear what happened at the World Cup?”

Harry had all but forgotten the World Cup. Quidditch wasn’t that popular in America, and he had been occupied. But the news that something had happened—and from the look on Brian’s face it wasn’t a good thing—made his heart stop for one, two, three beats.

“Robokov hit a Bludger that caught Weasley in the head. She’s still unconscious.” Harry dimly heard the thwack as yesterday’s copy of The Quidditch Times hit his desk. He sat, and allowed the information to sink in.

Brian prattled on about the match. Weasley was injured while England was making a player substitution, and Robokov claimed he had already hit the ball, but that was in dispute. Many fans with Omnioculators claimed that it was an illegal hit, and it could affect the outcome of the match, which was apparently still underway....

“Is she – okay?” His mouth was so dry, his voice came out high pitched and squeaky.

“Who?”
“Ginny. Um, Chaser Weasley.”

“Oh. Don’t know. The Healers are still working on her according to the article. But, it’s yesterday’s paper.”

Brian shot across the hall in search of something while Harry read the article. It reported that Chaser Weasley had been transported to a hospital in Romania for treatment; details of her condition were unknown. Robokov would be allowed to continue playing until an official decision had been reached. Meanwhile, the match was nearing the end of its second day of play. A picture of Ginny, unconscious on the pitch and surrounded by her teammates was included. He noticed that Scott Morgan was, again, holding her hand.

Brian returned with a wireless, which he thoughtfully set on Harry’s desk and tuned to the British Quidditch Network so he could get the most accurate and current information. This wasn’t as useful as Harry would have liked; it was broadcasting the France vs. Peru match at the moment.

Unable to stay still, Harry walked the corridors of the American Magical Ministry for what seemed like hours. He felt utterly powerless. It recalled the early part of the Horcrux hunt, when they had no idea what to do, or when Ginny had disappeared into the Chamber and they had all feared her dead. Please, Ginny, don’t be dead.

He wanted to go to her, but he knew he couldn’t. He couldn’t leave his assignment, and he would have a hard time arranging transportation to Romania even with his name and credentials. Also, he knew that her family was there, and (the thought caused his stomach to clench painfully) her boyfriend. He was sure she was getting the finest care, and for all he knew, his presence would make everyone uncomfortable.

But he hated being here, doing nothing. After being asked if he was lost and did he need help finding an office for the third time, he left the Ministry and took to the streets of New York, just walking, and thinking, and hoping, hoping, hoping that Ginny would be alright. That she would wake up, and that he would have a chance to see her again. Please, Ginny, don’t be dead.

Returning to his office in the late afternoon, he was pleased to hear from Brian that indeed, Chaser Weasley had regained consciousness, and it seemed she would make a full recovery. The match had ended; Bulgaria had won and would advance to the finals.

Harry decided that the best thing he could do was finish his assignment a few days early and wait for Ginny to return to England. He threw himself into his work, finally taking a look at some of the banking records. He kept coming across the initials S.M. He thought of Scott Morgan, who was after all originally from the States, but his record had been clean.

He went back through Robokov’s file and saw that he played for the Tutshill Tornados for a time before he was selected for Bulgaria. He had played against Ginny in a match just last season on the Harpies’ home pitch. Leafing through the file, he came across the initials S.M. again.

Six hours later, Harry had a solid theory and minimal evidence. He had done all he could from where he was; the rest of the information he needed was at the Ministry of Magic. He took ink and parchment and began the first of several letters. Once he had posted them via Owl Express, there was nothing he could do but wait for return owls.

To pass the time, Harry decided to write Ginny a get-well card. It was a lot harder to do than he thought. Figuring out what to say had been bad enough; it took him an hour and two trips to the library to get the card to sing, and even then it was a bit off key. At least she’ll think it’s funny, he mused as he put it in the envelope. He had renewed respect for her 12 year old self. Merlin, he
missed her. He’d spent so much time lately pretending she didn’t exist that he’d forgotten just how much.

“Spend all night here?” Audrey said.

Harry lifted his head off the desk and tried surreptitiously to wipe the drool from his mouth. Running a hand through his hair, he answered her.

“Uh, yeah. Trying to finish up, you know.”

“Well, then you deserve tonight off. Why don’t you come over and I’ll make you something special.”

“No. Look, Audrey....”

Audrey held up her hand. “If there’s one thing I know, it’s that tone of voice. You don’t have to try to spare my feelings. It’s over, isn’t it?”

Harry nodded. “You’re a really –“

“Oh, don’t,” she said matter-of-factly. “We both knew this was just for fun.” She looked at him curiously as if trying to decide which of several questions she wanted to ask.

“Is it someone else?”

You, Harry thought. Ginny is the Someone, and you are the Someone Else.

The line between knowing and not knowing is very fine indeed. In that moment, with sudden and complete clarity, he knew, knew, that he wanted to marry Ginny. That whatever juvenile fears and apprehensions he had were gone; he simply did not want to exist on the same planet that she did and not be with her. It was a great revelation, and he wanted to tell Audrey, but he thought he should tell Ginny first.

“Not exactly, but I do have to get back,” was all he could say.

She looked at him thoughtfully and then gave him a knowing smile. "She doesn't know yet, does she?"

He didn't answer, but stood and walked around to the front of his desk.

"She's a lucky witch," Audrey said.

"You really are amazing," said Harry, and he meant it.

August 23, 2003, 4:30 pm

Luna answered the door.

“Hey, Luna. Is Ginny here? No one was at the Burrow so I thought I’d try here.”

“Hello, Harry. I don’t think so, I haven’t been here that long myself. Would you like some Gurdyroot tea? Then we can chat if you like.”

“Uh, no thanks. I don’t care for it much.”

“Oh. How about raspberry, then?” Harry agreed, and Luna stepped rather ethereally into the
kitchen.

While Luna was busy, he looked around the flat. It appeared as if the several open trunks he saw had exploded their contents into the room. A vast assortment of shells, bones, horns, plants, seeds and notebooks surrounded the chair where Luna had been sitting. He saw a rather large stack of Owl Post, and Auror instincts taking over, he thumbed through it. His breath caught when he saw Ginny’s handwriting on a postcard from Romania, dated before the accident.

**Having fun. Lots to tell. Love, Ginny**

He couldn’t understand why she wasn’t back yet. The World Cup had ended days ago. Luna returned with the tea, and he closed a trunk and sat on it. She talked for a long time about her expedition and some of the more interesting things she’d found, but Harry really wasn’t listening.

“Huh?” he said when he heard a question in her tone.

“I asked if you wanted to have sex with me,” she replied very serenely.

Harry was flummoxed; this was unusual even for Luna. The weird thing was that Luna was actually the only other witch Harry had thought about having sex with. Until recently, at least.

Ginny knew this; she had asked him once, “Who would you have sex with if we weren’t together?” Luna had been the only person he had been able to think of.

Ginny had laughed hysterically.

“What’s so funny?” he had wanted to know.

“Me, too!” was all Ginny could get out before dissolving again into a fit of giggles.

Harry peered at Luna. “Uh, why did you ask me that?”

“You just seem so sad. I thought it might cheer you up.”

“Luna, you’re a good friend, and it’s nice of you to offer, but you don’t have to do that just to cheer me up.”

“That’s what Ginny said too.”

Now Harry was fully interested in the conversation.

“You offered to have sex with Ginny?”

“Yes. She was sad too.”

“When was that?”

“Right after she asked you to marry her. She was crying all the time, and I tried to rub her back and tell her things would be okay, but I don’t think it helped. And then I said ‘Well, maybe this will help.’ and I kissed her and told her that I loved her.”

“And then what?” Harry found himself asking.

“Well, we kept kissing and touching and after a bit we took our clothes off and kissed and touched some more, and she showed me where she likes to be touched so that I could make her come, and she did, and then she said ‘Thank you’ but she was still crying. So I offered to marry her – it’s legal
in some countries, you know – and she cried more. I don’t think I cheered her up at all.”

“Just the one time?” Harry had to know.

“Oh. No. It happened a few times, and she made me show her what to do so that I could come too.”

He was having a difficult time processing the information as fast as Luna was supplying it. When his brain had caught up, he had a striking thought.

“So, are you saying that you and Ginny are...girlfriends? And she really isn’t dating Scott?”

“I don’t know who Scott is. Ginny and I certainly are girlfriends, but we aren’t lovers anymore, if that’s what you mean.”

“You’re not?”

“No. After a few times, Ginny said that I shouldn’t be having sex with her just to cheer her up, and that she loved me a lot, but if she wanted to marry a wizard, she needed to start meeting some worth marrying. I left on expedition pretty soon after that.”

Harry sat, lost in thought, remembering all that had happened to him, and to Ginny, since Luna had been gone.

"Harry?" Luna's voice brought him back to the present.

"Hmm?"

"I know it's not really any of my business, but you and Ginny both seemed a lot happier when you were together. I don't really understand why you don't want to marry her. She's lovely...in lots of ways."

Harry smiled, a little regretfully. "Yes, she is." He wanted to tell Luna that he knew he'd been a complete arse, that he did want to marry Ginny, but he was now so thoroughly depressed about it that he didn't really want to talk to anyone. Except Ginny. He wanted to talk to her and smell her and laugh with her, and take her to bed and have her ask him to fuck her in the arse. Knowing that he’d likely ruined any chance he had now that she was with Scott, and knowing that he wasn't really fit company for anyone, he finished his tea and got up to leave. Being in Ginny's flat, even surrounded by Luna's treasures, was only making things worse.

Luna saw him to the door.

"It'll be alright, Harry," she said in her very calm Luna voice, eyes wide as ever. "The Crumple-Horned Snorkacks will be mating soon."

August 25, 2003, 2:25 pm

Two days later, Harry was sitting at his own desk in the Auror offices. He had finished up the last of the paperwork from his work in the States, and he would be in meetings with the Wizengamot all afternoon. His theory had been correct. Sean Murdoch, the Assistant Manager at the Stadium where the Harpies played, had been involved in numerous illegal Quidditch ticket price-fixing schemes. Many of the profits had been funneled to Dark Arts groups and individuals in various countries, including the United States. As a result of these schemes, Murdoch and many others stood to make a lot of money if Bulgaria advanced to the finals.
During his investigation, Harry discovered that Murdoch had paid Sergei Robokov a hundred thousand Galleons to injure Ginny at the World Cup. Harry suspected that the reason Ginny had been targeted was because of Murdoch’s humiliation after his date with Ginny in May, but he didn’t want it to be public knowledge. Harry had taken the time to do all the paperwork by hand rather than using a Veritaquill because he didn’t want that incident to be part of the official record.

It would take awhile, but Robokov, Murdoch, and several others would likely end up in prison. Because Bulgaria had lost the final match, France had been allowed to keep its World Cup title, but there was talk that another Quidditch World Cup might be held the following year.

Harry returned from one of his afternoon meetings to find a pair of Omnioculars on his desk and Ron sitting at his own desk directly across from him.

Harry stared down at the Omnioculars. He knew without asking that if he looked in them, it would be the England vs. Bulgaria match. He could watch Ginny getting knocked off her broom if he wanted to, but he didn’t. He was a little puzzled as to why Ron had brought them.

As if reading his mind, Ron said, “I wasn’t sure if you’d want to see or not. It’s hard to watch.”

“But,” he continued, “when she’s on the ground, just before she loses consciousness, you can tell that she is saying your name.”

Harry felt a chill at the words and reminded himself that Ginny was fine. Then he smiled. There was hope after all. “Thanks, Ron.”

“No problem, mate. Give them back when you’re done.”

“How – how is she?”

“Oh. Fine. Annoying as ever. You’d never know anything happened. She got your card.”

“Yeah?”

“We all thought it was hysterical, and she did too at first, but then she closed it and put it under the fruit bowl.”

He and Ron talked like the friends they were, catching up after not seeing each other for weeks. It was Ron who delivered the unhappy news that Ginny was not returning immediately to England. She was staying a little longer with Charlie (and Scott) at the dragon sanctuary, and then going directly to St. Kitts for the team’s post-Cup celebration and retreat. She wasn’t expected back until early September.

Fortunately, Harry had just cracked a major case and could have his pick of assignments; his boss merely raised an eyebrow when he asked to go St. Kitts as part of the security detail.
Chapter 5

Author's notes:

Harry and Ginny have a conversation - or two.

Once more, I'd like to extend thanks to Antosha for the beta work, to Shocolate for the Brit-pick and to you for reading. Hope you enjoy the end!

September 1, 2003, 10:00 pm

Harry had been at his post, concealed by the Invisibility Cloak, since his encounter with Ginny. His post was fortunately not in the main banquet hall; the few times he glanced in there, he'd been rewarded with views of Ginny talking animatedly with the people at her table and later, after the band started playing, views of her dancing with Scott.

He decided that coming here was a foolish move; any scenario that involved him and Ginny and Scott couldn't end well. He had been so eager to find her and tell her he was ready to marry her that he hadn't really thought much about the consequences. Besides, Quidditch detail was notoriously boring, and many of the players were difficult to get along with. Any Auror with seniority avoided it like the plague. Harry should have just asked for a holiday instead.

On the other hand, one of the nice things about being an Auror was that you had access to information. Thus it was that Harry knew that Scott Morgan had agreed to give an interview to the American press at 10 pm.

Harry removed his Cloak when he saw Hennessey coming and set out to find Ginny. It wasn’t difficult. She was sitting in a chair at the side of the room, talking with some of her teammates.

He gave her a quick, formal bow. “Will you dance with me, Ginny?”

Ginny looked at him skeptically. Her brows slowly furrowed.

“What’s Dumbledore’s favorite color?”

Harry almost laughed; they hadn’t used security questions in years, but he supposed she was right to be suspicious given her recent attack.

“Pine fresh.”

She regarded him for a moment, deciding.

“It’s me, Ginny.”

“My Har- Harry doesn’t dance,” she said flatly.

He pulled gently on one arm. Looking at his tie, she seemed reassured, and she followed him onto the marble floor. It was a traditional wizarding dance. Harry and Ginny stood facing each other palm to palm as the music started.

“What are you doing here?” she asked as they sashayed along the floor.
“I’m on Quidditch detail. On my break at the moment.” They faced away from each other and traced a semi-circle in opposite directions to meet again and clasp hands.

“*Quidditch detail*? Since when?”

“Since about ten hours ago. I ...had some stuff to do after my last assignment and just got in this morning.”

"Harry, you’re up for Senior Auror next promotion. You don’t *do* Quidditch detail.”

“Well,” he said as he twirled her under his arm and then swung her around, “staffing was light after the World Cup. Lots of people wanted time off. So I volunteered.” This was mostly true.

They broke apart for a series of steps with a different partner. When they were facing each other again, she asked, “Where did you learn to dance?”

“In the States.” The dance was repeating, and they were sashaying again.

“Where you sent the card from?”

He nodded.

“Someone taught you well.” No, not someone, Harry thought.

“Well, I don't like watching you dance with other blokes.”

She cocked her head at this, but didn’t say anything more.

When the music changed to a slow song, he gathered her close to him.

“Just one more?”

“Harry, I really don’t think –“

“Please?” He kept one hand on her waist, her right hand in his left.

“Al-alright.”

They moved, relaxing against each other just a bit, when she said, “I should thank you.”

He hadn’t expected that.

“For not putting what happened with Sean in the report.”

He arched an eyebrow at her, and kept moving. His heart was beating much louder than he thought was necessary.

“Ron sent me his copy as soon as he got it. I read the whole thing.”

So she knew. “You’re welcome.”

The music surrounded them, but he barely noticed. Harry curled her outstretched hand to his chest, closed his eyes, and breathed. She smiled, a little, and put her head on his shoulder. As they stood there, swaying gently, he pressed her closer, and kissed her temple, and Harry thought that maybe, just maybe things would be okay.

“Excuse me.” The harsh American accent and clipped manner startled them both. “That’s my
girlfriend you’re dancing with.”

They each took a step back as Ginny spluttered hurried introductions. “I know who you are,” Scott said to Harry with a thoroughly unfriendly handshake.

“Now, if you don’t mind, Ginny and I need to go to the atrium for some pictures.” And he whisked her away. Harry could hardly blame him; if the situation were reversed, he’d have punched Scott.

**September 2, 2003, 3:15 am**

Harry was sleeping on one of the camp beds at headquarters when he woke to the sound of raised voices in the other room.

“Now tell me, Hennessey, when did you last see her?”

Harry was instantly alert.

“At two a.m. sir. I did a sweep and everything was fine. But when I was doing the three o’clock sweep, Chaser Weasley was not in her room.”

Anderson lowered his voice. “Are you absolutely sure she didn’t go with Morgan?”

"Yes, sir. He took an Emergency Portkey back to the States two hours ago, but she wasn’t with him.”

Harry was already getting dressed; he threw on some khaki trousers and a t-shirt. He took his shoes into the other room and started to put them on.

“I’ll go,” he said to Anderson.

“But you’re not even on duty.”

“It’s okay. I can find her.” He levitated the magic carpet and headed out.

**September 2, 2003, 3:43 am**

“I know you’re there, Harry.”

Hovering just a couple of feet above ground, Harry stepped off of the magic carpet, tapping his wand on his head as he did so. The Disillusionment charm broken, he emerged from the shadows behind Ginny. She was near the water, bare toes digging into the sand. Her arms were folded in front of her as if embracing herself but wishing it were someone else. The luminous moon sent silver streaks through her hair.

She did not move as Harry walked toward her, and he took this as a good sign.

*Now or never.*

He stepped closer to her, could feel warmth radiating from her and smell her hair. Gathering courage, he wrapped his arms around her waist.

She tensed briefly, and then released an unsuccessfully stifled sob. Tenderly, Harry brushed her hair to one side and set his chin on her newly bare shoulder as he watched a solitary tear track down her cheek.
“I – I just didn’t think it would be this hard,” she bit out in short gasps. “I m-miss you so much.” Harry knew she was trying desperately not to cry.

“Some of my friends tell me I’m being stupid. If we don’t want the same things, there’s no point in wasting my time pining over you.” She paused, swiping the tear away. “Hermione said that these things take time. That we were together for a long time, and I can’t expect to get over you so fast.

“And Luna says that the Crumple-Horned Snorkacks mate in September.” She clearly meant it to be funny, but a fresh tear surfaced.

“Who do you think is right?” Harry asked.

“I’m sure Luna is right – I just don’t know what it means.”

“Ginny –”

“No, don’t. The last thing I need is your pity. Or your guilt. It’s not your fault. You don’t want to get married, and I did, or do, so I guess that means we can’t be together.

“The trouble is,” she continued, “I thought I just wanted to be married. Start a family. Turns out, I just wanted to be married to you. Have children with you.”

For the first time, the mention of children, his future children, did not make Harry sick or panicked. This time, it gave him goosebumps.

Ginny noticed, but didn’t understand. “Are you cold?”

Harry couldn’t seem to find his voice, so he just shook his head.

“Scott asked me to go to America with him. For the off season. Meet his family and travel around.”

“That,” Harry’s voice sounded small and very far away to his own ears, “sounds... nice. You’ve never been, have you?”

“You’d think, huh? If he’d asked yesterday, I’d have said yes in a heartbeat. But, after tonight...”

“What did you say?”

“Well,” she started, and then, to Harry’s surprise, she laughed.

“I didn’t say no, but I didn’t say yes either.” She paused, serious again. “I should have gone, though. It’s not like you’re going to change your mind.”

“Actually, I think I have. That’s what I came to tell you. That’s why I’m on Quidditch detail.”

“What?” Ginny broke free and turned to face him, shocked. “What do you mean?”

“Damn. I didn’t want it to be like this, Ginny. I mean, you’re with someone, and I don’t even have a ring, for Merlin’s sake.”

"Not exactly," she said, somewhat subdued. "Scott... left." She wrinkled her nose as if recalling something unpleasant but then refocused her attention on him. "What are you talking about? Didn't want what to be like this?" She looked quite bewildered.

“Ginny, I love you. I never stopped. I’ve been a right prat, and I’m not proud of it. But – I want you. Just you. Always. I’d rather be married to you than not married to anyone else.”
Ginny’s face was a cloud of confusion and doubt.

“Shit, that didn’t come out right, either. Oh, damn. Look, when we’re both back in London, will you come over and we can talk? And I promise the next time I try this, it will be a proper proposal and everything.”

“Proposal? Harry, you’re mental. Don’t do this to me!” She had turned, and was striding up the beach away from him. Her long hair, freed from its constraints of earlier in the evening, was billowing behind her.

“No, Ginny! Stop!” He ran past her and turned toward her, his face pleading. She turned and started back in the direction she had come from. He caught up to her again and grabbed her wrists this time. “Ginny, please! Just listen to me, okay?”

“Listen to you?” she shrieked. "I hear nothing, nothing, from you for three bloody months except a card, and now you want me to listen? I bloody well won't!” She tried wrenching her wrists away, but he held tight. A brief struggle ensued, during which she pounded on his chest and called him names he didn’t know she knew and finally collapsed, sobbing, in the sand.

“I’m sorry,” he said, sitting beside her, panting with exertion. Merlin, she was strong. He was careful not to touch her. “This wasn’t how I had it pictured. When I came here, to the island, I just wanted you to know that I still love you and that I want to be with you – to - to marry you. If it’s not too late.”

He offered her a conjured tissue, which she pointedly ignored and wiped her face with the hem of her nightgown.

She had stopped crying and was sitting with her arms around her knees, staring out into the surf. She hissed at him, “How do you know you won’t change your mind again? Panic and leave me at the altar?”

“Well, first off, I wouldn’t do that because you have five brothers that would emasculate me. Or hold me while you did.” She looked unconvinced. He knew she was angry, and probably bitter too, with good reason. He took a deep breath and tried again.

“Ginny, this is maybe not the best place to try to work things out. Will you just owl me when you get home and then we can talk? I’ll even cook for you.” He tried to smile, but this was not going well at all.

She was quiet for a long time. Harry was duty-bound not to leave her there, but she obviously was not enjoying his company. He wondered if it was wise to say anything else.

When she spoke again, her voice was hoarse. “Just one thing. Are you really serious?”

Harry stood slowly and then squatted down in front of her. He brushed her hair from her face so he could look her directly in the eye.

“Yes, Ginny. I am serious. And I’m sure. More sure than I’ve ever been about anything.”

A brief nod was the only acknowledgement he got, but it was enough for now.

“Come on, I’ll take you back to the hotel. You must be getting cold.”

He held a hand out to help her up; she took it and launched herself into his arms. She kissed him then, firm and wet and sloppy, as if their physical relationship was starting from the beginning.
Harry kissed her back, and then took the next step, swirling his tongue along her ear lobe and nibbling just above her collarbone. His hands began to roam. She was wearing a nightgown, but it hardly mattered; he could feel every curve. He ran a thumb eagerly across the swell of one breast, and her nipple reached out to greet him.

After a long while, he managed to pull back from her, just a little, and whisper, “Ginny, wait. We don’t have to do this.”

Her hand, which was stroking his erection through his trousers, froze in place. She was panting heavily, and he could barely make out her words. “Don’t have to do what, Harry?”

“This. Here. Now. I show up and turn your life upside down; the least I could do is find you a bed.”

“Shut up, Harry. Just shut up.” Suddenly, he felt one of her legs cupping his arse with her calf, quite a feat considering their height difference, and she began to grind against him. “I’ve waited for you to get your head out of your arse twice now, Potter, and if you really meant what you said, then we have time for anything you want to do. But right now, I just want to shag you ‘til you can’t see straight.”

She jumped a little, and then lifted the other leg, and Harry had no choice but to grab her arse with both hands. Not expecting the sudden weight of her, he stumbled a bit, and took a few steps forward. He kept going, and soon, his knees bumped into the magic carpet, still hovering a few feet in the air.

He dropped her rather unceremoniously in the middle. Arms firmly clasped around his neck, she pulled him down with her. Planting a few fleeting kisses on his chest and belly, she worked quickly to get his pants off and soon set her mouth on his cock as if she were a starving woman, and this the only sustenance she had had in weeks. She sucked and licked and savored him with an enthusiasm he couldn’t ever recall her having for this before. His body responded, and he drove himself into her mouth until he had to stop or come.

Reluctantly lifting her head from his lap, he pushed gently on her shoulders until she was lying down and just looked at her for a moment, his head suspended between her thighs. Ginny flooded his senses; he could see the sheen glistening off of her swollen folds against a backdrop of ginger curls, could smell her unique scent, a bit flowery but mixed with the saline tang of sweat and arousal, could hear her mewling noises of desire and encouragement. He flicked his tongue across her clit and tasted the skin that yearned for him, a taste he now knew was unlike any other woman’s, and he could feel her hands clutching fistfuls of his hair as she clenched forcefully around his tongue and fingers seven, eight, nine times and called his name over and over.

Time slowed for a bit. He leaned a cheek against one thigh and rested a hand on the other thigh. Reaching down, she entwined her fingers with his.

He moved up and looked at her, her brown eyes alight with pleasure. He leaned his forehead against hers. “I want –“ he began, but Ginny raised her chin and bit his lip rather harder than necessary.

“I told you to shut up.” And suddenly it didn’t matter what he wanted because what she wanted, clearly, was for him to be inside her. They stopped talking and spoke only in low moans and throaty grunts and incoherent whispers accented by the soft slapping of skin against skin.

Later
The dark indigo of night was fading imperceptibly into the deep blue just before dawn, and Harry was spooned behind Ginny with his head propped up on an elbow. Encased in the magical charge of the Silencing and Cushioning and Heating charms he’d put on the on the carpet, it was hard for him to sleep. He was reacquainting himself with the freckles on her right shoulder when he noticed the change in her breathing. She pushed back against him gently; he put an arm around her waist and squeezed back.

The sky was lighter now, and the first faint pink rays of sun were appearing above the horizon.

“Why?” she asked.

“I was afraid,” he replied, knowing what the real question was. “I’ve loved you for ages, but forever is a long time.” He sighed and licked his lips. “I was afraid that I wouldn’t be a good husband. Afraid that my warped childhood would make it too hard to have a really normal life.” He told her the truth, finally. She put a hand on top of his, but didn’t say anything.

“But I had some time to think about it, and to see what life was like without you. And I realized two things. The first was that I can be without you, but I don’t want to be.”

She turned now and was facing him with her own head propped on an elbow. Clasping hands, they stared at each other for a long time. He ran his thumb along her wrist.

“Don’t shut up now,” she whispered.

He smiled. “And the second bit was that the most important thing about having a good marriage is picking the right person.”

She rewarded him with a radiant smile and an intimate kiss. He opened his eyes just in time to see the sun peek over the horizon, shooting wild orange rays behind the clouds. "Look," he said. He rolled her gently back onto her side, back against his chest, and they watched the glorious dawn of a new day.

The End

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