Two out of Three

by wynnebat

Summary

A few years after the war, Harry thinks he has the ideal life. He's working his way up to his ideal job, he's still together with his Hogwarts sweetheart, he's got a couple of great friends, and he's love potioned to the gills.

Notes

This story was originally posted as a part of Keira Marcos' Rough Trade challenge (July 2014, Boot Camp II: Harry Potter), titled The Winter Courtship. This new version is edited, longer, and with twice as many manly hugs. Its title comes from Meat Loaf's Two Out Of Three Ain't Bad.

See the end of the work for more notes.

And all I can do is keep on telling you
   I want you
   I need you
But there ain't no way I'm ever gonna love you
   Now don't be sad
'Cause two out of three ain't bad
Now don't be sad
'Cause two out of three ain't bad

- Two out of Three, Meat Loaf

"Welcome you two! It's been too long," Molly Weasley cried as she threw open the front door of the Burrow. She looked well, much better than she had last week, when half the Weasleys had been sick with wizard's flu and their usual Saturday dinner had been canceled. Harry was glad to see her, glad to hear the sound of the rest of the Weasley bunch inside the house. It had really been too long.

"It really has. Hullo, Molly." He hugged Ginny closer as they entered the house and gave Molly a one-armed squeeze. "You look great."

"Flatterer," she replied. "I know I still look a little pale. I blame you, honey." She waved a finger at Ginny, who scowled good-naturedly.

"Sorry! But I didn't realize I had the flu until Harry and I were on our way home," Ginny replied. "Don't blame me for enjoying my holiday so much that I picked up a small souvenir!"

"Er, are you sure you want me here?" Harry cut in, knowing what Molly's answer would be but still wanting to make sure.

Molly turned back to Harry, giving him a familiar glare, the one she always gave her kids when they weren't using enough of their brains. "Don't even start on that, love. I'll tell you the same thing I told Ron. You're family. I always want you here.

"Someone mention me?" asked Ron, who'd poked his head around into the small entrance space. "Oh, hey Harry, Ginny. And what's that about holidays? I thought it was just an away game?"

Harry squeezed through the doorway, letting go of Ginny to talk to Ron. He hadn't properly talked to his best mate in much too long; they were apprenticed under different people in their Auror training, and when they saw each other during spell practice, most of what they said to each other were incantations. Their intense Auror training only left time for them to fall into beds at the ends of each day. Harry was just glad Ginny put up with it all instead of too getting angry about how little time he had to give her. It was just one of the many little things he loved about her.

"We picked the wrong career, mate," Harry said, as they both entered the dining room while Molly and Ginny followed behind, talking quietly. He shook his head in mock sadness and said a quick hello to the others at the table: Bill, Fleur, Audrey, George. "Gin's able to go around the world for free as long as she plays a few games of Quidditch, George—" he waved at George, who was sitting at the other end of the table and had perked up at the sound of his name "—gets to create fun things, Percy switched to the potion-making business, and gets to blow stuff up—" though Harry didn't see Percy at the moment, he was sure the man was in the kitchen with Arthur, helping with the food "—it's only you and me who are stuck keeping people from being idiots."

As they squeezed into the small dining area, Harry pulled out a chair for Ginny, then one next to hers for himself. Ron sat down on his other side. Harry collapsed into his chair with a soft thump, happy to be at the Weasleys' but mostly just exhausted. Being an Auror trainee was the toughest thing he'd ever tried, and that was after spending the year he was seventeen constantly terrified for his life.

Ron grinned. "Me, you, and Hermione—she's one of the poor office monkeys, too. And Harry, you
know we also have the honor of doing our superiors' paperwork and picking up the drunk and disorderedly from around the Diagon Alley bars." Harry made a face, his opinion about the grunt work he and Ron did a widely known and sympathized fact.

Then he looked around, belatedly realizing his other best friend was nowhere to be found. "Where is Hermione, by the way?"

"Still at work, unfortunately for her. She's pretty much living there. The merpeople scandal still hasn't been resolved."

Harry made a mental note to drop by her office when he had the time; if the scandal still wasn't over, the Auror department probably needed to get involved. Not to mention, he missed spending time with her. "Sorry to hear that. Say hello and good luck from me when you see her, okay?" With that, Harry joined the others in piling a plate with Molly's amazing cooking. Tonight, the dining room table creaked under the weight of shepherds' pies, mashed potatoes, and assorted vegetable dishes.

"Will do," Ron replied.

"Oh, and did you tell your family about the, um—" Harry pointed awkwardly at his head, then at Ron's. Everyone had settled in as Ron and Harry caught up, and now was a good time to reveal it.

Ron shook his head. "Haven't had the chance. I got here just before you did." Ron put his drink down and stood up to get the attention of the small crowd of people in the room. "Mum, Dad, everyone else, would you mind if I make an announcement?"

"Go on, dear. Is it about you and Hermione?" Molly asked.

Ron blushed just a little. "No, Mum. If it were that, don't you think she'd be here with me?"

"Trouble in paradise already?" George asked.

Ron shot him the stink eye, while Harry grinned, knowing about the ring Ron had taken to carrying around with him the past month.

"No. I just wanted to say that Harry and I, and all the current Aurors, are undergoing Legilimency and Occlumency training right now. We're both potioned up in order to get access to that part of our brains easier, and will be for the rest of the month. The problem is, they make it easy to accidentally read someone's mind. So don't think about anything too graphic while making contact with us, okay?" Once they got off the potion, most people's Legilimency skills would fade, since most didn't have the natural aptitude for it. But the higher ups were hoping to get at least one or two Legilimencers for the department, which meant everyone had to at least try it out. Harry, for one, knew he had absolutely no aptitude for the mind arts, but Ron was taking to it like a hippogriff to the air.

"So if I were to think about the wonderful weekend Harry and I had," Ginny teased.

Ron blanched. "Agh, no, please."

"That said," Harry added. "If anyone's uncomfortable with it, I'll be happy to not come to future gatherings for a while. Your thoughts should be private."

"Don't be silly," Fleur said, her husband chiming in with, "It's fine with me." The others at the table added their agreements, and Ron sat back down. The conversation soon switched to more comfortable topics, traveling along the familiar lines of the general incompetency of the ministry, Celestia Warbeck's new too-young boyfriend (and Molly's very firmly in denial about her heroine's
spiraling career), Bill and Fleur's vague thoughts about moving to France, Audrey's knitwear shop, Arthur's new gossipy coworkers, George's (astonishing and terrible, according to Molly and Arthur) lack romance in his life, and the fact that Percy's teenage essays on cauldron thickness had actually come in handy.

Two hours in, Harry's head began to pound, and when Molly said something about leaving her reading glasses in the kitchen as she squinted at Fleur's new manuscript, Harry said "I'll get them," getting up before Molly could pull out her seat.

She smiled gratefully at him. "Thank you, dear."

The kitchen was small and narrow, hidden from the rest of the house by its awkward architecture. It looked like it had been added on at the last minute, and protruded from the main house more than slightly. For all Harry knew, maybe it had. It did provide a valuable support for the upper stories, which, Harry knew from Arthur's anecdotes about growing up in the Burrow, actually had been constructed room by room as the family grew in members. "It's all completely safe, of course," Arthur had finished, and went on to show Harry the new model of the Weasleys' flying car, this one a newer Ford model.

For the moment, it was a safe haven from the rest of the house, and Harry leaned against the farthest wall of the kitchen, letting his mind relax for just a couple moments. It had been a busy week, and he'd been working overtime today before going to dinner. As much as he loved the Weasleys, he was ready to fall into the nearest bed and sleep off the week.

But before long, thoughts of his girlfriend crept in, weaving themselves through the tiredness. Ginny wouldn't want to leave until the very end of the night, and Harry would never deny her time with her family. And if he went home alone, it would only result in an argument and a miserable start to a week. He really didn't have the energy for an argument; he had to go into work in nine hours. Neither did he relish the thought of Ginny being less than happy with him; his beloved had a temper and the patience of a Kneazle.

Sometimes, he wondered if it was a Potter quirk, this inability to say no to the person he loved. Or if it was just a regular symptom of love. But he supposed it didn't matter.

Harry pushed himself off the cupboard, ready to get back to Ginny, when George entered the kitchen, closing the door behind himself.

"Did you find them?" George asked, coming to stand next to Harry. He leaned against the tabletop, looping his hands through his belt, slouching enough that he and Harry were for once the same height.

Harry shook his head and settled back into his little nook. As desperately as he suddenly needed to see Ginny, she could wait a few minutes. He hadn't talked to George since two Sundays ago, when he'd came to help George with the shop.

"No, but I haven't really looked. I just came to close my eyes for a second," he told his friend with a smile. He couldn't help it; there was something about George that always put Harry in a good mood. Ginny had even jokingly asked if there was something she should be jealous about a few times.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes, I'm fine. It's just…"
"You're overworked," George said with a questing lilt. Harry thought back to when the Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes store was still in its infancy, when the twins wore constant harried expressions, and thought that George could definitely empathize.

"I was assigned to assist the Head Auror," Harry replied. "It's supposed to be an honor, my arse. I'm working twice as hard as the others and the pay is still crap. Not to mention, I've got the Legilimency potion in my veins, and it itches like crazy." He went on, telling George about his boss and Auror mates and absolute lack of time for anything. Harry told himself that he'd stop talking as soon as George started to look like he wasn't interested in the minute details of Harry's life, but George continued listening ardently, and asked a couple questions to move things along. If Harry had to name one thing he liked most about George, it was that he always treated Harry like there was no one else he'd rather be spending time with. But as for spending time..."I'm not even going to be able to make it to the shop tomorrow. Sorry."

It was a habit they'd gotten into two years ago, a week after Fred's death. Every day of the week, one of the Weasleys had come to help George out. Later, George hired Verity and two more helpers full time during the week, and the rest of the Weasleys weren't really needed. But Harry still came on Sundays, despite knowing George didn't need his help. It was relaxing work, and potion-making with a Weasley twin was loads of fun. But mostly, he stayed because he wanted to be there, and George wanted the same. He'd come to like George, and George him.

"That's fine. You know I can survive without you, right?"

Harry bumped his shoulder against George's. "You know I want to be there, right? You're my mate. My best mate, if you don't count Ron and Hermione."

"Thanks, Harry," George said, the cadence of his voice off by a tad.

Harry belatedly realized that their shoulders were still touching; he'd forgotten to move back, and George was too polite to tell him. "And Ron and Hermione don't count anyway," he said, diffusing the awkwardness. "Ron, the git, beat my hex shooting record the other day and I haven't seen Hermione in ages, since she took that job in the legal department."

"You could—"

"If you suggest giving my Sundays up, I'm going to suggest dunking your head in whatever potion you're currently working on."

George mimed zipping his lips and throwing away the key. Harry pretended to catch it and pocket it. They grinned at each other like loons, until Harry eventually asked, "How've you been?"

"Hectic, as usual. The new Skeeving Snackboxes line is selling well, but I've caught five kids trying to eat them while in the store. Five. When did I sign up to make sure people didn't do anything stupid around me? It's like they're trying to give me grey hairs. They're marketed for eleven and up for good reason. Any younger and there's still the possibility—a small one, but it's there—of them reacting badly with the kids' magic." George ran his hand through his bright red hair, letting it fall back down in layers, the color catching in the light. "Not to mention the chameleon potion experiments are kicking my arse. I'm pretty sure it's impossible and that I should've scrapped the project last week. I'm slogging through the calculations through sheer stubbornness and denial."

"Do you need a hand?"

"Not your tired one," George said with a small laugh, and Harry pretended to glare at him. "I'll get it right. It's just going to take longer than I thought it would."
"Good luck," Harry said, and picked up the reading glasses that were a couple centimeters away from him. "I should probably get back to the table. Ginny's probably waiting for me." At the mention of her, his heart began to feel too big for his chest, his mind focusing on her completely. For a moment, Harry wondered what it could be like, not being in love with someone who took up so much of his attention. Boring, probably. Amazing, maybe. But his mind raced away from the possibilities and back to his heart, which was firmly Ginny's.

Something changed in George's expression, and his face grew less happy, more closed off. Harry suddenly remembered that George was having terrible luck with dating.

"Yeah. But you love her, right?" George asked.

Was Harry going to get the big brother talk—again? He could stand it from George, since he never got around to giving him one in the first place, but Merlin, Harry didn't need the Weasley brothers telling him what not to do with their precious baby sister. He smiled, trying to put in all the love he felt for Ginny in his expression. "I do. She's the best woman in the world."

An odd thing happened then: George leaned in and hugged him, murmuring, "Take care of her." Harry froze out of instinct, none of his friendships being very tactile, then wrapped his arms around him and patted George's back. He wondered if George was okay, if the stress and lingering grief was getting to him. Maybe he needed ask Molly to check in on George more often.

Harry pulled back a little and looked up at George's face. George's eyes resembled Ginny's, but he had a few flecks of gold in them, and without meaning to, Harry felt himself get lost in the eyes in front of his, in the closest mind he could find.

George's mind was as colorful as his shop, bright and energetic, beautiful beyond anything Harry had ever seen. But as Harry tried to untangle himself from his friend's mind, he touched onto George's surface thoughts and feelings by accident, and almost gasped.

They were full of love. So loving, he could have thought he was in Ginny's mind had that love not had George's particular signature—and all the love was directed toward Harry. This was what his instructor had warned him about—the sensation of losing himself in someone's mind. Because Harry never wanted to leave. Even as he felt disgusted with himself for invading George's privacy so thoroughly, he felt his whole body warm at the sensation of George's love for him.

Then George blinked, and Harry was back in his own head, himself again but with the addition of the knowledge that George was completely and utterly in love with him. George, the playful, kind, heartbroken brother of the woman he loved. Under all the love Harry felt in George's mind was a constant heartache coming from the knowledge that Harry would never love George, not in the way he wished. On top of Fred's death, all this, too. How did he live with it?

"Harry!" Ginny's voice called, and Harry turned back to see her standing in the doorway to the kitchen, an annoyed expression on her face. "You've been here for ages. Is everything okay?"

Harry and George untangled themselves from their embrace, both blushing despite it being platonic.

"Everything's fine," George said. And there it was: the shadow over George's face, the way he frowned ever so minutely, then smiled as though nothing were wrong. Harry felt as though everything were wrong. When had George fallen in love with him? And why? Harry had never shown interest in George, or in any man for that matter. He'd been with Ginny for years. He loved her.

"Just some manly bonding," Harry added, grimacing at the questioning expression on Ginny's face.
Ginny's mouth tightened just a little, and Harry sighed inwardly. He strode over and pecked her cheek. "Sorry, love. I didn't mean to abandon you. Let's go back?" It wasn't really the mark of a good boyfriend, ignoring your girlfriend all week and then holing up with her older brother. Especially since Ginny's parents usually took the Saturday dinners as an opportunity to try to convince her to go into a career that wouldn't end up getting her injured on the Quidditch field.

He felt guilty, like he'd done something terribly wrong, even though he knew that taking a couple minutes for himself wasn't a bad thing. But it was probably bad to hole up with someone who was in love with him, Harry thought, his guilt piling up. He wondered if Ginny knew, if this was why she joked about jealousy and was always a bit too sharp with George. But that sounded self-centered even in his head. Ginny had nothing to worry about; Harry hadn't looked at another person, male or female, since sixth year. There was likely a better explanation.

"I didn't mean to break up your conversation," Ginny said, leading him out of the kitchen.

"It's alright," Harry replied, glancing back at George and mouthing, Sorry.

George just nodded and waved, his expression relaxed as ever. If Harry hadn't accidentally read his mind, he wouldn't have had a clue that George felt anything other than friendship for him. As Harry's eyes slid away from George, they caught a pang of sorrow from George's mind. It resonated with Harry's own sorrow, because he couldn't love his friend back, not when he had Ginny. He hoped that for George's sake, George fell out of love with him soon.

There was nothing to think about. George was in love with Harry; Harry wasn't in love with George. It was a simple problem, one Harry couldn't solve, couldn't fix, couldn't do anything about. And yet, without meaning to, Harry kept turning the revelation over and over in his mind that night and the next day. He thought about it when he and Ginny returned from the Burrow, ruminated over it that night when he couldn't sleep, pondered the matter while doing his superior's paperwork, and even continued to be distracted by it during training. Sometimes, his thoughts drifted towards Ginny, as if automatically, but they didn't stick. Ginny would always come first in his life; it was a given, a constant ever since he'd fallen for her. But George... He was everything Ginny was and wasn't, a good friend and a confidant and someone to lean on when he had to be brave and confident in front of Ginny.

The instructor didn't notice his distraction, thank Merlin, since Harry really didn't want to be yet another trainee lectured on propriety and responsibility in this instructor's booming tone. But Ron did. During their short break, in between shooting curses at each other, Ron pulled Harry aside, away from the other trainees.

"Harry… Look, I'm not good with this kind of emotional stuff, but you've been kind of weird today. Is it about Ginny?"

Harry shook his head. Ginny was the furthest thing from his mind right now. Despite his love for her, he'd always liked solving problems and taking action; now, even though it wasn't his business, he was trying to figure out what to do about George.

"Work? Mum? The Dursleys? The house?" With every shake of Harry's head, Ron's guesses got wilder. Finally, a serious expression crossed his face. "Is it… Look, is it about George?"

Harry jerked back. "You know about that?"

Ron looked awkward, embarrassed. It had been ages since Harry had seen that expression on his
face; he'd mellowed out a lot after the stresses of the war and fixing his friendship with Harry. But with that expression, Harry knew that Ron wasn't just talking about his friendship with George.

"Yeah, you know he and Fred were never all that subtle..." Ron trailed off.

"Does everyone know?"

"Pretty much. I think Percy might not, since he's really oblivious."

"Coming from you, that's pretty bad," Harry ribbed, but his heart wasn't in it. As much as he knew that he wasn't truly a Weasley, it hurt that the entire family had kept the secret from him. Had protected George, he realized, and wondered for the hundredth time what he was supposed to do. If anything. If he didn't just bury the knowledge in the back of his head and never acknowledge it ever again.

But that wasn't something Harry could do, and not just because he didn't want to revert to his fifth year self, oblivious to people's feelings. George was his friend, one he'd made much later than the rest of his group of friends. He'd been comfortable only having Ron and Hermione and Ginny (and, occasionally, Neville and Luna); he hadn't thought he needed another friend. But George filled a place in his heart that Harry hadn't realized he had.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Harry asked. It had been ages since he and Ron had kept secrets from each other, he'd thought.

Ron shrugged. "He didn't want you to know. Said you had enough on your plate, and with Ginny in the picture... It made more sense to not tell you than to tell you."

Harry sighed, thinking about how much like George that sounded. "I understand."

"Did he confess?" Ron asked.

"I read his mind by accident. I didn't mean to; it just happened."

"Bloody hell," Ron said. "I don't know what to say."

"It's fine," he said. "He's my friend, and family, too."

Ron patted him on the back. "Good. Otherwise, I'd have had to kick your arse, best friend or no."

"I would've deserved it."

"Yeah..." Ron trailed off. They stood for a moment, watching trainees start heading back into the training room, until Ron said, "But at least I didn't have to read Ginny's mind. Sheesh. She kept her head down the entire night. It was like a reminder from when she was in her first year, remember?"

"The bloody singing Valentine," Harry replied with a shudder. "I've been hoping I'd lost that memory somewhere down the line. Thanks."

"You're welcome. But what was up with that?"

Harry shrugged. "She's not comfortable with anyone in her mind, even me and you. After the whole —" he waved his hand "—diary thing, during second year, she doesn't want a reminder."

Ron sobered quickly, his mouth going into a frown. "Merlin, I forgot about that. Is she okay?"

"She's fine, I think. We haven't really been able to talk though, with her not wanting to meet my eyes
even though it doesn't happen every time. Last night aside, it's getting pretty rare now. The potion is fading." Harry sighed, then smiled slyly. "We haven't had sex in two weeks, it's terrible."

"Nope," Ron retorted, slamming his hands onto his ears and glaring at Harry. "No, no, no. There are things an older brother doesn't want to hear, ever, and that's number one on the list."

Soon, both of them had to get back to their posts, Harry with a lighter heart. It wasn't good news that the combined minds of the Weasley family hadn't been able to help George, but it was good that Harry could talk about George's feelings with Ron without feeling like he was breaking George's trust.

After finishing his part of the Head Auror's paperwork at half past seven, Harry left work and apparated to a common apparition point just inside Diagon Alley. He walked down a familiar path, one he usually took every Sunday morning. He ignored the way people stared once they realized who he was; at least they weren't asking for autographs and blessings, like some had in the early days after the war against Voldemort finally ended. He'd been worried that he'd have trouble being an Auror with the way everything he did and didn't do was always in the news, but in the two years since the final battle, his fame had abated somewhat. He wasn't being mobbed by well-wishers anymore and his walk down Diagon Alley today wouldn't be published in the Daily Prophet. And neither would George's feelings, if the news got out, even if Harry had to threaten the editor himself.

It was after store hours when Harry arrived at the Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. The storefront, usually obnoxiously bright during the day, was dimmed, the only light coming from a banner for glow in the dark robes, available with Kneazle, U-No-Poo, and weather-reflecting designs. Harry let himself in through a concealed entrance at the back of the building, letting a spell wash over him and identify him as one of the few people with an all-access pass to the building.

As he took a step through the doorway, his skin began to tingle, heat running through his body. When his foot touched the ground, he felt his body begin to shrink. It was similar to taking Polyjuice, this sudden dysphoria between what his body should be and what it suddenly was. Moments later, his body had shrunk to half its usual size. He almost tripped over his robes, which had remained the same.

"George, you arse!" he called out.

The door to the storage room was partly open, light shining through the crack. A moment later, George poked his head through and failed to suppress a laugh. Despite his annoyance, it felt good, right, to see George happy.

"Sorry. That was supposed to be for Percy when he comes by tomorrow morning," George explained, holding the door open as Harry entered the room and climbed onto a box to sit on, since standing talking to George when he was the size of a goblin would make their conversation even harder.

"No harm done... Right?" This was probably an experimental ward trap, and Harry didn't relish the thought of being two feet tall for the rest of his life.

"You'll be back to normal in five minutes," George replied, collapsing onto a box across from Harry.

"Busy day?"

"Verity took a sick day that might turn into a sick week. I had to cover for her... It was hell,
basically. But something tells me you're not here unannounced to ask about my day." George glanced down at Harry's robes, the Auror badge clearly defined since he hadn't bothered to stop by his flat first. Ginny was sure to be home, and if he saw her after a long day of missing her at work, Harry was sure he wouldn't have been able to leave the house. And this conversation wasn't something Harry could delay.

"This isn't official Auror business, is it?" George asked.

"No, no. It's… personal business." He tried to think of a good way to phrase what he needed to say, but it all tumbled out when he took in George's concerned expression and his warm brown eyes. "I read your mind last night by accident. I had no right to and it shouldn't have happened." He was utterly crap at Legilimency, like most of the other Aurors. George aside, the most personal thing he'd uncovered in the last month was that Hermione didn't like apple pie. He truly shouldn't have been able to get that deep into George's mind; a couple days ago, Harry would've said it couldn't have happened. But that had changed. "You're my friend and I—" care about you, appreciate you, need you; but there was something else, some feeling Harry had on the tip of his tongue but not in his head, right there, so close, so huge and ever present and "—I'm sorry."

It was so damn awful, that he'd violated his friend's privacy, his inner thoughts and feelings. It wasn't as bad as what Voldemort and Snape had done to Harry, but it was unacceptable in its own way.

George was silent for too long, his face stony, but eventually he sighed and said, "I knew you'd find out eventually. It's alright."

"It's really not—" Harry said, and then backtracked when he realized what he'd said. "I meant, that I read your mind. You obviously didn't want me to know. But it won't change our friendship now that I know," Harry promised.

"If it would've, if you were that type of man, I wouldn't have fallen in love with you," George replied, and Harry didn't know if that was a compliment or a criticism. If he'd been just a little different, if the Dursleys' fear of anyone different had sunk in, he would've saved George some of this pain. "Look, I don't expect anything to come of it. I hadn't ever expected you to feel the same… You've been in love with my little sister for ages."

A stab of guilt went through Harry. George deserved to be loved like Harry loved Ginny, like Molly loved Arthur. He didn't deserve this state of limbo, this one-sided love.

"And you've been in love with me," Harry said, hoarsely.

George shook his head. "Not as long as Ginny has… She loves like it's a marathon," he said, his mouth turning up in a half smile. Ginny had been in different kinds of love with Harry for most of her life, Harry knew, though he tried not to think about the way she'd loved him before she really got to know him.

But he and George both knew that in the end, it didn't matter which of the siblings had been in love with Harry longer; it mattered who Harry loved back, and that was blindingly obvious to all of them. Harry wanted to ask, why did you choose me? Why me, of all the wizards in England? Why someone who's so completely and utterly taken? But it would be cruel and pointless.

George must've seen the guilt on Harry's face, because he rolled his eyes and threw a box of Skeeving Snackboxes at Harry's head. As he caught them and threw them back, Harry realized he'd become his usual size sometime during their conversation.

"Stop that. We're still friends, and there isn't room in this friendship for pity. If you want to make it
"Agreed," Harry said. Standing up, he crossed the small space between him and George and hugged him close, resting his head on George's shoulder. Despite their thick robes, George felt warm and sturdy as he gripped Harry back. Harry hoped everything he couldn't express came across; everything that he didn't yet understand, like the way he was so sure that he wanted George in his life forever, despite feeling no romantic love for him. George held on too tightly, but Harry said nothing. "You just want me around as unpaid help, anyways," Harry said as he let go, glancing at the many half-unpacked, unorganized boxes in the storeroom.

"You've got it," George replied after a beat.

The air around them felt fragile, and Harry had no idea how to fix it. It faded as they let the conversation turn to less depressing topics, as Harry stuck around longer than he ever did, helping George and basking in their easy friendship. If not for the way he caught some of George's glances, it would've been like any other day. Their friendship hadn't changed. But something shifted nonetheless, because Harry wasn't oblivious to the way George looked at him any longer, and neither could he deny that a part of him didn't mind it at all.

They worked companionably into the night, side by side, aware of each other in ways they'd never been before. When he got home in the early hours of the morning and crawled into bed beside Ginny, Harry was convinced that despite everything, things would work out alright. Some way, he was going to keep both George and Ginny in his life.

Harry woke up gradually, before his alarm was set to go off; he felt a pair of eyes on him. Opening an eye, he saw Ginny watching him from the dresser. She was sitting on a high stool, her elbow on the dresser, leaning against the light wood. Both pieces of furniture, as well most of the other pieces in the flat, were from Grimmauld Place, thoroughly cleaned and lightened before moving. Neither Harry nor Ginny saw the point of buying new furniture when they had a house full of it, and Harry was idly putting all his extra money aside to buy her a ring.

Ginny seemed deep in thought, and Harry couldn't help but notice how utterly beautiful she looked. It was always like this with Ginny. When he wasn't around her, he could focus on other things, but when he was near her, his love for her overshadowed everything. He didn't think he could find a more perfect woman if he tried. When Ginny noticed he'd begun returning her gaze, she quickly looked away from him.

"You're up early," Harry said, trying to remember the last time Ginny had woken up before him when she didn't have practice. It didn't happen often, not since the first month they'd moved in together and had a honeymoon-like phase, with morning sex and breakfast in bed and a lot less arguing.

"I know. I'm surprised myself, since I fell asleep late after waiting for you last night," Ginny replied, swiveling on the stool and turning towards the mirror. This way, she could meet Harry's eyes as often as she wanted without worrying about him reading her mind. "You came home at three in the morning. You weren't even drunk." She picked up a brush and began fixing her hair for the day.

"I sent you a note," Harry replied.

"I know. Your note didn't say you'd be with George."

Harry shrugged, the blanket around him falling lower with the movement. "I said I'd be with a friend.
I say the same thing with Ron, and Hermione, and Neville. I'd say and Luna, but I usually say I've been abducted by nargles." Deciding he might as well get up, Harry walked over to the wardrobe. It was a Monday and he would be stuck at work all day; he might as well find something comfortable to sit in a desk in.

Ginny didn't even crack a smile. "You already see him every Sunday. All Sunday. And you don't think it's a conflict of interest."

The phrase clicked in Harry's head in a way it hadn't before, when he'd thought Ginny was talking about how he was one of multiple partners for George's business but saw the new products first, or about him neglecting the friends he'd known longer, or about… He didn't even know.

"You're talking about the fact that he's in love with me." It was like a punch to the gut, that Ginny had talked to him about this very thing while keeping him in the dark.

"You caught on." Ginny's smile wasn't anywhere near nice.

Harry stared blankly at the wardrobe until Ginny levitated his favorite work shirt from the back. He shrugged the shirt on, taking care to use a quick ironing charm. "You're upset." There wasn't any reason for Ginny to be upset, Harry thought, but both of them had always struggled with the chest monster of jealousy.

"Of course I'm upset. You spend so much time with my brother—whom I love and adore—but he's someone who's in love with you, and you expect me to be fine with it? It's not cheating, but it's wrong."

"I didn't know—"

"And are you going to stop now that you know?"

Harry didn't need to think it over. "No. I love you, but… George is my friend. Look, that's all he is."

"That's all? You say that like it's that simple. You treat your friends better than your girlfriends, that that's all. You ignored Cho almost completely after your failed date. You were more interested in Malfoy than in me the year we got together. I was ready to give up. I thought you were gay!"

"That's ridiculous," Harry said.

"What other reason is there for the way you look at George? The way you care about him? Harry… I barely see you after you get home from work, on Saturdays you split your time between me, Ron, Hermione, and my family, and Sundays you spend the day with George. Even after—even after everything I've done for you, for us and our relationship, you'd rather be with all of them than me."

"Ginny, I think about you all the time, constantly, when you're not with me—" Harry began, but she just threw one of his robes into his arms.

"You're all I've ever wanted and you still don't love me," Ginny said, choking out the words.

"Of course I do."

"Did you even think about me while you were with George? Did you?"

Her anguished voice made Harry want to pull her into his arms, but he'd be rebuffed for it now. "Ginny... You have nothing to be worried about. I don't have any feelings for George. I love you. It's a fact of the universe. I've been in love with you for ages."
Ginny shook her head. "But not before sixth year. Not even a bit."

Harry shrugged. "I'm sorry, Ginny. But I just... I never noticed you before then." He sighed.

"I hate you," Ginny said, laughing humorlessly. "I hate you and I love you and I don't know what to do anymore, Harry."

"Then let me do something," Harry said, pulling her into his arms. Ginny hugged him tightly and he rested his chin on her head, running his hand through her hair. "I'll take the day off, call it a family emergency. We can spend the day together, just the two of us. I'll make your favorite meals, you'll take a long bath, we'll remember what it's like to fall in love. You and me against the world."

"Oh, Harry," Ginny said, backing away enough for her to kiss him. Just before she leaned back in, her eyes met Harry's for an instant. He felt the sensation of getting lost in someone's eyes, leading his mind into someone else's.

No, he thought, remembering what happened two days ago. But foreign sensations accosted him, and they weren't what he'd have expected. He felt Ginny's love for him, strong enough to burn, but her love was overshadowed by guilt more potent than anything he'd ever felt. Guilt and anger and hatred—directed at herself rather than at Harry. Emotions that Harry didn't think existed in their relationship in this intensity. Despite knowing it was wrong, Harry reached in, trying to find their roots. He found a memory of a glamoured Ginny buying Amorentia in Knockturn Alley, talking with the shopkeeper about how it might be affected by the other potion Harry was taking this month. He pulled back, and back, and back, each guilt-saturated memory of Ginny doing this again and again receding until he had returned to his own mind.

When he was finally himself again, he pushed Ginny back, unable to bear her skin on his.

"Are you alright?"

He bent over slightly, heaving, trying not to panic. He was an Auror; he knew he couldn't just cough up the potion and make things alright again. He was an Auror; he knew the thought running through his head, that it's fine, the potion is for his own good, wasn't his own. He was an Auror; he hadn't known.

"Harry, what's happening? Harry!"

Dry-heaving wasn't going to change anything. Neither was cursing Ginny into the next great adventure. He didn't even know if he'd be able to do her harm. He'd never tried. Never wanted to. He'd never—he'd never wanted this.

Harry spun in his spot, his mind blurring, his thoughts going from one extreme to another.

He needed to get help.

He needed to go to Ginny.

Ginny was potioning him.

Ginny loved him, and he loved her.

She'd know what to do.

It was the perfect way to get splinched, apparating without knowing where he wanted to go, but somehow, he made it through without losing a part of himself. He didn't know where he apparated
to, only that the air was different and it was hard to see. He didn't know if he'd left his glasses behind, or if it was just tears in his eyes.

"Harry?" someone said.

Harry flinched backward, stumbling on a beaker and falling, the hardwood floors getting closer until a pair of familiar freckled arms caught him.

A hand grasped the back of his head, lifting it up, and Harry saw that it was only George.

"What's wrong?" George cried, still holding Harry together.

Harry opened his mouth to tell George that everything was alright, that he just needed George to send him home, that he needed to get back to Ginny. But when he looked into George's scared eyes, his heart stuttered, and his mouth moved without his brain's input.

"Amorentia," Harry gasped. It was all he could say before his head felt like it had split in two, and he passed out from the pain.

He smelled the hospital first, the bitter scents behind sanitation spells a familiar thing. He'd gotten used to them in the Hogwarts infirmary after his many run-ins with danger, and had gotten thoroughly sick of them during his Auror training years, after spell mishaps and violent petty criminals. He'd been in St. Mungo's many times to take statements, but never had he been on this side of the bed.

When Harry opened his eyes, the hospital was barer than he'd thought it would be. It was a small, single-bed room, with a bed, a table with his wand resting atop it, and three empty visitor's chairs. The realization that neither his best friends nor the Weasleys were there filled Harry with righteous anger. Had they really taken Ginny's side? Hermione was Ginny's best friend, the others her family. Had they known what was happening? The thoughts were absurd, since the elder Weasleys had always treated Harry with nothing but kindness. But then, so had Ginny, or so he'd thought.

Taking his wand, Harry said, "Accio Harry Potter's chart."

A piece of paper ripped itself from the wall and flew into Harry's hand. From what he could make of the nearly illegible handwriting, the Healers had confirmed what Harry already knew. The report detailed what his Healer thought he was afflicted with (Amorentia, class five love potion) and what they'd done (flushed it from his system as best they could).

As he was reading, the door opened and a woman in white Healers' robes walked in. "Mr. Potter. I can already tell you'll be a difficult patient."

"I try," Harry replied, putting down the chart.

"My name is Healer Laurie. Are you in any pain or discomfort?"

"No." In fact, Harry felt better than he had in ages. His mind felt clearer, stronger, less tired—less obsessed.

"Then I'll fill you in on what has happened. You've been in a healing coma for three days, after being brought here by Mr. George Weasley. Your boss was alerted by Mr. Ronald Weasley, and your other obligations—bills, appointments, letters—are being dealt with by Ms. Granger and the other Weasley family members, excluding Ms. Ginny Weasley. Everyone who wished to visit you at
the hospital—nine members of the Weasley family, Ms. Granger, Mr. Longbottom, and Ms. Lovegood—were were subjected to a mild truth serum. All but Ms. Ginny Weasley were deemed to have no knowledge of the potion. Do you have any issues with anything I've said or knowledge that contradicts it?"

"None," Harry replied, calmed by the knowledge that the Weasleys hadn't turned their backs on him. "What about my health? Why was I in a coma?"

"It took three days to cleanse your system of Amorentia, and after determining that you've had Amorentia in your body for the better part of four years, we thought it prudent to keep you sedated until it had completely passed. I'd like to ask you a few questions about Ginny Weasley now, if you feel you are up to the task."

In the next hour, Harry and the Healer determined that Harry had likely first been potioned early in his sixth year of school, though Harry couldn't remember Ginny asking him to eat or drink anything she made. But Harry knew from Fred and George's countless pranks how easy it was to slip a potion into someone's dinner, and he hadn't been nearly as careful then as he was now. During the year he and his friends spent on the run, Harry hadn't felt as much in love with Ginny as usual; he had been so obsessed with ending the war that romance just hadn't factored into the picture. After the war, he and Ginny had moved in together quickly, and Ginny happily cooked over half their meals when she was home. It could have happened at any time.

"We are not as well-studied in long term effects as we wish. In more extreme cases, where the drinker has ingested the potion for a decade or longer, the effects of Amorentia become permanent. In cases such as yours, consequences vary." The Healer paused, as if to gather herself, and delivered the rest of the news in a steady tone. "You may have permanent emotional damage," the Healer said in a gentle tone. "It's unlikely, given your current anger and the fact that you were able to seek help once you found out, that you'll continue to be in love with Ms. Weasley. However, you may find it hard to resist her sexually, be unable to be angry with her for longer periods of time, find yourself susceptible towards her emotionally, or seek to reestablish a relationship with her." She must've seen Harry's dismayed expression, because she followed with, "Or you may have none of these symptoms. The human body is not a reliable thing. Yours especially, given that you are able to resist mind spells like the imperious better than most wizards. You are young, determined, and have people to fall back on. I'm positive you'll recover, Mr. Potter."

"Thank you," Harry said. He hoped to Merlin that the potion hadn't changed him permanently. It didn't seem that way, at the moment. He was utterly pissed off at Ginny, the kind of blinding anger that he'd never felt towards her—or never been able to feel. He wished the relationship had never happened. And for the first time in four years, when he looked at the Healer, who was young for her station, Harry thought of someone other than Ginny as attractive.

The thought that when everything sunk in and he calmed down, he'd realize he was in love with her, terrified him to the bone.

"There is also the matter of whether you wish to press charges against Ms. Weasley. A ministry representative is a floo call away, if you're ready to make a decision now. As is the majority of the Weasley family, if you wish to have visitors. They have been barred from your room due to their relationship with Ms. Weasley, but now that you're awake, you can make a decision about who you wish to see."

"I'd like to talk to the ministry representative, first," Harry said. "I know my decision."

"I would like to remind you that you are not in the most mentally sound position at the moment," the Healer added. "And that the statute of limitations for love potion crimes is one decade."
Harry nodded. It was terrible, not knowing if he could trust his own mind and judgment. But he couldn't wait forever, and he wouldn't make the Weasleys wait in limbo, wondering if or when their daughter would be taken to prison.

The Healer exited the room, and minutes later the ministry representative entered.

"Well, if you don't represent the ministry, no one does, Minister Shacklebolt," Harry said wryly, shaking hands with Kingsley.

Kingsley chuckled, sitting down in one of the chairs. "I asked them to not mention I'd visited; I didn't want to get mobbed today."

"Good choice," Harry replied. "It's a terrible pastime, getting mobbed."

"Especially when the mob is in the form of reporters." At Harry's questioning look, Kingsley explained, "I know you value your privacy, but the situation was somehow leaked to the press two days into your coma. We're still investigating how, since St. Mungo's used a very restricting privacy ward for all your information."

"Dammit," Harry murmured. That just made things so much harder. He'd thought he and Ginny could break up quietly, weather the small storm, and let the mess be forgotten. Now that the Daily Prophet knew, this hurricane of a situation would never be resolved quietly. He'd be lucky if he wasn't forever known as the Man Who Lived to be Betrayed and Ginny and her family the evil, villainous potioners.

"Will the fact that I won't press charges make it better or worse?"

"I can't say for certain, but now it looks like it'll be worse in the short term, even in the long term. You're a national hero and the public wants blood. But if no one adds fuel to the fire – if Ginny doesn't respond – it will go away."

"I'll give an interview as soon as I'm able stating that..." Harry trailed off. That what, he forgave her? That he didn't mind? That it was water under the bridge? That he loved her family so much that he didn't want to cause them grief? He sounded like a pushover and an idiot even in his own head. "I'll think of something."

"Go for the forgiveness angle. Mention the work you did after the war to give everyone a fair trial or retrial, and the importance of personal choice. It isn't what I'd do, but it's up to you."

"Thank you, sir."

"You're protecting her," Kingsley said quietly. "Is there the possibility of blackmail?"

"Definitely not," Harry replied, trying to find a way to put his confusing mess of feelings into words. "I feel betrayed and angry, but... I was happy, almost the entire time during our relationship. It would have been different if I'd been unhappy and still locked into loving her. If she'd been a monster."

"And you realize it was potion-induced happiness?"

"It doesn't mean everything I felt should be discounted. And..." He sighed. "Molly and Arthur would be heartbroken if their youngest child went to jail. While I hate Ginny a lot right now, I don't want her to go to Azkaban."

"If that's what you want," Kingsley said. "Either way, you're on paid leave until the end of the
"Don't argue; it's standard procedure, though it's usually used for Aurors who had been under the Imperius Curse. You've got a week and a half to deal with what happened; the Auror department has time to review your work to make sure it was unbiased. You weren't in your right mind for the entire two years you've worked for the Auror department. No red flags have shown up in the last couple of days, and none are likely to come up. This also won't affect your career. But it has to be done."

Harry swallowed, trying to bury his anger. It wouldn't do to argue against Kingsley; he'd tried often and failed almost every time. And he trusted Kingsley's judgment as he couldn't trust his own right now.

"You know where my office is if you change your mind about charging her," Kingsley finished, standing up.

"And I bump into you at the shooting range at least twice a week." He had a feeling he wouldn't be contacting the Auror, but it was good to have options.

"I do have to shame you rookies a bit. After all, if a former Auror like me can hit a perfect average, what's stopping the rest of you?"

"The lack of arthritis in our bones," Harry replied, not even bothering to dodge Kingsley's stinging hex as it hit the white sheets, deliberately missing. As Kingsley left the room, Harry asked him to tell the Weasleys it was alright for them to enter.

It had been a long time since Harry had been nervous around the Weasleys, but as three redheads and a brunette tumbled into the room, Harry could honestly say that he had no idea what to expect. He braced himself for anything—yelling, pleading, anger, sadness—except for the silence that initially greeted the room. Arthur, Molly, Ron, and Hermione were quiet for a moment, staring at Harry and the hospital bed as though they'd never seen him in one before, then Molly burst into motion, hugging Harry tightly.

"I'm so, so sorry, love," she murmured, her tears falling onto Harry's cheek. "I had no idea."

Arthur added his agreement, saying, "We wouldn't have condoned anything like this had we known."

As Harry tried to placate her, he found himself staring at the others in the room. He'd never realized, but Hermione was gorgeous, bushy hair and all; Ron was tall and fit, an Auror's body through and through—and holy Merlin's balls, Harry did not need to start thinking of his friends as attractive. But it felt like he hadn't seen them in years; like he'd been friends with caricatures of them instead of the real people.

"I should have realized," Hermione said, taking a seat in one of the chairs. "You fell in love with her so swiftly. I just thought you'd been oblivious to it for a while."

"You had your own issues to deal with," Harry awkwardly replied, patting Hermione's hand.

"But there were still signs," Ron argued. "Anything. I'm bloody sorry, mate. My own sister…"

"My former best friend," Hermione said, sniffling and hugging Harry as soon as Molly let go. "I don't know how she could do this."
As each person in the room embraced him, Harry started to feel like he was floating on air; it was a combination of the love in the room and whatever drugs were still in his system, he assumed. The Weasleys still cared. They hadn't abandoned him. It was going to be fine.

He could do with a little less crying in the room, though. "Come on," Harry said awkwardly. "I'm not dying or anything. I feel better than ever."

"You look good, mate, better," Ron said, and Harry remembered learning in school about how love potions always gave the user a sickly pallor over time. He guessed that during the war, everyone had too much to worry about to think Harry looked a little off, and then later, they'd just been used to him the way he was. He'd always been thin and gangly, always a bit pale; even Harry himself hadn't noticed himself getting worse. "I reckon my shooting rank is in jeopardy now."

"Course it is. As soon as I get my job back," Harry replied, which lead to him paraphrasing what Kingsley had told him when he'd visited. His visitors were various shades of appalled, though understanding.

"We'll stand beside your decision," Arthur said. "Whatever you choose to do, you'll still be a part of our family in the end."

"You're our children, both of you," Molly said. "For better and for worse. We've asked Ginny to move back in with us, though she's still living at the flat right now."

"You can stay with me and Hermione," Ron added, Hermione adding her agreement.

As much as Harry loved his friends, he couldn't agree to that. "I'm going to move back into Grimmauld Place," he told them. "I think I need some time away." He glanced at Molly and Arthur. "A lot of time."

Molly looked like she wanted to argue, but instead she just took his other hand in hers. "We'll be here when you're ready."

They stayed for another hour, talking and crying and reminiscing, until Healer Laurie asked that they let Harry have some rest.

Harry grinned thankfully at her. "I don't know why I'm so tired."

"Your body is adjusting to a lack of something it's had for a very long time. It's expected and natural," the Healer said. She continued to list other physical effects Harry might have, though she did make sure to say, "Amorentia is not an addictive substance, and you will not need rehabilitation. However, I do strongly suggest you consider a short, love potion-specific, counseling period."

"How long would that take?" Harry asked.

"It depends, but no less than two weeks. Sometimes..." the Healer began, but Harry lost track of what she was saying.

The missing member of the Weasley family—the part of the family that Harry needed to see, anyway—had finally come, leaning against the doorway as the Healer continued to talk about the benefits of counseling for abuse and potion victims. George waved at Harry, and Harry absently waved back, too shocked to respond in any other way. He'd seen the Weasleys and Hermione differently today, their faces no longer colored by Ginny's opinions and his artificial love for her, but compared to the difference between the George of a week ago and George now, they'd barely changed at all. If George had been a black and white photograph, now he was a stunning watercolor, dimensional, larger than life, present in all parts of Harry's life.
He wearing his work uniform of a white Oxford and slacks, sleeves rolled up and hair messy; he must have come straight from work. Harry had seen George twice a week for years in almost this exact state, and never once had he been hit with so much want at the sight of him. Never once had he seen the smile George directed at him and thought he wanted to take a picture and frame it and give it center stage on his office desk. Never once had he wanted to kiss every one of his freckles. Never once had his heart skipped a beat and doubled, racing as he thought of what his future looked like if George were in it.

*Oh, Harry thought. Oh.*

Now that his mind wasn't clouded by love potions, he could fully admit to himself what a long-buried part of him had already known: he'd been in love with George all along.

Grimmauld Place had been abandoned since the war. It was a point Molly had hesitantly brought up during their conversation in the hospital, but Harry hadn't been interested in hearing it. Now, a day after waking up in St. Mungo's and six hours since he'd been released, Harry wondered if it would have been better to stay at a hotel instead. Since Kreature's death a year ago, no one had visited Grimmauld Place. There was a steady layer of dust on everything, and the house still bore marks from its use by the Order and ransacked by Death Eaters. It was more or less unlivable, but it would have to do until Harry figured out what to do.

After a quick cleaning charm, he collapsed onto an armchair and threw an early release of the next day's issue of the Daily Prophet on the table next to him. His first stop once he'd left his hotel room was their London headquarters.

**POTTER FORGIVES WEASLEY, WILL NOT PRESS CHARGES**, the headline read.

The other highlights of the issue included:

- The story, straight from the Boy Who Lived, page 2
- How to tell if you've been slipped a potion, page 4
- What does this mean for others who've shared his experience? page 6
- Will there be no wedding of the century? page 14
- A word from the (now former!) number one wizarding bachelor, page 15

Harry sat there until the sunlight behind the moth-eaten curtains faded, thinking about what he was going to do now. He'd prevented the papers from speculating too much by giving them more information, but now he was aimless, unsure. He had an enforced paid vacation of a week and a half in order to get his head together, but he couldn't think of a single thing he wanted to do and too many things he didn't.

The fireplace began to shoot green sparks, jarring Harry out of his brooding. Hermione's head appeared in the fireplace, a streak of soot running through her hair and the woman herself halfway through a sneezing fit.

"Oh, Merlin, this is awful," she said once she was herself again. "Can you open the wards so that I can apparate in?"

"Sure," Harry said, saying the password into the empty house.

He heard Hermione's pop of apparition, and reason Hermione needed to apparate in became quickly apparent.
"Er, Hermione?" Harry asked, eyebrows raised, and staring that the frankly huge box Hermione had apparated in with. She hadn't even been able to hold it; she'd apparated it in only by touching one of its very wide sides.

Hermione opened the box flaps. "I know you don't like to think of yourself as needing any kind of help—"

"Thanks," Harry replied wryly. "Please, tell me about my other issues now that we've gotten the big one out of the way."

She responded by picking up and dropping two books onto an armchair. "I would've brought more, but I know how busy you are. One's about recovering from love potions—honest and helpful, I've read it—and the other is about how various Quidditch players have dealt with harassment, stalking, love potions, and bad press—I think you'll like it better; Ron's read and loved it."

Hermione continued levitating other boxes, containers, and items. "Cleaning supplies. Meals for the next two weeks—Molly, Luna, Neville, and I made them, Ginny wasn't anywhere near the house at the time and we've checked everything thoroughly. Prank items from George's store. Some of your clothes from your flat—sorry I couldn't get much, but Ginny wasn't as cooperative as I'd hoped. Firewhiskey. Letters from people I know you know. Letters from people I don't know, both groups checked for magic, powders, and potions. Cold case files for when you get bored. A box of invisible rattertuffs from Luna; she says they help clear the mind."

"I don't know what I'd do without you," Harry honestly said, levitating the food into the kitchen and the rest into piles. Sometimes, Hermione overreached, but this time, she was absolutely perfect.

"Brood in a dark room, I think," Hermione replied, and spelled balls of light into the air.

Harry picked up the bottles of firewhiskey and set them on a table, brushing dust off as he worked. "Are you and Ron busy tonight?"

"We are completely free," Hermione replied.

"Come around, then," Harry said.

All Hermione needed to do was use his fireplace once again, and Ron was there. Harry had lost a girlfriend, Hermione had lost a best friend, and Ron had lost the trust he'd had in his sister. But they still had each other, and life would still go on, careless of Ginny's betrayal and their hurt.

The alcohol was quickly divided, and the stories of Ginny's terribleness flowed as the trio got considerably less sober. From the miniscule—"I never got my copy of Hogwarts, a History back from her!"—to the ugly—"Even the thoughts that aren't about her are different now."—to the old—"She bit my ear a lot when she was a baby. It was awful. We're not that far apart, so I don't remember much from when she was really tiny, but her baby teeth are burned into my memory!"—to the new—"She hasn't moved back in with her parents yet. I don't know what she's thinking, but she can't just wait in your apartment until you get back!"—to the dismal—"We were thinking of having kids."—to the cheerful—"I never, ever have to deal with that awful hair spray again!"

"Unless your next girlfriend uses it," Ron said, idly levitating a feather throughout the room, until it fell onto the mattress.

After a couple more sneezing fits and half a bottle of firewhiskey, Hermione had taken it upon herself to vanish every stain, dust particle, and insect from the sitting room. All the while, she swore at every filth-attracting member of the Black family bar Sirius and Regulus in words she'd never use
while sober. Then, because Ron was shocked Harry had ever slept on a bed of hippogriff feathers—
because cleaning brought to mind Dobby, then Winky, then butterbeer, then the Shrieking Shack,
then root beer and the fate of muggle-wizard relations, then pillows—he apparated one from his and
Hermione’s flat and expanded it to fill the whole floor.

It felt like collapsing onto a cloud, a million times more comfortable than the Black family armchairs.
As Harry stared up at the ceiling and the magical constellations floating across it, his limbs just barely
touching Ron's and Hermione's, he could only think of one person he wanted in his life, one person
who was missing.

Harry took a deep breath. Were he a little less drunk, he would have waited. He would've considered
his state of mind, and Ron's, and George's. He would've mused over it for weeks, wondering what
was and wasn't real. Or at the very least, he would've put it more eloquently.

"I'd really like for my next girlfriend to be George, and he uses a different kind of hair gel."

"I think George would like that," Ron said, nodding. "And Mum. And me."

"And me," Hermione murmured, half asleep and burrowed into Ron's side.

"It would be brilliant," Harry said, softly.

"Would it?"

"Yeah."

When he awoke, Harry instantly knew that everything was wrong. He was lying on an armchair in
the sitting room, one of Hermione and Ron's blankets covering him. His friends had left hours ago,
needing to go to work, and had taken the mattress with them. Hermione had vanished the stray
feathers, the empty food containers, and the empty bottles of firewhiskey. But the wrongness
stemmed from the fact that the love of his life was missing from the house. Suddenly, he had no idea
what he was doing at Grimmauld Place. He had no idea when he'd started listening to people and
believing without a doubt what they told him. He'd forgotten how subjective the truth was, forgotten
how to listen to his feelings. And his feelings pointed only one way.

Harry disapparated from Grimmauld Place and into the home he'd left, making sure to imagine the
kitchen since he was sure Ginny was still asleep. The flat was familiar and comforting as he walked
through it. His knickknacks were scattered throughout, his input into the color scheme easily
apparent. It was the home he and Ginny had made for themselves, their sanctuary. He couldn't
imagine how he could've left it.

When he slowly opened the bedroom door, he saw that Ginny was sound asleep in their bed. For a
moment, he just stayed there. She looked like an angel. Harry hadn't fallen in love with her for her looks,
but sometimes he couldn't take his eyes off of her loveliness.

He lay down on the bed, not getting under the covers in case it would disturb her. Minutes later,
Ginny opened her eyes, rubbing sleep out of the corners.

"Harry—You came. They wouldn't let me into your hospital room. But what are you doing here?"
Her voice was hoarse and sleep-filled and the most perfect thing Harry had ever heard.

"I'm here because I love you," he said simply. "The Healers said I was completely free of the love
potion. I think this time, it's real."
"Are you sure?" Ginny asked, quickly sitting up, her eyes lighting up with hope.

Harry mirrored her action. "I'm positive. We can fix everything now."

"That's not what Hermione said when she came by yesterday."

"That's just Hermione." Harry knew none of his friends would approve of what he was doing, but he was too old to be swayed by anyone other than himself.

"She said that you were angry and miserable. And—that she could never be my friend again. She said that I was worse than the people she worked to imprison. I kicked her out after that."

Harry kissed her forehead. "I'm sorry."

"She said that you could find real love now," Ginny whispered, her voice shaking.

"But I want you. I really—really, truly—love you. She'll just have to accept that."

Ginny sighed. "It's not that simple, Harry. I—my parents hate me now. I tried to floo call Luna, but she ignored me. My coach contacted me today to tell me that I was fired. I didn't even know my contract had a poor moral conduct clause, and now I can't pay the rent. I just wish I could get away from it all."

There was only one thing Harry could suggest, and he did it easily, without misgivings. "Would you like that? To leave?"

"So much," Ginny breathed. "To go somewhere where no one knows my name."

Harry remembered the articles, the letters, the looks people gave him and no doubt gave Ginny. They would both be hounded for the next couple months, just because of one mistake. Maybe it was selfish, but he wanted to give them a break from it all. They could come back later, when things died down again. "If you really want to, we could. It would be rough, but I have some money saved up, and you do too. We could do it."

"You would leave everything for me? Your job? Ron and Hermione? George?"

Harry could barely imagine a life without his friends. He loved it here; he loved his job, his friends, his family. But if his life didn't include Ginny, it wasn't much of a life at all. Ginny was the air he breathed, the only perfect thing in the world, the light in the darkness.

"It would be hard. But I'd do it for you, only you," Harry said, taking her hands in his.

"Not for George," Ginny said.

"Of course not. He'd never ask."

She pulled away. "Not because you wouldn't go?"

Harry shook his head, trying to make sense of his thoughts. "I—I don't know. I'm finding it hard to think, these days. Yesterday, I was convinced I was in love with him and hated you. Crazy, right?"

Ginny stilled, barely breathing. Slowly, she brought her hand to his heart. "I didn't think anything could ever hurt this much," she whispered. "I really thought—but I guess it was too good to be true."

"What do you mean? Are you saying you don't want to leave?"
She brought her hand to his face, running it up and down, before she leaned in and met his lips with hers. It was a soft kiss, and kind one, one to cherish and remember. Things between them were always so fast, work and friends and the scandal always getting in the way. It was nice to have this moment.

Ginny let go, ignoring the way Harry leaned in to stretch out their kiss. "I'm going to go. Please stay here for a while. Until you... until you remember."

"Remember what?"

But Ginny only shook her head rapidly, her eyes beginning to water. She apparated away, leaving Harry alone in the home they shared. With nothing else to do, Harry lay back down on the bed, staring up at the ceiling and trying to find reasons for Ginny's actions. The whole thing made him tired, bored, and aggravated; even more so when he thought about how he'd spend the rest of his week in this state, unable to work, unable to see his friends (who had work). Maybe he and Ginny really could just leave. It would be a sight better than this.

His mind turned in circles until inexplicably, Harry thought of Ginny, and the thought lacked all semblance of love. His entire body jerked, thoughts stopped and started, breathing became fast.

_Not panicking_, Harry told himself as he picked himself up and sat on the edge of the bed. _I'm not panicking. There's a rational, impermanent explanation for this..._

He was going to be sick.

Harry made it to the bathroom, dry-heaving the contents of his empty stomach. Tears of frustration and anger built up in his eyes until he forced them back. It looked like his body still wasn't his own. Not completely, not like he'd thought it was. But there was only one thing Harry could do, and that was fight, because Ginny wasn't ever going to have him again.

Heart beating wildly, Harry apparated to St. Mungo's.

"Your moments of confusion should abate in time," Healer Laurie said. Harry had been ushered into a private waiting room the moment he'd appeared in St. Mungo's, and within the hour his previous Healer had appeared.

"It is likely that there are still trace amounts of potion in your system. Not enough for you to continuously be in love, but enough for small moments."

"Or it's a permanent side effect," Harry said, daring the Healer to disagree.

"Yes," she replied. "But that is only the worst case scenario."

_My life is full of worst case scenarios_, Harry thought. Hopefully, this time, the worst case didn't become his life. He didn't think he could handle a lifetime of delusion; it would drive him insane, never knowing whether he was acting under Ginny's influence or not.

Soon after, the Healer declared that she'd done all the test she could do, and Harry left the room and made his way to the exit. Along the way, he noticed a familiar bushy-haired woman walking through the halls.

"Hermione?" Harry asked, eyebrows raised. "I didn't think I'd ever seen you before eight pm again."

The hospital visit notwithstanding—the bosses of his friends had always been pretty lenient when it
was the Boy Who Lived that his friends wanted to visit.

"We finished the merpeople case, so they've started letting us out into the world again," Hermione replied. Her smile was bright and easygoing, the stress that had been constant on her face gone. "I wanted to see how your counseling session went." Seeing Harry's face twist in confusion, she asked, "Did I get the time wrong? We were both pretty drunk when you told me when it was."

"Yeah," Harry said. "It's in a couple days, not today. I was just getting a checkup." He'd completely forgotten about counseling, but he didn't want to talk about what had happened. Thankfully, Hermione didn't say anything about how it was strange to get a checkup the day after he'd left the hospital.

"And I wanted to ask how things have been with your future girlfriend," Hermione said, laughing as Harry aimed a jinx at her.

"I don't think that's politically correct, Ms. Future ICW President," Harry ribbed. Hermione blushed as though the thought of leading the International Confederation of Wizards and forcing it into the twentieth century had never crossed her mind, though Harry knew better. "And things have been good."

"I'm glad. But technically, it's Supreme Mugwump," she replied. Once they were within range of the apparition point, they said their goodbyes.

"Hermione—" he said. He opened his mouth and almost asked, How did you know you were in love with Ron? He knew Hermione would give him an honest answer, and a succinct one, because Hermione didn't like talking about her feelings, especially when it came to love. He refrained because he didn't need an answer to that particular question. He knew he was in love with George, in a bone-deep love he'd never felt, a love that didn't creep insidiously into his mind, but blossomed every time he gave it attention. "Thanks."

With a wave, she disappeared.

What he really wanted to know was, How do I trust myself again?

And that wasn't a question Hermione could answer.

Harry spent the rest of the day reading Hermione's book, wherein he'd realized just how frighteningly common love potions were, and that he really had to give Viktor Krum a floo call of empathy, now that they had something in common besides money and fame and a healthy dislike of Draco Malfoy. At Healer Laurie's request, he sent hourly "still hate Ginny, still not in love with her" letters to St. Mungo's, and was overjoyed the next morning when he woke up feeling himself. He didn't feel a burning desire to be with his scheming ex-girlfriend, and his love for George was still there, waiting for him to act. Not pushing or prodding, just there, a soft comfort in his crazy life.

An hour into the day, the object of his actual affections floo-called him.

"Is there a system?" Harry asked as George entered through the floo. Hermione checking up on him out of the blue had been one thing, but it was becoming a pattern now. Not that he minded, Harry thought as his eyes lingered on George. Not at all.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," George said innocently.

Harry peered at him suspiciously.
George just grinned at him. "It's just for these couple of days. Mum's really worried about you. And... I wanted to make sure you were alright, too. I would've come either way."

Harry sighed, too charmed by George's caring to be angry.

"So what's the plan for today?"

"I was going to go over some old cases, but since you're here... Would you mind coming with me when I stop by the flat? I want to finish moving out, but I'm afraid I might have the wrong reaction to seeing Ginny. Also... There's something I need a third person for."

"Anything," George replied.

Ginny had removed him from the apparition access ward, as Harry had found out when he'd failed to apparate inside. She must've changed it after yesterday's fiasco; Harry couldn't decide whether he was happy or angry about it all. The flat was still half his, bad love potion-influenced decisions and all. Instead of apparating in and out, Harry knocked on the front door, George standing beside him.

The door opened to reveal Ginny, red-eyed and wild-haired. "Hi, Harry. I thought you might come. And George."

"Hullo, Ginny," Harry said, not taking his eyes off her. It had been years since he'd seen her without the influence of potions, and he was relieved to feel no love for her. He didn't love her, didn't want her, didn't need her. But only when he was in his right mind. "I'm just here to get my things."

"You're moving out?" she asked, letting them inside. "Are you... You're going to live with George?"

"No," Harry replied. He started with the bedroom, summoning his things and throwing them into a conjured box. Ginny would probably find out where he was moving, but he wouldn't tell her.

After watching Harry for a moment, Ginny hesitantly said, "What about what happened yesterday? Are we going to talk about it?"

George looked between them, but Harry shook his head.

"No. We're not," he replied. "It's not going to happen again."

When he finished with the bedroom, he traveled to the living room, packing up knickknacks and summoning things from other rooms as he went.

Ginny shot a glance at George. "You're not going to let me talk to him alone, are you?"

"Not if I have any say about it," George replied.

"Alright then." She turned to Harry. "I'm sorry for what I did. It was wrong. I knew it was wrong, but I did it because I love you. I thought that one day, you'd fall in love with me for real. You'd see me for who I was, not just as Ron's younger sister, and you'd fall in love with me. I know I hurt you. But please, let me fix things. If you won't do it for me, do it for our relationship. We've been together for four years. Doesn't that mean something to you?"

Harry clenched his fists, knowing it was useless and he'd never hit a girl. But he hated Ginny with such a passion that he could barely force out his response. "Ginny, if you don't stop speaking right..."
now, I’m either going to curse you from head to toe or break down, and I don't want to do either. What you did is unforgivable. I don't ever want to be with you again.” Harry ignored her devastated expression and looked around the room, then walked around the flat until he was sure none of his things were left. Gone were his Quidditch posters and autographs, his war medals and House Cup trophies, his photographs, his clothes. He'd cut himself out of the house bit by bit, but cutting himself away from Ginny wouldn't be as easy.

When he returned to Ginny and George, who'd been talking quietly, Ginny asked, "Is there anything that can make you forgive me?"

"There's something that will ease my mind," Harry said, and got on both knees. His heart ached for his now bittersweet memories, for the many times he'd imagined proposing to her.

"No," Ginny pleaded. "You don't want to do this."

"You've told me what I want and don't want for four years," Harry said. "This is exactly what I want."

Shivering, Ginny walked closer and dropped to her knees across from him, hand outstretched. "I love you," she said.

Harry clasped her hand and George raised his wand above them.

"Do you, Ginny Weasley, agree to never give anyone a love potion ever again?" Harry asked.

"I do."

"Do you agree to never approach me, Harry Potter, in a romantic or sexual way again?"

A beat. "I do."

"Do you agree to rebuff me to the best of your ability should I ever approach you in a romantic or sexual way?"

Another beat, a long one. "I do."

A rope of fire burst from George's wand, wrapping around Harry and Ginny's clasped hands. Their unbreakable vow would forever bind them and keep them apart. The only thing Harry could feel was relief.

Harry released her hand and stood up. "We're done, Ginny."

Ginny wiped tears from her eyes, steadying herself as best as she could. "Good luck," she said, her voice choked up. "I wish you the best."

"Me too," Harry replied, and turned away. George exited the flat first, and Harry let the door slam shut behind him. He turned on his heel and apparated to Grimmauld Place with his belongings, George already a step ahead of him. He was tired, though the trip hadn't taken all that long.

"Are you alright?" George asked.

"I am," Harry said. He was, or he soon would be. It didn't matter. What mattered was George's hand on his shoulder, the way he did what was best for Harry, the way he cared enough to let him live his life.

If it wasn't for how different his love for George was from his love for Ginny and how strong it was,
Harry would've thought he'd gone around the bend, falling in love with anyone and everyone. He'd known for a long time that he was attracted to both men and women—it was something he'd realized during his seventh year on the run. And then, when the final battle was over, he'd considered trying to date a man. In retrospect, he could remember the exact moment Ginny had potioned him; it had been a month after the battle and she'd come over with pumpkin pie. He'd had one month to think and dream and avoid Ginny because he wasn't sure she was what he wanted, and then she'd ruined it. Harry didn't think he could ever forgive her. He couldn't imagine getting back together with her, or wanting to have sex again, or even sitting across the table from her at Weasley family dinners.

Harry didn't trust his feelings much anymore. But he trusted George, and that gave him the strength to say, "Ginny was right about one thing. I did fall in love while under the love potion."

George shook his head. "That's the potion talking."

"Not with Ginny," Harry said.

George froze.

"I saw you only twice a week, but I wanted to see you every day. You, who trusted me and cared about me and loved me and argued with me and thought I needed my head checked out after my Aurorly heroics. I thought it was just friendship, these feelings I couldn't put a word to. But it was love." Harry swallowed. "I don't—I don't want to date, not right now. I've got to get my head together first. This morning when I woke up I thought I was still in love with Ginny. I'm not ready yet. But one day, if you want…"

George beamed, wide and happy. "We could take it a day at a time. Harry—you've made me the happiest man in the universe."

Six months later:

"Oh, Harry!" Molly cried, throwing open the door to the Burrow only seconds after Harry had knocked.

Harry smiled sheepishly. It had been six months since he'd appeared at a Weasley family dinner, six months since he'd found out that his girlfriend of four years had been love potioning him, six months since he'd realized he had the love of someone who would never try to control him. "Hullo, Molly. I'm sorry it's been so long."

Molly sniffled, her eyes growing watery, and opened her arms. Harry stepped into her hug and returned it, resting his chin on her head. In the background, George began to mutter about being chopped liver, and Molly lifted one hand to bring George into the hug as well.

"You're always welcome here, love," Molly said. "You don't have to be dating one of my children to be my son."

She let him go and Harry stepped back. George's hand found its way into his again, and Harry's heart skipped a beat. Nervously, Harry raised their joined hands.

"It's a bit too late for that," George said.

"Oh, you two," Molly said. "I'm so happy for you. Now, come in, or the food will get cold!"
She led them in, and as Harry greeted the rest of his family, there was nothing artificial about the love and joy in his heart.

End Notes

Thanks for reading!

Complete; no sequel planned.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!