Ginny is charged with helping a selkie recover his wife. This takes place after the the events of "California Dreamin'" which hasn't yet concluded. :D

“This looks like a good spot,” Ginny said, unfolding the checked blanket she was carrying and spreading it out on the warm sand. Harry set down the small cooler in the sand next to the blanket and collapsed with a groan.

“I never thought you were going to find a place that suited you,” he said with a grin, hands behind his head.

“Oh poor you. Had to walk all that way across the car park and some sand with a cooler. Never mind that I have this tote bag and the blanket,” Ginny said, tossing said tote bag down before sitting down on the blanket next to him.

“Yeah, but the cooler has all of the beer, so it’s much more important.”

“I see where your priorities lie, Potter.” Ginny smiled down at him, ruffling his hair. He took her hand and kissed her palm, giving her a thrill in her stomach. She looked out at the beach, tucking wind-mussed hair behind one ear. It was a beautiful, sunny day, the sort that must have inspired every song ever written about the California beaches.

“What’s this place called again?” she asked, stretching out on the blanket next to Harry.

“Natural Bridges, probably because of that,” he said, pointing vaguely to a giant rock formation out in the water. The ceaseless waves had worn a hole in the middle of it, making it look like a flat-
topped arch.

“Makes sense.” Ginny turned over on her back and propped herself up on her elbows. The beach was full of people lounging on blankets and chairs, children digging holes and playing in the surf. Further out she saw surfers in their wetsuits, waiting on their boards for the perfect wave. The sun on her shoulders felt wonderful and the heat radiating up from the sand through the blanket was making her drowsy.

Turning back to Harry, she lifted up his sunglasses and he opened one eye a crack. “Can I help you?” he asked, drawing her down for a kiss.

“Just checking. Are you going to take a nap?”

“I might. It’s wonderful out here.”

“You mind if I take a walk?”

“No, love. Tell me if you see anything interesting.”

“More interesting than you spread out on that blanket?”

“Hm. Not very interesting,” he chuckled.

“It’s all a matter of opinion.” Ginny kissed him again and stood up, taking off her sandals. She looked up at the sun and took off her tee shirt, feeling cooler in her bikini top and shorts.

“Now that’s interesting,” Harry said and she looked at him to see him holding his sunglasses up with a grin. She stuck her tongue out and threw the shirt at him.

“See you in a bit. Don’t drink all the beer.” Not looking back, she headed off down the beach, walking toward the surf. The freezing cold water of the Pacific on her feet took her breath away and she forced herself to stand still, gradually getting used to the chill water.

“No wonder those surfers are wearing wetsuits,” she said to a dog that trotted by, an enormous stick held in his mouth. She moved further into the surf until the waves were lapping at her calves and headed down the beach towards some rocks. Memories of crawling around on the rocks with her dad during childhood seaside holidays made her smile.

Soon she reached the rocks and started climbing, eagerly looking for anything in the seawater pools left behind during low tide. She found several pools with tiny crabs, sea stars and sea anemones that closed around her finger when she touched them. The crashing waves drew her further out on the rocks and she shaded her eyes from the sun, looking at a rock farther out full of seals, their cigar-shaped bodies covering every available surface. The wind carried their incessant barks to her and she smiled, wondering what they could possibly have to talk about.

The waves were crashing far below, so Ginny sat down on the edge of the rock, enjoying the fresh smell of the salt air on the wind, the sun on her back and the roaring waves. Watching the seals, she saw one slide off into the water and with some surprise, watched as it came to the rock she was perched on, popping its head up out of the water.

The seal’s big dark eyes focused on her, giving her a brief sensation of falling and she shook her head, suddenly wary. “What do you want?” she asked, raising her voice to be heard over the waves pounding against the rock.
In response, the seal turned around in a complete circle before swimming over to a part of the rock that sloped down closer to the water, stopping to look at her again with its unblinking gaze. Does it want me to come over there? That's odd. Ginny looked around her, seeing that she was completely alone. Well, let's go see what it wants, she thought, carefully rising from her perch at the edge and making her way down to where the seal waited.

The spot the seal had chosen was shielded from the brunt of the waves and a gentle swell lapped over Ginny’s bare feet as she crouched down. “Hello. Did you want to talk to me?” she asked cautiously.

“Are ye Ginny Weasley?” the seal asked in a surprisingly deep voice.

“I am. Who are you?”

“My name is Taraghlan,” he said and Ginny thought she could detect a faint Scottish accent as he spoke. Ah, a selkie, then.

“Pleased to meet you, Taraghlan. How did you know who I am?”

“We’ve all heard of how ye helped the water horse find a new dryad.”

*News travels fast in the magical creature community, I guess.* “I was just glad I was able to help him.”

“I have a friend that is in need of your help,” Taraghlan said, bobbing around in the swell created by the constant waves.

“Oh? Is he nearby?”

“No. He is north, by the ruins in the City.”

“Can you be more specific?”

“It has been many years since I shed my skin and walked as a man and much has changed. The word Sutro comes to me,” he said, an oddly human frown of concentration creasing the seal’s smooth brow.

“What sort of help does he need? I may not be able to do anything for him.”

“Ye found a dying water horse a new dryad, Ginny Weasley. Rònan is certain ye’ll be able to help him find his wife.”

“What? His wife? What happened?”

“He will have to tell ye. Go to the Sutro and talk to him.” He looked past her and dove down under the water, swimming swiftly away. Ginny turned and saw a dad with two small children clambering across the rocks and she stood up, looking back out toward the seal-covered rock.

*Huh. Well, I guess I have a summer assignment,* she thought as she headed back to Harry and the blanket. “You look comfortable,” she said, looking down at him. He’d taken off his shirt and lay on the blanket in his swim trunks, the stag on his hip peeping above the waistband. She sat down next to him, fishing around in the cooler for a beer.

“Nice walk?” Harry asked, taking the beer she offered him.

“Yeah. You weren’t kidding when you said the sea here is cold. No wonder those blokes out there
are wearing wetsuits!"

“Where did you go? See anything interesting?” Harry took a long swallow of his Newcastle and Ginny watched his Adam’s apple bob up and down.

“Over to those rocks. Saw some nice tide pools. I met a selkie,” she said, taking a drink of her own beer.

“A selkie? Out here?”

“Yeah. And get this, he knew who I was. Said he’d heard about me helping the water horse.”

Harry blew out a short breath through his nose. “You’re getting a reputation, love. Did he ask you to do anything?”

“He said he has a friend that needs help finding his wife. Does the name Sutro mean anything to you?”

“Well, there’s a couple of things up in the City with that name. There’s the Sutro Tower—that’s the big radio tower on the hill—and the ruins of the Sutro Baths. If it’s a selkie you’re looking for, it’s got to be the baths,” Harry said, sitting up and pushing his sunglasses up on top of his head. “Are you going to go talk to him?”

“I thought I might. If he genuinely needs help, I should help him if I can.”

“Be careful. Not all magical creatures are like your water horse.”

“I know. What do you know about them?”

Harry took another sip of his beer as he thought, looking out at the water. “Well, they’re generally not Dark. Like most magical creatures, they tend to keep to themselves, but they’ve been known to come to land and cause mischief.”

“The one I talked to, Taraglahn, said something about shedding his skin?”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded. “They can shed their sealskins and take human form, but they need that skin to change back.”

“What happens if they lose it?”

“Then they’re stuck.”

“That doesn’t sound too good. And they marry?”

“Well, I don’t know that they marry the same way we do, but they do mate for life, sort of like some birds do,” Harry said, squinting at Ginny. “He said this friend needs help finding his wife?”

“Yes. D’you suppose his wife has lost her sealskin?”

“It’s possible. I dunno what he’ll expect you to do if that’s the case.”

Ginny sat quietly for a moment, turning recent events over in her mind. “Harry, do you think…?” she said, unwilling to say the name. Even thinking about him caused a chill to come over her in spite of the warm California sun.

“No, I don’t. If his wife’s been missing since the Gold Rush, then that selkie’s got bigger problems,
yeah?” Harry reached out and took her free hand, squeezing it hard and she squeezed back, putting Cornelius Maxwell out of her mind. “Come here,” he said, drawing her close to him, the look in his eyes banishing any lingering iciness.

Ginny closed her eyes as their lips met, thinking that she could happily spend the rest of her life kissing Harry on a blanket on a sunny Santa Cruz beach. He leaned back, pulling her with him and she had the presence of mind to jam her Newcastle bottle into the sand. “Harry, you’re trying to make me spill my drink,” she admonished as he grinned up at her.

“There’s others in the cooler,” he said, drawing her down for another kiss. She lay half on top of him, the feeling of his sweaty skin and the gritty sand stuck to the both of them reminding her that they were out in the middle of a public place, a thought that she couldn’t deny excited her.

She felt his fingers trailing up and down her lower back, inching higher and higher until they were fiddling with the tie of her bikini top. “Harry,” she admonished, looking down at his amused eyes.

“What?” he asked, all wide-eyed innocence, those fingers still fiddling around with the tie.

“We’re out here in public.”

“So? That doesn’t seem to have stopped you from snogging me senseless,” he said, raising an eyebrow.

“You started it.” Ginny leaned down to kiss him again, lips warm and soft against hers.

“And you seem determined to finish it,” he murmured, cupping her face in his hands. Trying to seem casual, she placed her hand over his crotch, feeling his hardness that matched her wetness.

“I’ll finish you, boyo,” she whispered, sliding her hand up and down as Harry hummed against her lips.

“Mommy, over here!” came a child’s shrill scream. Ginny looked up and groaned at the sight of two overloaded parents and three more children heading straight towards them. The little girl was jumping up and down excitedly, waving a bit of seaweed as if it were a flag.

“To be continued,” she whispered, giving Harry a final kiss before rolling away to lie flat on her back. She giggled as he gave an exasperated sigh and surreptitiously adjusted himself next to her.

“That thing seems like a lot of bother sometimes,” she said teasingly as Harry sat up to finish his beer.

“I don’t hear you complaining.” Harry smirked down at her, sunglasses back in place.

Ginny picked up her own beer and drank as she watched the family set up next to them. In addition to an enormous cooler, they had a huge blanket, an umbrella, and three tote bags, one of which seemed to be full of nothing but sunscreen and a ton of toys. While Dad was trying to set up the umbrella, the four children ran around like wild things, Mom desperately trying to corral them to smear copious amounts of sunscreen everywhere she could reach. She shook her head, grateful for the simple sunblocking potion she’d spritzed on her and Harry after they got out of the car.

She looked at Harry and saw him watching the family too, eyes hidden by his sunglasses and she nudged him, getting a smile in return. Finally, the children were slathered to Mom’s satisfaction and released to run off to the edge of the water, hooting like maniacs.

“Fancy a swim?” he asked, standing up and stretching his arms up over his head, making more of the stag on his hip visible as his trunks slipped down a little.
“That water’s freezing,” she said as she stood up and took off her shorts. “I don’t know how much swimming we’ll be able to do.”

“I’m sure we’ll figure something out.” She took his hand and together they ran into the crashing waves.

Later on that night, Ginny cuddled close to Harry, listening to his breathing as he slipped into sleep. The day at the beach and their energetic lovemaking urged her on to slumber, but she couldn’t quite still the thoughts flying around in her head. Now that she didn’t have any distractions, she brooded on the problem of the selkie’s wife.

_I wonder how long she’s been lost? If she’s lost her skin and can’t change back, what do they expect me to do, transfigure her back into a seal? Make a potion? What if she’s not even in San Francisco anymore? I’m not Sherlock Holmes!_

Sensing her agitation, Stuart snuggled down closer to her side and started up his motorboat purr.

“How would you go about finding a selkie’s wife?” she whispered, rubbing his ears. True to cat form, he didn’t answer, giving her one of his inscrutable feline looks. Next to her, Harry shifted to lie on his side, pulling her closer.

“All right?” he murmured sleepily in her ear.

Ginny put aside all thoughts of selkies and missing wives, focusing on Harry’s lean body snuggled up to hers, turning her head for his drowsy kiss. _Well, no use worrying about it tonight. I’ll see if I can find Rònan tomorrow._

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The next morning, Ginny had to remind herself that neither she nor Harry had anywhere to be. For the next glorious two months, her time was her own, barring any time she might poke her head in at SF Thaumaturgical.

“I know why you got into this teaching business,” Ginny said, poking Harry in the chest as he sat up in bed, reading the _Uncanny Examiner._

“Yeah? Why’s that?” he asked distractedly.

“So you could have summer holidays off with me.”

“Hm. I see.”

Ginny got up to make tea, the cat following behind her and sitting patiently next to his dish. “Are you going to talk to that selkie today?” Harry called.

“Thought I might. See if I can get this business figured out before Teddy comes.” She cracked a few eggs into a bowl and scrambled them, pouring the mixture into a heated pan. A few minutes later, she brought a tray into the bedroom with the two plates of eggs, covered liberally in cheese, and two mugs of tea.

“Oh, breakfast in bed,” Harry grinned, setting aside the newspaper.

“You didn’t look like you were planning on moving for a while. If Mohammed won’t come to the mountain…” Ginny said lightly, sipping her tea. “Did you want to come with me to see the selkie?”

Harry shook his head and swallowed his mouthful of egg. “No, I have some things I need to take
care of today. Unless you want me to come?"

“No, it should be fine. If anything happens, I know how to get hold of you,” she said, thinking of the last time she had Summoned him.

The sky was full of shifting clouds, the alternating warm sun and frigid shade making a sharp contrast to yesterday’s warmth in Santa Cruz. *Now I know what that Mark Twain bloke was talking about,* Ginny thought as she carefully picked her way down the cliffside to the ruins of the Sutro Baths. She reached the bottom and wrapped her scarf more securely around her neck. *Why do these magical creatures seem determined to freeze my arse off?*

She stood for a moment, surveying her surroundings. Waves crashed endlessly into the beach and she saw several large rocks just offshore. Some people were standing on top of one of them, looking out to sea. In front of her were the remains of the Sutro Baths. She’d looked it up online last night and she found it hard to believe that this was once the largest indoor swimming pool complex in the world. Now it was just some concrete ruins that housed two giant pools of seawater.

“Now where will I find you, Rònan?” she murmured quietly as she walked to the larger of the pools. Taraghlan had said that he was in the ruins themselves, so she decided that was as good a place to start as any. There was a rectangle of concrete that jutted out into the water that looked like it was one side of a former swimming pool. She went out to the end and sat down cross-legged, deciding to give the selkie time to decide if he wanted her help or not.

As she sat, she practiced the meditation techniques Harry had taught her after her encounter with the coin. That terrible voice still came back to her occasionally, but less and less as time went on. She had her eyes closed when she heard her name. “Ginny Weasley,” the voice said again, Scottish accent stronger than Taraghlan’s had been.

Ginny opened her eyes to see a mottled gray selkie in front of her, head and shoulders bobbing up and down as he floated in the water. He had those same fathomless black eyes and as she watched, his nostrils opened and closed as he breathed. “Hello, are you Rònan?” she said softly.

“Aye, I am. Taraghlan said he was able to speak to ye yesterday. Will ye be able to help me?”

*How do these things communicate? Santa Cruz is quite a ways away!* “I don’t know, yet. Taraghlan said only that you needed help finding your wife. Can you tell me what happened?”

“Aye, she wanted to shed her skin for a little while. She’d tired of the sea as we do on occasion, but I haven’t seen her since. I do miss her so and it’s not like her to stay away for so long,” he said, spinning around in the water as he spoke.

“How long has she been gone?” Ginny asked, hoping that they reckoned time more like humans did.

“Our pups had been weaned and now they’re about to be off to find wives of their own,” Rònan said softly, voice barely audible over the crashing waves on the beach.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t know how long that is.”

The selkie frowned in concentration. “Maybe three or four of your years?” he said hopefully.

“That’s much more helpful, thank you. So she shed her skin to come up on land and you haven’t seen her since?”

“Aye,” he said, giving her a short selkie nod.
“What do you think happened to her?”

He cocked his head to the side, an odd look on a seal-like creature. “Have ye ever seen a selkie in human form?”

“I haven’t. Taraghlan and you are the only two I’ve ever met,” Ginny said honestly.

“Well, if ye had, ye’d never forget it. As a woman, a selkie is uncommonly beautiful and full of the grace of the sea,” he said, his fathomless eyes far away.

“And as a man?”

He focused back on her, whiskers twitching. “Mayhap I’ll show ye one day,” he said and Ginny felt her face redden. Did he just flirt with me?

“So you think she caught someone’s eye? Do you think she’s left you for a human?” she asked, clearing her throat.

Rònan slapped the still surface of the water with his flipper, completely affronted at the suggestion. “No! Selkies mate for life, ye ken. We might seek alternate companionship every now and then, but we always come back.”

Selkies are polyamorous. Who knew? “So you think she’s in some sort of trouble?”

“Many men have lost their hearts to a selkie and many a selkie woman has fallen afoul of those that would seek to control her by hiding away her skin so she may not return to the sea,” he said sadly.

“And you’re certain she’s still alive and nearby? What if she’s in some other part of the country?” Ginny asked. “Three or four years is a long time.”

“Aye, it is, but I feel her as sure as the tide rises and falls.”

“Why haven't you come up out of the water to look for her yourself? What do you need me for?”

“Only one of a mated pair can shed their skin and leave the sea at a time. Otherwise there’s the danger of both leaving the wee bairns unprotected.”

“But you said your children are grown.”

“It doesna matter. As long as she is on land, I must be in the sea.”

“Well, why doesn’t one of the other selkies come look for her?”

“And have one of them fall into the same fate? No. I told ye, we’re uncommonly beautiful.”

“Oh, so you need someone like me that’s not?” she said, giving him an arch look. Two can play at this game, she thought with an inward smile.

Rònan surprised her by giving a bark that sounded a lot like laughter. “I didna say you’re not beautiful! I need a native land-dweller who understands your world.” He paused for a moment, looking straight at her, all amusement gone. “I need a strong magic-user. I’m afraid my lady wife is in some peril.”

“What makes you think that? You think a wizard has her?”

“Most mortal humans wouldn’t know a selkie if one slapped them on the arse, y’see? They wouldn’t
know to look for the skin, much less hide it away. No, it’s a wizard that has her. Or a witch, I suppose, if it comes to that.”

“How do you know her skin is hidden? What if it’s been destroyed?”

“Then she’d be dead and I’d be free to seek another mate.” The selkie dipped his head under the water and resurfaced, blowing a cold spray out of both nostrils.

Ginny sat quietly, turning over the information she’d been given in her head. *How would I feel if Harry had been taken away from me? I wouldn’t rest until I’d found him, that’s for sure. If she’s being held against her will, and by a wizard, I might be able to get some help.* Coming to a decision, she nodded. “All right. I’ll help you. What’s her name?”

Overjoyed, Rònan leapt out of the water, diving back down in a graceful arch. “Aye, her name is Marella. Oh, Ginny Weasley, it’s a great service you’re doing me!”

“I haven’t done it yet,” she cautioned. “We’ll see if I can find her first. You said that you can feel her? Is there a section of the City where that feeling is strongest?”

“Aye. I feel her the most over that way,” he said, pointing a flipper behind her to the east.

“How far?”

“There’s a wee little cove there people call China Beach. I think that’s the closest to her.”

“All right. That’s where I’ll start, then.”

“Thank you again, Ginny Weasley. Bring back my wife safe to me and I’ll be in your debt.” He executed a peculiar half-bow and slipped beneath the surface of the still water, leaving her sitting on the freezing cold concrete.

Rising up on stiff legs, Ginny stomped her feet to get the blood flowing back into them, looking back out to where the waves crashed onto the shore. “Well. All I have to do is find out where a wizard is keeping an uncommonly beautiful woman and find her sealskin. Should be a snap!”

Clambering back up the cliffside trail, she decamped to a coffee shop to warm up and plan her next move, using a napkin to jot down some notes from their conversation. *I wish Ben were here. He would love this.* She thought about her friend who was down in Los Angeles visiting family during the summer holiday.

“You’re not staying up here during the summer?” she’d asked when they were discussing their respective summer plans.

“Not the whole summer. Girl, I need to see the sun! San Francisco in the summer is gloomy as hell. I’ll be back in the middle of July. Besides, I need to do my familial duty and prove that I’m not wasting my father’s money,” he said with a roll of his eyes.

“Well, I’ll miss you,” she said sincerely.

“Please. With Harry off all summer, it’ll be ‘Ben who?’ Oh! I know! You should come down to LA! Bring Teddy! We’ll do Disney! Oh my God, it’ll be so. Much. Fun!”

She was vaguely familiar with the concept of Disneyland and it did sound like a fun place, though she very much doubted its “Magic Kingdom” claim. “Oh, I’ll talk to Harry about it! I’m sure Teddy will love it!”
Thinking about Harry made her wonder what he was up to and she looked around her. Just about everyone in the coffee shop were staring at their laptops, tapping away, completely oblivious to what was going on around them. Surreptitiously drawing out her wand, she sent her hummingbird with a message to Harry.

*I talked to the selkie and learned more about my task. Come meet me for coffee on Balboa between 35th and 36th.* Message sent, she ordered a macchiato for him.

“Breakfast in bed and now coffee waiting for me?” he said when he sat down a few minutes later. “My summer holiday is great so far. How’s yours?”

“Busy!” She leaned in closer and lowered her voice. “I talked to the selkie, Rònan. He thinks his wife is being held by a wizard.”

Harry sipped his coffee and frowned. “He does, does he? What makes him think that?”

“Well, he said that to most humans a selkie in human form would just look like a really beautiful person, but a wizard would know what she was and look for the skin to hide it from her so she couldn’t leave.”

“Fair enough. How long has she been missing?” Harry leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Rònan said three or four years. He’s sure she’s not dead—he says he can feel her, sort of how the water horse could sense his dryad when she was a tree.”

“Magical bonds are like that. He say if she’s still in the City?”

“He says yes. Over by China Beach.”

Harry nodded, absently reaching for a biscotti and dunking it in his macchiato. “Sea Cliff,” he said and Ginny felt a small chill. She took a long drink of her own latte to chase it away.

“Yeah. Not my favorite neighborhood after what happened the last time we were there.”

“There’s a fair few other wizards that live around there. Big lots, very private. I can see one being able to keep a selkie hidden for a few years.” Harry crunched through the biscotti and picked up another one, tapping it against the rim of his coffee cup as he thought. “What do you want to do?” he asked, focusing back on Ginny.

“I thought first I’d find out what wizards live there and see if there were any likely candidates. See if I can find out who’s been seen with a new girlfriend or wife. Any announcements in the *Uncanny Examiner,* that sort of thing.”

“Nannies, too. Selkies are excellent mothers, so don’t focus only on single men.”

“Or women,” Ginny cut in and Harry nodded.

“Or women. So basically, everyone.”

“It’ll be a piece of cake, right?”

“Love, you’ve got a pretty big task ahead of you with this one,” he said, shaking his head at her. “I dunno how you’ve gotten yourself into this.”

“I found a new dryad for a water horse. Word apparently gets around.”
A couple of days later, Ginny felt like she’d made exactly zero headway. Through chatting with Archimedes and Sarah she’d compiled a list of the Wizarding residents of Sea Cliff as well as Lake Street. She spent an afternoon with Sarah, picking her brain about the twenty or so homes and their occupants. She learned a whole lot of gossip, but nothing to really narrow down her search.

“According to Sarah, Marcus Williams has a roving eye and is frequently seen in the company of ‘distressingly young’ women, but none of them seem to have been of the magical variety,” Ginny said as she pulled her black dress over her head. “Here, zip me,” she said, turning her back to Harry.

“Have I told you how good you look in this dress?” he said, planting a kiss on the nape of her neck.

“I believe the words you used were ‘fucking fantastic’,” she said, arching her brow at him. “Anyway, then there’s the Jordans who have an open marriage and are frequently seen with other lovers, but their tastes seem to run towards the ‘rough trade’ spectrum, so they’re out.”

Harry hopped on one foot as he pulled on a sock. “Well, it sounds like you’ve got at least some eliminated, yeah?”

“One or two, I suppose. What I don’t have yet is a smoking gun, as they say. There are several families that employ nannies and too many pervy old men to count,” she said, looking in the mirror on the back of the closet door and straightening her necklace.

She turned around to face Harry and buttoned up his shirt for him. “I suppose I’ll have to start going door to door and asking if anyone has seen an incredibly beautiful woman.”

“With you in front of them, the answer’s always going to be yes,” he said, kissing her on the nose.

“Cheeky bugger.” Ginny whacked him on the arse as she moved past him into the loo to attend to her makeup, his throaty laugh following her.

“So now what is this we’re going to again?” Ginny asked as Harry navigated the winding road through the hills on the way to St Ambrose’s.

“It’s a welcome reception for the new scholarship students and their families. Sort of an opportunity for a bit of get-to-know-you for the ones that are brand new,” Harry said, glancing over at her.

“Sounds like it’ll be pretty busy. I’ll have to share you?”

“Just for a few hours.”

“I suppose I can manage that, as long as you promise me some time with you alone later,” she said, putting her hand on his thigh as he pulled into the school’s small parking lot.

“I’ll have to see what I can arrange,” Harry said, giving her that smile that made her insides quiver.

The all-purpose room was the only room that could accommodate all of the school staff, board members, parents, new students and assorted other children and helpers. The room was decorated with blue-and-gold banners and there were displays on the walls showcasing distinguished graduates and current staff members. Harry left her to join the other faculty members in a kind of receiving line and she watched as he struck up a conversation with Juanita and Sophia.

She took a glass of wine from a passing tray and walked around, smiling at the excited faces of the children who were new to the school. I remember when I got my Hogwarts letter. I was over the
moon, she thought, sipping her wine. She saw Jacob in conversation with a man who looked like a new parent to the school and she nodded, noting there was more salt than pepper in his hair now.

Making her way to an unobtrusive spot near the stage, she watched Harry as he talked with new students and their parents, shaking hands and laughing. I almost lost him, she thought, memories of that awful night making her heart thump. Shaking her head, she closed her eyes for a moment, focusing on her breathing.

“Are ye all right?” said a voice next to her and she felt a hand on her shoulder.

Startled, her eyes snapped open and she saw the concerned face of a young woman peering into hers. “Oh, yes, I’m fine! Thank you!”

“Yes, when ye get a bunch of wee ones in one place, the noise level does tend to go up,” the young woman said with a kind smile. “Which one is yours?” she asked.

“That one over there,” Ginny said, pointing to Harry with a smile.

“Och, he looks a wee bit old to be starting school here,” she said with a chuckle.

Ginny looked at her again, catching the slight Scottish burr. She was very plain-looking except for her hair which was a rich, dark brown. She thought. “He’s one of the teachers. Defense. Where are you from?”

“I’m from the Orkneys, a little place near Kirkwall. Doesn’t even have a name, really.”

“What house were you in at Hogwarts?”

At her question, the young woman looked down and away. “I didn’t go to Hogwarts.”

“Oh? Did you go to school here or somewhere else?”

“No, I’m a Squib, ye ken?”

“Oh, no! I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean any insult,” Ginny said, completely mortified.

“It’s no insult, it just is. I take no offense,” the young woman said, putting her hand on Ginny’s arm, her touch reassuring.

“Well, even if there was no insult, I should know better. Which one is yours?”

“Those four,” she said, gesturing toward a group of blond children. There were two boys and two girls, one girl obviously a few years older than the others. “Well, they’re not mine exactly, I nanny for them. They’re very sweet and Moira is so excited to begin learning about magic.”

“Well, if she was smart enough to snag one of these scholarships, I daresay she’ll do very well here.” As she watched the children, she felt that peculiar buzz in her tattoo again and rubbed it distractedly.

“Oh dear. Morgan’s done it now. I’d better go see to them. It was nice meeting ye…”
“Ginny, Ginny Weasley,” she said, embarrassed that she hadn’t already introduced herself to the woman. *Mum would say my manners have gone right downhill!*

“I’m Marella,” she said, the name sending an electric shock through Ginny and nearly causing her to drop her wineglass. “Maybe I’ll see ye again soon. Morgan, put your sister down! Scottie, what have ye got in your mouth? Ye wee besoms! I turn my back on ye for two minutes…”

_No, it can’t be. Rònan said uncommonly beautiful and she’s so plain! Marella must be a common Scottish name_, she thought as she watched her wrangle the children and shepherd them off to a quieter corner. *I wonder who her employers are. I’ll have to ask Harry. The girl’s name was Moira._

As the evening wound down, Harry and Juanita were able to break away from the constant parade of parents and joined her by the stage. “A good turnout,” Ginny remarked, handing Harry a glass of red wine.

“I guess? Juanita, how do these things usually turn out?” Harry asked with a shrug.

“This was pretty good. That new scholarship Jacob set up must have gotten a ton of applicants,” she said, elbowing Harry in the ribs.

“Ugh, don’t remind me. I thought we’d never get through them all.” He’d told her of not only the seemingly endless mountain of paper, but the endless bickering between all of the application reviewers.

As they chatted, Ginny looked for Marella but didn’t see her or her four blond charges. *They must have left already. It is getting late._ She yawned and Harry put his arm around her. “Is it time to go?” she asked, resting her head on his shoulder.

“Yes, I think we should be able to leave. Juanita, have a great summer, all right?”

“You too, Harry,” Juanita said, nodding at the both of them.

They took their leave of Artemis and walked out into the cool early summer evening, Harry sighing in relief. “I’m so glad that’s over. Now I’m free until the back-to-school reception.”

“You did very well. I heard a lot of parents talking about how witty and charming you were,” Ginny said, squeezing his hand.

“Do I get full marks?” he asked, nuzzling her neck as he unlocked the car.

“You keep that up and you’ll get extra credit.” Ginny kissed him as he helped her into the passenger seat. A few minutes later, they were on the way home, rolling through the dark hills. “So I had an interesting encounter tonight.”

“Oh? Did Richard corner you again? Tell you all about his collegiate Quidditch exploits?”

“No, nothing like that. I met a nanny called Marella.”

“Pretty name. Was she nice?”

“She was. Marella is the name Rònan gave me for his wife.”

“Yeah? You think it’s her?”

“I don’t know. Rònan said when I saw a selkie in human form, I’d know because of their beauty and grace, but she seemed awfully plain. Brown hair, blue eyes and beyond that, I can’t really recall
anything else about her. Well, except for her hair. It was brown, but very luxurious.” Ginny sat quietly as Harry drove, thinking about the nanny and their short conversation.

“She have anything to say?”

“She said she’s from the Orkneys, by a little place called Kirkwall and that she’s a Squib. Then the kids started acting up and she had to go,” Ginny said, thinking back over their short conversation. “One of the girls was called Moira—she’ll be starting in the fall. Did you meet her family?”

“Moira…hmm…blonde?” Harry asked, glancing at her for her nod. “Yes, I did meet her father. Abraham Langston he’s called. Works in Ludicrous Patents.”

“Oh, they’re on my Sea Cliff list, then. Sarah told me about Mrs Langston passing away around three years ago or so, leaving the four children.” She paused for a moment, frowning. “Harry, this all seems too much like coincidence. It can’t be her. She’s too plain!”

“Did you feel anything in your tattoo when she was nearby?”

Unconsciously, Ginny rubbed her palm over her hummingbird, lips pursed. “Well, yes. I felt a kind of buzz, but I thought it was just itchy.”

Harry raised an eyebrow and grunted. “Well. That’s interesting.”

“Why is that interesting?”

“The spell on your tattoo enables a bit of magic detection,” Harry said, slowing down for a stop sign.

“Then it should always be going off, shouldn’t it?”

“No, there’s a sort of baseline and then anything above that will set it off. It’s meant to help an Auror detect really concentrated magic like traps or enchanted objects.” He merged carefully onto the freeway, heading toward the Bay Bridge before speaking again. “If you felt it around her, then there’s something. She’s got something on her.”

“An object?”

“Or a glamour. Something that changes her appearance, yeah?”

Ginny sat quietly, the lights of the bridge flashing past. “So clearly I need to talk to her again, find out if it is her. What if she doesn’t want to go back?”

“If that’s the case, then it sounds like you’re going to have some hard news to deliver to your friend Rònan. I’ve never heard of a selkie voluntarily staying on land, but I suppose it could happen.” They were both quiet as Harry carefully navigated back to the parking garage. “All right?” he asked, taking her hand after shutting off the car.

“Yeah,” Ginny sighed. “I need to find out if it’s really her, if she’s being held against her will or not and if she’s not, then I need to go tell Rònan that his wife basically wants a divorce. Can creatures like that even divorce?”

“I dunno. I imagine there must be some way of severing a bond, but I have no clue what it might be.” He kissed the back of her hand and smiled at her. “Let’s get home. That dress of yours has been playing hell with me all night.”

“I told you that thing was a bother,” she said, feeling a slow flush come over her at the look in
Harry’s eyes.

“Still waiting for that first complaint,” he said with a wink before Apparating home.

***

The next day, Ginny walked down Sea Cliff Ave, reviewing her cover story. She’d decided that she would present herself at the house and ask for Marella under the pretense of bringing a treat to repay her for her kindness and concern the night before. She had a loaf of Harry’s banana bread, baked just that morning, to bolster her story.

“Do you want me to come with you?” he’d asked as he was wrapping up the loaf in a clean tea towel.

“No, it would look odd to have one of Moira’s teachers showing up at her house, wouldn’t it?”

“I could change my appearance.”

“Marella already knows we’re together. She asked which one was mine and I pointed you out,” she said, popping a piece of the other loaf in her mouth. “So it would be suspicious if I showed up with someone that wasn’t you.”

“Mm, I see your point.” Harry leaned against the worktop and crossed his arms. “You sure you’ll be all right?”

“Yes. I’m just going to talk to her and see if it’s really her and if she’s being held against her will. If she is being held, I’ll have to find out if she has any ideas as to where her skin might be. We’ll see how far I can get today. This might have to come out over a few meetings.”

“Be careful and if you need to, Summon me, all right?” Harry said, hugging her tight.

***

This should be the one, she thought as she approached the stately three-story home. There was no fence in front and the front garden sported some very whimsically trimmed trees. It had turned out to be a sunny day once the sun broke through the clouds and chased the fog away shortly after noon. Here goes. She took a deep breath and walked up to the front door, ringing the bell.

A moment later, the door opened and Ginny looked down to see a female house-elf looking up at her, one hand on the door. “Yes? Can Poppy help Miss?”

“Hello. Is Marella home? I’d like to speak with her,” Ginny said with a smile, hoping she didn’t sound nervous.

“Miss Marella has taken the children down to the beach,” the house-elf said. “Would Miss like to leave a message with Poppy?”

“Do you know which beach she may have taken them to?”

“Miss Marella likes to take them to China Beach,” Poppy squeaked, gesturing down the street.

“Oh, all right. I’ll see if I can find her there. I want to thank her for her kindness last night and give her this,” she said, motioning to the towel-wrapped loaf cradled in the crook of her arm.

“Very good, Miss. Miss will let Poppy know if there is anything Poppy can do for her.”
“I will, thank you.” Ginny nodded and the house-elf closed the door. All right. China Beach. She walked down the sunny street and soon the entrance to the little beach cove appeared. A road labeled “service vehicles only” led down to the beach and she walked, taking in the sounds of the waves and the cries of the gulls carried on the wind. About halfway down, she came to a hairpin turn and she paused, moving to the edge of the pavement to see if she could see Marella and the children down on the sand.

I bet that’s her, on that blanket there, she thought, seeing a brown-haired woman on a red-and-black plaid blanket spread on the sand. Two of the smaller children were playing in the sand nearby while the older two were out in the water. Alongside the pavement was what looked like a sort of community center with the roof level with the roadway, so Ginny walked out on it, feeling a bit like a spy as she watched Marella and the children. They seemed to be the only ones out on the beach. Not too surprising, it is the middle of the day on a weekday, Ginny reasoned.

As she watched, Marella stood up, saying something to the children in the water as she walked toward them. Her feet were bare and her trousers rolled up past her calves, her hair hidden underneath a floppy hat that she had to hold onto as the wind kept trying to sweep it off her head.

At the edge of the water, the older boy, Morgan, Ginny remembered, held something out to Marella with a smile. As she took it, a little curl of seawater washed over her bare toes and she was transformed. Ginny held her breath and felt as if all of the small hairs all over her body were standing straight up as Marella lost her frumpiness. Her hat blew away in the wind, allowing her silky brown hair to stream out behind her. She seemed to stand straighter, her waist slimmed and hips widened, her bosom became fuller. Ginny couldn’t see her face, but she could imagine the plainness of it was completely erased by an unearthly beauty.

The water ebbed away and as if a curtain had been drawn, Marella retreated into drabness, seeming to shrink in on herself and become insignificant once more. Wow, that was…I don’t even know what that was, Ginny thought as she was able to breathe again. Her tattoo was buzzing like crazy and she rubbed it, hoping to make the feeling go away.

“That’s got to be her,” she murmured as she watched Marella walk back to the blanket after chasing down her hat and setting it firmly back on her head. She showed Morgan’s gift to the younger children and sat back down on the blanket. Squaring her shoulders, Ginny continued down the path and onto the beach.

Catching sight of her as she approached, Marella waved and smiled. “Surprised I am to see you, Ginny! What brings ye out here on this beautiful day?” she said, patting a spot on the blanket next to her.

“Well, I wanted to thank you for being so kind and concerned about me last night at the school. That sort of kindness is rare these days and I wanted to thank you with a small gift.” Ginny sat down on the blanket and gave her the loaf of banana bread.

“Och, you’ve brought me a wee treat made with your own hands,” she exclaimed as she unwrapped it.

“Well, I didn’t make it, Harry did,” Ginny said deprecatingly.

“Still, it’s made with love and care and will be enjoyed here in this beautiful place.” She stood up, waving to the older children splashing at the water’s edge, calling them in. Catching sight of the bread, the younger ones abandoned their sand castle building and crowded in close. “Look at what Ginny brought us, sweetlings! Shall we have some now?”
Ginny watched as she deftly sliced up the loaf with a knife from a picnic basket and passed them out to the eager children who ate them so fast, she wondered if they’d actually tasted any of it. “What do ye say to Ginny?” Marella asked, dusting crumbs from her hands as she wrapped up the remains of the loaf.

“Thank you, Ginny,” the four children chorused before scooting away to continue their activities.

“They’re very sweet,” Ginny said, watching as Morgan chased his older sister. He had a strand of kelp and was trying to use it like a whip.

“They are. Sweet and a handful. That Morgan is going to get a smack from Moira if he doesn’t watch it,” Marella said with a smile. Ginny looked at her, wishing she’d been able to see her face when the seawater had touched her and momentarily dispelled the drab glamour.

“How long have you been their nanny?”

“Going on four years, since that one was a wee bairn,” she said, pointing to the youngest boy, who Ginny judged to be around five. She shook her head sadly. “Their mother up and died and their poor father had naught idea what to do with them.”

“Do you have children of your own?”

“Oh, aye. Some grown, some still young.”

“Do you get to see them often?”

“They’re off with their da. I haven’t seen them since I started nannying for Mr Langston,” Marella said, a note of sadness in her voice.

“That must be hard,” Ginny said quietly.

“Aye, but I’ve got no choice,” she said, voice barely above a whisper. Ginny waited for her to say more, but she looked out to the sea, knees curled up to her chest.

Taking a deep breath, she steeled herself and said, “Rònan misses you.” Marella didn’t react and Ginny thought she hadn’t heard. She started to repeat herself, but stopped as a tear slid slowly down her cheek.

“That’s a name I haven’t heard in far too long. Talked to him, have ye?” Still keeping her eyes focused on the sea, she wiped away the tear.

“I have. He’s worried about you. Your pups are almost grown.”

“They were just weaned when I felt the urge to walk as a woman again. They’ll hardly remember me. Oh, my boys,” she moaned, resting her forehead on her knees as her body shook with quiet sobs.

Mindful of drawing the attention of curious children, Ginny gently patted her on her back, making quiet soothing sounds as Marella sobbed out her sorrow. Slowly, she came back to herself, dabbing at her eyes and blowing her nose with a paper napkin. “I’m sorry,” she apologized.

“It’s all right. Rònan asked for my help. He’s concerned that you haven’t returned to him.”

“I can’t,” Marella said quietly.

“Because of the children?”
“That’s a small part of it, but Mr Langston keeps me sealskin locked up tight. I don’t have the magic to open it.”

“What about one of the children?”

“They don’t know the spell and besides, there’s the Trace, ye ken?”

“One of the house-elves?”

Marella shook her head. “House-elves and selkies have never been friendly. Plus, Mr Langston pays very well and none of them want to lose their place.”

“I can unlock it. Where is it? Let’s go now.”

“No, I canna transform now. It’s only during the high tide at the full moon. Besides, there’s the bairns to think about.”

“Do you want to stay? I can take a message to Rònan if you want to stay.”

“I don’t want to stay. The sea calls me so, but I can’t go if I don’t have the skin. The merest touch burns like fire.”

“I saw what happened when you got a bit of water on you. Do you carry an enchanted device that disguises you?”

“No. This glamour is all the doing of Mr Langston. Only seawater or my sealskin will dispel it and I can’t abide the touch of the sea for very long, so the disguise remains intact,” Marella said, a bitter note in her voice.

“Come with me now. The full moon is in just a few days. Stay with us and I can get your skin for you and then you can be with Rònan and your pups again,” Ginny urged.

Marella shook her head slowly. “I can’t leave the littles with no preparation. I’m the only mother they’ve known for these last years. It would be like their mother had died all over again.”

Ginny sat quietly, watching the waves pound ceaselessly into the sand. “I want to help you, but I can’t unless you decide what you want to do.”

“I understand and I am grateful for your offer. Let me talk to Mr Langston again. We had an agreement for two years, but when the two years came, he begged me to stay for another two and I agreed.” She sighed and looked at Ginny, her blue eyes troubled. “That is coming nigh and I’m sure he’ll agree to let me go. Little Cameron will be starting school soon and there won’t be much need for a nanny when they’re all gone during the day.”

“All right. But please, let me know if he refuses to let you go. I can help you or contact the authorities on your behalf. Harry used to be an Auror and he can help you, too.”

“I know who Harry Potter is, Ginny Weasley,” Marella said with a smile. “I may not be able to do magic of my own, but I can sense your bond is as tight as mine and Rònan’s.”

“Oh. Okay,” Ginny said, taken aback.

“I thank ye for your gift and your offer of help. I’ll talk to Mr Langston tonight.”

Feeling dismissed, Ginny stood and brushed the sand off the bottom of her jeans. “All right. I’ll meet you here again at noon tomorrow?”
“Noon tomorrow,” Marella nodded.

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“So she said she’d talk to Abraham Langston tonight about letting her go and giving her sealskin back. We’re supposed to meet at noon tomorrow at the beach again,” Ginny said, reclining back against the arm of the sofa and putting her feet in Harry’s lap.

“And the original agreement was for two years? This was right after his wife died?” he asked, rubbing his thumbs over the balls of her feet, almost light enough to tickle.

“Yeah. I gather the youngest was maybe a year old by then and the point was that she would stay long enough for him to get back up on his feet and maybe find other help.” She felt him draw the tip of his finger along the arch of her foot, making her twitch and she scowled at him. “Are you trying to distract me?”

“Am I being successful?”

“Harry, this is serious business.”

“So is this,” he said, kissing her ankle.

“Boys,” Ginny said, shaking her head. “My question is this—should we get the MLES involved? For all intents and purposes, he’s holding a magical creature against her will.”

Harry considered. “I suppose we could try. Call in an anonymous report.”

“What if he hides her? Or moves her someplace else when the authorities come? Did you talk to him last night? How did he seem?”

“Yeah, we chatted briefly. Seemed all right,” Harry said with a shrug. “He didn’t have red, glowing eyes or a maniacal laugh if that’s what you’re wondering.”

Ginny sat quietly, enjoying the feeling of Harry gently massaging her feet, thinking about Marella’s situation. “Harry, do you think he’s using her as more than a nanny and that’s why he won’t let her go?”

“You mean sleeping with her?”

“Yes, with her willing or not.”

Harry sighed and stroked a hand up and down her leg. “He wouldn’t be the first or the last, sad to say. Did you get that feeling from her?”

“No, not really. I’m just trying to think of all of the reasons why Langston would want to keep her captive so I can argue against them.”

“And no one can argue like a Weasley,” Harry said, deliberately tickling her feet this time.

“And no one can start an argument like a Potter,” she said, leaning forward to kiss him. His lips were soft and gentle against hers and she felt herself being pushed backwards. “You know, once Teddy is here, we won’t be able to shag anywhere we want to,” she whispered against the soft skin of his neck.

“Then I suppose we’ll have to take advantage of our remaining opportunities, won’t we?” Harry whispered back, sucking lightly on the thin skin over her collarbone.
“I do like it when you take advantage,” she sighed, wrapping her arms tightly around him.

***

China Beach the next day was as gray and overcast as the previous day had been sunny and bright. Ginny waited on the beach, shivering and listening to the crashing waves. *I hope Marella comes soon, today is a terrible day to be out here.* Sighing, she checked her watch and saw that it was coming up on twelve-thirty.

*Hm, should I stay and wait a little longer? Maybe she’s decided to stay on land and doesn’t want my help, after all. I’ll give her ten more minutes.* As she waited, she looked out to sea, imagining she could see a seal popping his head up out beyond the breakers. *Is that Rònan out there? Oh, I hope I don’t have to give him bad news.*

She decided to wait until a quarter to one before setting off towards the Langston house, hoping she’d run into Marella and the children on their way to the beach. Luck was not with her, however, and she arrived at the door of the house without having caught sight of the selkie and her charges. *Maybe the weather was too bad to bring the kids out,* she thought as she rang the bell.

The house-elf Poppy opened the door again, looking up at her. “Yes? Can Poppy help Miss?”

“Hello. Is Marella home? Can you let her know Ginny is here to see her?” Ginny looked behind the house-elf, hoping to catch sight of the selkie, but saw only a tastefully-paneled foyer.

“Miss Marella is not seeing visitors today. Miss Marella told Poppy to say if Ginny Weasley came to see her that she thanks her for her kind offer of help, but it will not be needed.” The house-elf looked up at Ginny expectantly as if waiting for a response.

“Are you certain she said that? I just want to speak to her for a moment, please. We were supposed to meet on the beach—”

“Today is not a good day for the beach, Miss. Mr Langston has asked that Miss Marella keep the children away from the beach,” Poppy said.

*That’s a tall order in this city.* “Please, I’d like to see Marella. I’ve been waiting for a long time on the beach and—”

“Poppy wishes Miss a pleasant day,” the house-elf said and closed the door in her face.

Open-mouthed, Ginny stood in front of the door, her face hot from the rush of blood to her cheeks. She rang the bell again, but this time Poppy didn’t answer. Frustrated, she banged the ornate wrought iron knocker against the door several times. “Marella! Marella, it’s Ginny!” she shouted. “Please come out and talk to me!” Getting no answer at the door, Ginny walked toward the back garden, standing on her tiptoes to look over the fence. The part of the back garden she could see was deserted, the swing set looking lonely and forlorn.

Exhaling a sigh of irritation, Ginny looked up at the windows. All of them were closed and covered by curtains. “Marella, I know you’re in there. I want to help you. I’m not giving up, all right?” she shouted again, hoping she was being heard. Not knowing what else to do, she crouched down by the hedge and silently Apparated back home.

“Harry,” she called, “Harry, are you home?”

“Gin? Is everything all right?” he asked, coming out of the room they were preparing for Teddy and into the lounge. She noticed he had a streak of pale blue paint in his hair.
“No, everything’s not all right. Marella didn’t come to meet me at the beach and when I went to the house, the house-elf just said that Marella wasn’t seeing visitors and to tell me that she thanks me for my offer of help but it won’t be needed,” Ginny said, trying not to sound completely panicked.

“The house-elf told you this? You didn’t talk to Marella?” Harry asked, frowning.

“No. I told the house-elf I wanted to talk to her directly, but she just closed the door right in my face!”

“Huh,” Harry grunted, “that’s not exactly polite, is it?”

“It’s suspicious is what it is! I think she talked to that Abraham Langston and he’s just not going to let her go.” She crossed her arms and tapped her foot. “I think we need to contact MLES about this.”

“All right, we’ll go right now,” Harry said, putting on his trainers and pulling his fleece jumper over his head.

A few minutes later, Ginny was in an uncomfortable chair in a bland waiting room, filling out a form that seemed far too detailed for her level of frustration. “Why do they need our address?” she grumped to Harry sitting calmly next to her. “What is our address? I haven’t memorized it yet.”

After filling in the preliminaries, she looked over the boxes to indicate what she was filing a complaint about. “Haunting? Malicious Spectral Infestation? Malicious Object Enchantment? Harry, this is ridiculous.”

Harry looked over the form and smiled. “Seems pretty standard from my end.” He shook his head. “God, I do not miss this at all.”

“Well, I’m just going to tick ‘Other’ and write in ‘Selkie being held against her will.’ That should get the point across,” Ginny said crossly, pressing extra hard with the pen. Signing the bottom, she stood up and took it to the officer on duty. He briefly looked it over and set it on a pile of other forms.

“So when will someone follow up on that?” Ginny asked, crossing her arms.

“We should be able to check on your complaint in three to five days, Miss,” the duty officer said, giving her an exasperated look.

“Three to five days? That’s absurd! There is a magical creature being held against her will! This needs to be addressed now!” she said. “I demand——”

“Three to five days, Miss. We have your contact details on the form,” he said, cutting her off without even looking at her. Ginny saw his name tag said “Jenkins” and she drew another breath, readying herself to unleash another stream of invective.

“All right, love?” Harry said, putting a calming hand on her shoulder.

“Officer Jenkins is telling me that they’ll get to my complaint in three to five days!”

“Miss, three to——” Jenkins said, finally looking up from the papers on his desk and pausing when he saw Harry standing next to her. “Oh. Ah…Auror Potter, I didn’t see you…” he stammered, eyes darting around the office.

“It’s just Harry, thanks. Jenkins, is it? I know the department is busy, but if you could expedite Miss Weasley’s request, I’d really appreciate it,” he said quietly.
“Of course! Here, I think I have someone available right now, in fact.” Jenkins picked up Ginny’s form and stepped quickly through an open door at the rear of the front office. “Reston!” they heard him shout in a strangled voice, the rest being lost as he moved away from them.

“I guess being Harry Potter isn’t always a bother,” Ginny said, smiling up at him.

“Being me does have occasional usefulness.” He shrugged and turned around, leaning his elbows on top of the counter.

“Thank you,” she said, kissing him on the cheek.

Jenkins bustled back into the office, a wide smile on his face. “Reston has just left and should only be an hour or so. Would you like anything to drink? Coffee? Tea? We have Lipton.”

“Coffee, thanks,” Harry said and Ginny reminded herself to put some decent tea bags in her purse the next time she left the flat.

They waited on the uncomfortable chairs, drinking terrible coffee and flipping through months-old magazines. “You never told me law enforcement was so exciting,” Ginny said, tossing aside a copy of “Magical Housekeeping” from last year.

Harry had his eyes closed and hands folded on his stomach, legs stretched out in front of him; she thought he looked like he could wait there for a thousand years and not be bothered. She noticed he still had the streak of blue in his hair. “Law enforcement is largely long periods of ‘hurry up and wait’ punctuated by short bursts of ‘oh shit’,” he said, opening one eye to look at her. “Did I tell you about that time Ron and I—”

“Ginny Weasley?” a lanky, blond-haired man asked as he walked towards them. “I’m Kevin Reston.” He held out his hand and Ginny shook it.

“Did you talk to Marella?” she asked anxiously as he sat down in the chair next to her. Harry gave up his relaxed pose and sat up straight, eyes trained on Officer Reston.

“I did.”

“What did she say? Is she all right?”

Officer Reston held up his hands in a placating gesture and Ginny tried to rein in her anxiety. “She’s fine. No visible signs of injury and she seemed calm and happy.”

“How were the children?”

“I didn’t see the children, I interviewed her alone.” He looked at her skeptically. “You say she’s a selkie? She doesn’t look like any I’ve ever seen.”

“That’s because of the glamour! Take her to the sea!”

“Be that as it may, she says she’s happy and not being held.”

“Was Langston there?” Harry asked, leaning forward.

“No, sir.”

“Did you ask to see her sealskin?” Ginny asked, putting a hand on the officer’s forearm.

“Ma’am, I don’t quite believe that she’s a selkie as you say. I’ve never heard of one staying on land
so long and she just doesn’t fit the type,” he said gently.

“That’s because he won’t let her go! Her husband and pups are waiting for her! Harry—” Ginny turned to him, feeling utterly defeated at the officer’s complacency.

Harry stood up and took her hand, holding out his right one to the officer who stood as well. “Thank you very much for expediting our request, Officer Reston,” he said, shaking his hand.

“Oh, no problem at all, Auror Potter,” he said, looking the slightest bit starstruck. “It looks to me like everything is fine at the Langston home. Don’t hesitate to contact us again if you hear anything else.”

“Why? So you can go have a look-see in three to five days?” Ginny said bitterly, standing next to Harry.

“We will. Thanks again,” Harry said, giving Ginny’s hand a hard squeeze before leading her out of the office and into the main street of the center of Wizarding San Francisco.

“Harry, what—?” she began, subsiding at the shake of his head.

“Let’s get home,” he said, letting go of her hand and Apparating away, Ginny following a second later.

“What was that all about?” she asked, facing Harry in their lounge.

“Gin, they’re going to see what they expect to see and if Marella is telling them she’s fine, they have to take her word for it,” he said gently.

“But he didn’t even believe she’s a selkie! Can’t he feel the glamour in his tattoo?”

“Non-Aurors don’t have tattoos like we do, love.”

“Why doesn’t he believe me? I told him she’s being held against her will! She told me he has her sealskin locked away!” Ginny felt her face get hot and tears beginning to threaten. Closing her eyes, she tried to find a well of calm inside. I’m not angry at Harry. I’m not angry at Harry, she repeated over and over as she gradually regained control of her feelings.

“And Marella told him that she isn’t. So, the question becomes what is the real story here? Is she being held and being forced to say she isn’t? Or is she truly staying with the Langstons of her own free will?” Ginny opened her eyes to see Harry pacing back and forth in front of her, long strides making short work of the room.

“What should we do, then?” she asked, feeling helpless. A wave of exhaustion came over her and she sat down in an armchair, Stuart immediately seizing the opportunity to jump up in her lap and shove his cat face into hers.

“Do you think you can talk to Rònan again?” Harry asked, standing next to the fireplace.

“Maybe. I can try. What do you want me to ask him?”

“I want you to see if he can sense anything of what she feels through their bond. He said he could feel about where she was—see if he can sense anything of her emotional state, yeah?”

“All right. And then what?”

“Moira’s new teacher might be paying a visit to her father this evening,” Harry said with a conspiratorial grin.
Ginny huddled deeper in her jacket as she sat on the concrete peninsula that stuck out into the larger of the two pools at the ruins of the old Sutro Baths. The wind coming in off the water in the late afternoon was fierce and she fought to keep her teeth from chattering. *Come on, Rònan,* she pleaded, casting her eyes up to the top of the cliff in front of her. She could barely make out Harry, standing with his hands in his pockets as he patiently waited for the selkie to show up and talk to her.

Finally, Ginny detected the faintest disturbance in the water and Rònan’s mottled gray head popped up in front of her. “Ginny Weasley, d’ye bring me news of me lady wife?”

“Hello, Rònan. Yes, I have news. I was able to talk to her. She is well and is working as a caretaker for a man with four children.”

“Och, she has ever had a soft spot for the wee littles,” he said with a note of pride in his voice. “Will she be comin’ back to me soon, then?”

“Well, I’ve run into a bit of a problem,” she said, explaining to the selkie about her conversation on the beach. “She said she misses you and the pups and wants to come home, but she also feels a duty to the Langston family. She said she would talk to Mr Langston and then she would come home, but when I went to talk to her today, she wouldn’t see me.” Ginny looked at him, trying to gauge his reaction, but his dark seal eyes were inscrutable, so she went on.

“We went to the local authorities and they sent someone to talk to her, but she told him that everything was fine. Rònan, I’m sure she’s being forced to say all is well.” She paused for a moment, trying to decide how to phrase her next question. “I wanted to know if you could maybe sense anything about her emotional state? Through your mating bond? Since you could tell approximately where she was, Harry and I thought…?”

Rònan nodded, spinning around in the still pool as he thought. “I can’t give ye exactly how she’s feelin’, ye ken, but it’s no happiness. I felt a kind of lightness the day after we spoke and I thought sure I’d see her cuttin’ through the waters to me, but that night all of that lightness went away and I began to fear the worst.”

Ginny nodded, feeling her heart sink. “So she does want to come, but she’s being forced to say everything is fine.”

Rònan looked up at her, bobbing gently up and down in the water. “Is it too big a task I’ve asked of ye?” he asked quietly.

“No, it’s just turned out to be a bit trickier than I thought it would be,” she said, hoping she sounded confident and reassuring. *I must be a better actress than I think I am,* she thought, smiling as Rònan executed a graceful flip in joy.

“I knew I’d asked after the right person, Ginny Weasley. When I heard what ye’d done for that water horse, I knew ye’d be just the one to set everything to rights again.”

“Your faith in me does me a great service, Rònan. I’ll do my best,” she said, feeling a tiny bit warmer. “Thank you very much for coming to speak with me again.”

“Och, it’s the least I can do. Let me know if there’s aught else I can do to help you.” He gave another selkie bow and dove back under the water without a single ripple.

Ginny sighed and stood up on stiff legs, dusting off her bottom. Harry met her halfway up the cliff path. “Well?” he asked, wrapping her up in his warm arms.
“He said that she’s not feeling happy. This just makes me even more convinced that she’s being threatened somehow.” She stood quietly, savoring Harry’s warmth. “I wonder if Langston threatened to destroy her sealskin?”

“Then she’d die, wouldn’t she?” Harry said softly.

“Maybe he doesn’t know that. Maybe he thinks that he’d just be dooming her to being a woman forever and never able to return to the sea?”

“Well, looks like Abraham Langston and I will be having a parent-teacher conference tonight.”

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“Are you sure you won’t get into trouble?” Ginny asked as Harry drove slowly down the residential street.

“Well, I may have roped myself into some other pre-term parental visits, but it should be fine,” he said, parking the car several houses down from the Langston’s. He shut it off and turned to Ginny. “All right. Let’s go over the plan.”

“I’m going to wait here until I get your signal. Then I’m to Disillusion myself and Apparate into the foyer. Then I’ll find Marella and talk to her face-to-face and confirm if she wants to leave. I need to find out if she knows where her sealskin is being kept and if I can get it. Then I need to figure out how to get her out of the house, into the car and drive away,” she said, listing items off on her fingers.

“Very good. Got it in one.” Harry smiled and caressed her cheek. “You would have made a smashing Auror.”

Ginny made a face and kissed him. “Too much running, jumping and climbing trees for my taste.”

Harry opened the car door and got out, handing her the key fob. “Wait for my signal, all right? If there’s a Blood Seal, we’ll have to come up with Plan B.”

“Got it.” She tucked the fob into her jeans pocket and watched him walk down the street. “And now I just sit and wait.” Closing her eyes, she settled back into the leather car seat and tried to relax. This is no different than waiting before a big game, she thought, remembering her old pre-game rituals when she played for the glory of Gryffindor.

I wish I could at least see the front door from here. Oh! The signal! Her tattoo blossomed with a short burst of pain from an aborted Summons. There mustn’t be any Seal then. She took a deep breath and Disillusioned herself, the shivery feeling of the spell raising gooseflesh on her arms. Here goes. Holding her breath, she focused as hard as she ever had on Apparating silently. If she failed at this, then the jig was up.

A brief squeezing sensation and she was in the Langston foyer, appearing without a sound. Yes! She stood still, listening. She heard voices coming from the left, one of them being Harry’s. A staircase went up to her right and she moved lightly over to it, pausing before beginning her ascent.

On the second-floor landing, she stood still, hardly daring to breathe while a house-elf carrying a bundle of clean linens went down the stairs. Pacing quietly down the hall, she found what appeared to be the family bedrooms. Light shone underneath the bottoms of the doors, so she didn’t open them, not wanting to run into the children. Another staircase at the end of the hall went up to the third floor. Quiet as a mouse, Ginny ascended.
More doors. Only one however had light shining underneath and she approached it, knocking softly. “Marella?” she called quietly.

A moment later, the door opened a few inches and Marella’s face peered out. “Is someone there?” she asked anxiously.

“It’s me, Ginny,” she whispered. “Let me in.” Marella’s eyes widened in surprise and she opened the door wider, allowing Ginny to pass. “Close the door.” Once the door was closed, Ginny dispelled the Disillusionment.

“Oh, Ginny, it is you!” Marella held her hands in front of her mouth, looking like she was trying to hold back tears.

“Shh, Marella, it’s okay,” Ginny said, folding the selkie in her arms and rubbing her back until she calmed down. “Listen, I don’t know how much time I have. Harry is downstairs distracting Abraham.” She drew her over to the small bed and sat them down. “Is what Poppy told me true? You want to stay?”

Marella shook her head, tears starting up again. “No. I knew ye’d never believe that cock and bull story. I want to leave…I need to leave, but Mr Langston…he threatened to destroy me sealskin.”

“But won’t that, um, kill you?”

“Not right away. It’s a slow fading as me magic drains away.” She paused and shook her head again, looking down at the patterned carpet. “It’s a horrible way to go.”

“Let me help you get out, then. I have a car waiting. Where is your skin kept?”

“I canna leave tonight, I won’t be able to transform until the full moon in two nights time.”

“You can stay with us for a couple of nights.”

“Och, it’s kind of ye, Ginny, but I can’t leave wi’out saying goodbye to the bairns.”

Ginny bit back a groan of frustration. All of her senses were screaming at her to get Marella out now, but she could hardly abduct the woman—she was able to Apparate herself silently, but she doubted she’d be able to take Marella alongside and still leave no trace. “Can you tell me where he has your skin hidden? I can take it with me tonight and then he won’t be able to destroy it.”

“He keeps it in a trunk at the foot of his bed.”

“Metal? Wood? You indicated before that it’s locked with magic?”

“Wood, cedar I think. And yes, magic keeps it shut.” She looked at her hopefully. “If ye could get me skin away from him, that would be such a help.”

“I’ll do what I can. Which room is his?” Ginny stood and reapplied the Disillusionment, listening closely to Marella’s directions to Abraham Langston’s bedroom.

“Oh, do be careful, Ginny. I couldn’t bear it if you got caught and punished for helping me!”

“Don’t worry. I’ve got Harry Potter on my side.” She patted Marella on the shoulder and quietly left her room, going back down the stairs to the second floor. After a moment, she went halfway down the stairs to the ground floor, straining her ears for voices, exhaling in relief at the sound of Harry’s laugh.
Okay, up the stairs and to the left. This should be it. She laid a hand on the doorknob and slowly turned it, alert to any squeaks or creaks as she pushed the door open. “Lumos,” she whispered, casting a pale light around the room. The large, ornately-carved trunk sat at the foot of an enormous four-poster bed and Ginny cautiously approached it, aware of the fact that her tattoo could help her detect traps.

With kids in the house though, I doubt there’re any traps on it. She stood in front of it, studying it. There was a keyhole, she noticed, which likely indicated there was nothing inherently magical about it. Kneeling down, she carefully laid a hand on the lid, poised to Apparate away if anything happened. Nothing did, so she tried to simply lift the lid, finding herself completely unable to.

Hmm, now what are you locked with? Alohomora? Good a place as any to start. Focusing her will, she cast the simple unlocking charm non-verbally and tried the lid again, almost falling over backwards when it flew open. Well, I guess we know Abraham Langston isn’t a paranoid ex-Auror. Passing her wand light over the opening, she saw a jumble of things in the trunk that looked like they hadn’t been touched in a long time.

She took out several photo albums and set them on the thick carpet next to the chest. Underneath them was a large, tissue-wrapped package. Ginny took it out, folding a bit of tissue aside, revealing a rich ivory satin. Oh, his late wife’s wedding dress… Spying a dark mass, she laid her hand on it, nearly gasping at the rich softness. Gathering it to her, she hugged the sealskin to her chest like it was a teddy bear, burying her nose in it and inhaling deeply of the scents of the sea. Salt, mud, sand, fresh air… I wish I could bottle this smell!

Reluctantly setting it aside, she put the other things back into the chest, locking it again. She folded the sealskin up into as small of a package as she could, hugging it back to her chest as she made her stealthy way back to Marella’s room, knocking quietly on her door.

Visible once more, she handed Marella the sealskin, tears springing to her eyes at the sight of the selkie reunited with her skin. Much as Ginny had, Marella buried her nose in the fur, taking several deep breaths, mumbling words she couldn’t hear. As she had on the beach, the woman transformed before her very eyes, the drab glamour falling away to reveal the stunningly beautiful creature underneath. “Ginny Weasley, ye have done me a great service,” she said, eyes shining with unshed tears.

Wiping at her own eyes, Ginny smiled. “Are you certain you don’t want to go right now?”

“Aye. I need to prepare the babes. Moira will take it hard and wee little Cameron, too.” She squeezed the skin again, hugging it close before reluctantly handing it back to Ginny, plain glamour back in place. “Keep it safe, aye?”

“I will. Listen, the first full moon is in two nights. I checked the tides and high tide should be around one in the morning. We’ll come back for you then, all right?”

“Aye.”

“Will you be ready?”

“Aye, I will,” she said, nodding stoutly. She wrapped Ginny up in a strong hug and she fancied she could smell the same scents of the sea in the selkie’s brown hair.

“Okay. Two nights. Be ready.” Marella nodded again and Ginny Apparated silently out of the room, reappearing next to Harry’s car. Harry wasn’t in it, so she sent him a short burst of a Summons to let him know that all was well and got back into the passenger side of the car, still holding the sealskin
Looking at her watch, she saw the whole escapade had taken less than an hour.

A few minutes later, Harry opened the door and got in, looking in the back seat. “Where is she?” he asked.

“She’s not ready. It’s not the full moon for two more nights and she doesn’t want to leave the children without saying goodbye.”

Harry sighed, gripping the steering wheel. “What about her skin?”

“I’ve got it right here.” Ginny patted it and Harry swept his hand over it.

“Oh my God, that’s divine.”

“I know! You should smell it!”

“Later. Let’s get home first, yeah?” Harry drove them back to the garage and they Apparated back home. In the lounge, she unfolded the skin, finding it to be much larger than she thought it should be. Giving in to temptation, she curled up on the sofa and covered herself with it like a blanket, Harry joining her a moment later, snuggling close. He buried his nose in the fur, taking a deep breath.

“Oh, this reminds me of something,” he said, taking another deep breath.

“What?” Ginny asked, watching him as he searched his memories. Sometimes he still looks like a little boy, she thought fondly.

“The best day of my life, out on that rock in the middle of the sea, when Hagrid came to get me.” His voice was soft and his eyes were distant, wrapped up in the memory of the day he found out just who and what he was.

Ginny leaned forward and kissed his neck. “I thought the best day of your life was when you met me?”

“Oh, pardon me. Second best day of my life, then.” He turned to look at her, green eyes bright and she felt her heart do a little stutter step. Before she knew it, he was kissing her, lips soft at first and then pressing harder, forcing her mouth open under his. Her hands swept through his hair, down his neck, fumbling at the buttons of his shirt.

The smell of the sea was all around them, combining with the feel of Harry’s skin under her hands to drive her on. “Harry,” she whispered as he trailed his tongue down her neck, “what’s happening?”

“Dunno,” he breathed, breath hot in her ear, “do you want to stop?”

“Don’t you dare.” Ginny nipped him on the neck and pushed him backwards on the sofa, the sealskin sliding to the floor with a thump. Buttons conquered, she spread the shirt wide, running her hands over his hot skin, raking her fingers down his ribs, tracing the antlers of the stag on his left hip.

She abruptly realized she was topless and she scowled down at Harry, who grinned helplessly back up at her. “You owe me a tee shirt, a bra and a zip-up jumper.”

“I’ll take you shopping for a whole new wardrobe tomorrow,” he said, interspersing his words with kisses from her neck down between her breasts. Ginny gasped when he fastened his lips on one of her nipples and sucked hard.

Rocking her hips against Harry’s, she groaned low in her throat when he bit down on her nipple.
before releasing it to laugh up at her. “Let me up, love.”

“Why should I? Maybe I like you where you are?” She decided to give him a taste of his own medicine and bit him on his left nipple, the one she knew was more sensitive, making him hiss.

“This sofa is a bit cramped, don’t you think?” Grabbing her wrists, Harry forced her to sit up, diving in for another kiss before standing up from the sofa, letting the shirt fall from his shoulders.

“Oh, no don’t step on it,” Ginny said, picking up the sealskin from the floor. She held it against her bare breasts, wondering briefly what it would feel like to make love with Harry on top of it before setting it aside and taking his hand as he led her to the bedroom with a trail of more kisses.

She lounged on the bed, propped up on one elbow, watching eagerly as he kicked off his trainers and slid his jeans off, looking at her with a raised eyebrow. “Enjoying the show, Miss Weasley?”

“Yes. This is going on your permanent record, Mr Potter.” She leaned forward, putting a hand on his waist and drawing him to her as she pressed her lips to his stag tattoo, pulling his boxers down until they fell down of their own accord, tracing more of the stag with her tongue as she uncovered it. Ginny felt his hands in her hair as she sucked on the skin over the hard point of his hipbone, leaving a slight redness behind. “So you know where I’ve been,” she said, looking up at him.

“I know exactly where you’ve been,” he murmured, gently rolling her over onto her back.

“Where’s that?” she asked, spreading her legs as he laid between them, getting a grin in response. “Is this where you like me to be? Underneath you?”

“Under me, on top of me, in front of me,” he said, kissing her again, tongue stroking along hers, “I’m not too particular.” He sat back on his haunches and Ginny grinned as he made short work of her jeans, briefly confounded by the button fly. Jeans off, he caressed her through her knickers, making her groan.

“Just take them off already,” she panted, impatient to feel him touching her directly.

“Maybe I’ll leave them on and we can pretend we’re teenagers, yeah?”

“So you enjoy being rubbed raw? This is new.” Ginny said playfully, sitting up and putting her arms around his neck, pulling him in for more kisses.

“When you put it that way, I’m suddenly glad I’m not a teenager.” She felt him slide his hand inside her knickers, becoming aware of how wet she was and feeling a little embarrassed. I don’t think I’ve ever been quite this…ready, she thought as Harry maneuvered her onto her back again, pulling her knickers off.

She held him in the cradle of her hips, the feeling of his weight pressing her down into the bed and his cock sliding over and between her folds as they continued to kiss making Ginny feel like all was right in her world. She looked at him, brushing his messy fringe away from his forehead, spotting a few more shining strands of silver mixed with the black and felt as if her heart would burst. “What?” he asked, kissing the swell of her breast.

“Nothing. I love you.”

“I love you, too,” he whispered, mumbling something unintelligible against her pale skin.

“What?” Harry shook his head and she saw a flush come over his face and she let him be. I’ll get it out of him later. “Are you ready?” she asked as he drew back, gasping as he drove into her, crashing
his hips into hers in answer. They moved together, establishing a languid rhythm that Ginny loved best as she held him close and sighed out her climax in his ear.

Her cries seemed to inspire Harry as his own breathing sped up and he pushed into her harder and faster, bringing her to another orgasm. “Gin, I—” he grunted, breath hot on her neck and she wrapped her legs around his waist, holding him close while he came with a shuddering groan.

Replete, Ginny lay still, luxuriating in the feeling of Harry on top of her, gently scratching her nails up and down his back as he came back to himself. “All right?” she asked as he shifted to lie next to her.

“More than,” he said, drawing her in for a lingering kiss. “You?”

“Oh yes.” She snuggled closer to him, perfectly content in their post-coital closeness until she had to use the loo. “Have you seen the cat?” she asked as she brought Harry a glass of water. “He’s usually jumped all over us by now.”

“Hold on, I’ll go check.” Harry stood up, picking up his boxers from the floor and slipping them on. Ginny got under the bedcovers and smiled as he came back into the bedroom, carrying Stuart. “He was on the sealskin, just rolling himself all over it,” Harry said, setting the cat on the bed.

“Oh, I hope Marella isn’t allergic to cats.” She looked at Harry and gave him a half smile. “The lady cats of the neighborhood had better watch out if that sealskin does to Stuart what it did to us.”

Harry chuckled as he slid into bed next to her, molding his body to hers. “We might have to put that thing under lock and key for the next couple of days. We still have to finish Teddy’s room.”

“I did think what it would feel like to do it on the skin.” She conjured up a brief vision of her and Harry on the skin in front of the fireplace, feeling a surge of desire.

“I did, too,” Harry said, kissing her on the shoulder. “Seems like it would be terribly rude though, doesn’t it?”

“I dunno. Selkies seem like a randy bunch, yeah?”

Ginny thought of Rònan and his flirting and nodded. “Yeah.” She lay quietly, stroking her hand up and down Harry’s arm where it rested around her waist. “What did you say earlier? After you said I love you?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“You got all red. Doesn’t sound like nothing to me. Come on, tell me.”

“You’ll think I’m daft,” Harry sighed, squeezing her tighter. “I’ve been thinking of Rònan and Marella and I asked you to never leave me.”

“Well, I don’t feel the urge to wrap a skin around me and go hang out with a bunch of barking seals,” she said lightly, hoping to make Harry laugh.

“No, I suppose you don’t.”

“Although if you feel like doing something like that, tell me first, all right?”

“You have my word,” Harry said with a short laugh. Mission accomplished, Ginny snuggled closer, allowing sleep to pull her under.
The next two days saw Ginny trying to keep her mind off of Marella and her perilous situation. Mindful of the curious effects of her sealskin, she put it carefully away in her old school trunk and had Harry lock it with a drop of blood.

They were going to pick up Teddy early next week, which only added to Ginny’s desire to wrap up the business with Marella and return her to her husband. She was looking forward to Teddy’s visit, especially the trip they had planned down to Los Angeles with Ben. “Gin, I need two more of these,” Harry said, breaking into her thoughts of summer fun. He held up a screw and she searched the floor in front of her crossed legs, finally finding the required parts.

“Here. There’re eight left,” she said, handing them over.

Harry grunted and screwed them in, testing how the drawer slid on the newly-installed rail. “All right. Help me turn this over.” She stood up and helped him turn the ungainly, half-assembled chest of drawers over to its other side and looked at the room they’d put together for Harry’s godson. Ginny had questioned the bunk bed, but Harry had just smiled at her and said, “What boy doesn’t love a bunk bed? Besides, it’ll come in handy if he has a friend over.”

The chest of drawers Harry was currently cursing at was the last piece to join the bed, desk and trunk full of toys. All it needs now is a little boy, Ginny thought with a smile. “Bugger!” Harry said quietly, causing her to turn to him.

“What’s wrong?” The chest was standing upright now, all of the drawers in place.

“It’s crooked.” He stood looking at it, arms crossed over his chest.

“No it’s not.”

“Yes it is. See, how that drawer goes there? It slants.” Harry ran his finger along the now-obvious gap.

“Oh. Well, just a little. Who’s going to notice?”

“I’ll notice.” He reached out and pushed the chest in the opposite direction of the slant, momentarily making the gap disappear, only to have it come back when the chest settled back into position.

“Harry, Teddy isn’t going to care. As long as it doesn’t fall apart, it’ll be fine.”

He blew out an annoyed breath and Levitated it, moving it into position against the wall. “I guess you’re right. Ugh, I can’t look at it. Let’s get this cleaned up.”

As she picked up the various bits and pieces, she found three more screws. “Harry, there’s three screws here. Are you sure you used the right ones everywhere?”

“Don’t they usually put in extras?”

“No, I don’t think so. That would be too confusing.”

Harry looked at the screws in her palm, eyes narrowed. “Fuck it. He won’t notice, yeah?”

As the day went on, Ginny found she was keyed up and anxious about the rendezvous with Marella that night. She tried to sit and read a book she’d been trying to get to for most of the year, but couldn’t get comfortable. Listening to music just wound her up more and she couldn’t focus on
anything on the computer.

“All right, Gin. Let’s go,” Harry said, standing up and stretching, long body framed by the afternoon sun coming in through the window.”

“Go where? It’s not time yet. High tide isn’t until one in the morning,” she said, closing the refrigerator door for the tenth time that day.

“You have been up and down and back and forth all day. You’re making me anxious just watching you,” Harry said, hugging her from behind. “Come on, get your gear on. We’re going to go run.”

She followed him into the bedroom as he started stripping down, pulling on running tights and a different shirt. Soon, they were both dressed for a run and headed out, jogging lightly on the stairs down to the street. “Where are we going?” she asked as Harry set out. “I’m not on the cross-country team, you know.”

“How does Fort Point sound?”

Ginny considered for a moment and then nodded. “Doable.” As they ran, she focused on her breathing and the rhythm of her feet hitting the pavement and after a little while, she felt some of her anxiety about the upcoming night fade. Glancing at Harry next to her, she smiled.

“What?” he asked, navigating around a family out for a stroll.

“I’m glad you’re on my side,” she said, nudging him as they ran.

“I’m glad you let me be.”

Back at home, Ginny felt much more settled and after a shower and a light dinner, she was able to lie down for a nap. “Wake me at midnight, all right?” she asked Harry as she went into the bedroom. He was on the sofa, busy with next year’s lesson plans and nodded distractedly, chewing on a pencil.

It seemed as if she’d barely closed her eyes and Harry was already shaking her awake. “Gin, it’s midnight, love.”

“Mm, already? Okay, I’m up.” Long years of snatching sleep when she could during Healing rotations stood her in good stead and she was quickly dressed and ready to go. Harry unlocked her old trunk, pulling out the sealskin, filling the flat with the scents of the wild sea and handed it to Ginny. Holding it close, she rubbed her cheek against the sleek pelt while Harry finished getting dressed.

“Oh my. You’re going all out tonight, aren’t you?” she said when he came back out into the lounge in one of his old black Auror tee shirts and black cargo trousers carrying his old black boots.

Harry shrugged and sat down on the sofa to pull on the boots. “I figured I might as well be ready for anything.” She looked at him there, clad all in black once more and shook her head. Let this be the last time he dresses like that, she thought.

“Okay, let’s go over the plan,” he said, standing up and bouncing on the balls of his feet.

“We Apparate to the garage and drive to the Langston house like before. This time we both go in Disillusioned and get Marella. You Apparate with her because you’re better at silent Apparating with other people than I am. I follow you and we get her to China Beach, give her the skin and wave goodbye,” Ginny said, giving a little wave at the end.
“Well done,” Harry said, clapping softly. “Ready?’

Ginny pulled on her fleece jacket and put her hair in a ponytail. “Yes. Let’s go rescue a selkie.”

“That’s my girl.”

Soon they were rolling quietly down Sea Cliff Avenue in Harry’s car, managing to find the same parking spot they had a few days previously. Harry turned off the car and turned to face her. “I’m going to go first, then you follow on my signal, yeah?” Ginny nodded, feeling a quiver of anticipation in her gut. Leaning in, he kissed her cheek. “Love you.”

“Be careful,” she said, kissing him back. She sat back and watched as he Disillusioned himself, straining to hear any sound of his Apparating but hearing nothing. A moment later, she felt a brief burning sensation in her tattoo and took a deep breath. “Here goes,” she said, applying her own Disillusionment before Apparating silently outside of Marella’s bedroom door.

“Marella?” she called softly, knocking gently on the door.

It opened a just a crack.

“Ginny?” she whispered.

“Yes, and Harry. Let us in.” The door opened wider and she stepped in, followed by Harry. They released their Charms and Ginny was surprised to be engulfed by Marella’s hug.

“Oh, it’s happy I am to see ye! I’ve dreamed of this day for so long and to finally have it so near!” Her eyes shone in the low light with unshed tears and Ginny had to fight back her own.

“Are you ready? Do you need anything besides your skin?”

“Where is me skin? Did you bring it with ye?”

“It’s in the car. We’ll get it on the way to the beach, all right?” Marella nodded and took another look around the small room that had been her private space for the last four years.

“There’s naught else I need from here. Just me skin and the wide open sea.”

“All right. I’m going to Disillusion you. It might feel a little bit weird, but it won’t hurt you.” Marella nodded again and Ginny cast the spell, tapping her wand gently on top of Marella’s head. Instead of taking on the aspect of her surroundings, the selkie stood before her, unchanged. Frowning, Ginny cast it again and again nothing changed. “Harry? It’s not working.”

Harry came over from his position at the door, digging in one of his many cargo pockets, drawing out a familiar, shimmery cloth. “I was afraid this was going to happen,” he said, throwing the Invisibility Cloak over Marella, causing her to vanish from sight. “Plan B.”

“Oh, thank Merlin. I was about to have a heart attack,” Ginny said, hand over said heart.

“Is everything all right? Can you see me?” Marella asked, voice muffled by the cloak.

“No, you’re under Harry’s Invisibility Cloak. Harry, why didn’t the Disillusionment Charm work?” she asked, turning to look at him.

“I’m not sure. It could be because she already has an appearance modification on her. Sometimes spells don’t work the way you think they should on magical creatures because…well…because they’re magic themselves.” Ginny could tell from the look on his face that this was a mystery he would get to the bottom of. “This means we probably can’t Apparate with her, either.”
“Oh no. That puts a twist in our plans.”

“What? What does that mean?” Marella asked, sounding anxious.

“It means we’ll have to sneak out the old-fashioned way.”

“Gin, get under the cloak with her. I’m going to Apparate out and wait for you outside, all right? Summon me if you run into trouble,” Harry said leaning down to kiss her again.

“Okay. See you outside.” Ginny reached for where she thought Marella was and caught the edge of the cloak, scooting underneath it.

“This is cozy,” Marella said, grinning at her and Ginny could see the wild excitement in her eyes.

As soon as Harry was gone, she started moving them toward the door, one arm around Marella’s waist. “It works best if we match our steps together, so we have to go slow,” she whispered. Deep breath now. Opening the door, she shepherded Marella out into the hallway and toward the stairs. She wasn’t too worried about being seen on these stairs, but it was good practice for the stairs down to the ground floor.

Ginny was concentrating so hard on moving in sync with Marella that she completely missed the cat laying the middle of the second floor hallway, planting a foot directly on its tail. The cat let out a screech and shot down the hall and down the stairs as if it had been launched from a cannon. “Shit,” Ginny whispered, freezing in place, looking into Marella’s panicked eyes.

“Mr Fluffy?” came a little girl’s voice from the other side of the nearest door. Marella moved toward the door, putting a hand on the knob. “Oh, no sweetling, it’s just me,” she called softly.

“Marella? What happened?”

“I came down for a wee bit of milk to settle me stomach and I didna see Mr Fluffy there in the hall. I’m afraid he’ll have some cross words for me the next time our paths cross,” she said, impressing Ginny with her improvisation skills. “Go back to sleep, sweetling.”

“Okay.” Ginny finally felt like she could breathe again when Marella let go of the doorknob and nodded to her. Moving slowly again and keeping a sharp eye out for any other animals, they made it to the door in the kitchen that led to the back garden.

Almost. A few nervous moments later, they were out in front of the house and Ginny breathed a sigh of relief to see Harry standing in the shadow of a tree. Taking off the cloak, she wrapped her arms tightly around him.

“Any trouble?” he murmured quietly.

“I stepped on a cat,” she whispered. “One of the girls woke up, but Marella got her to go back to bed without seeing us.”

“Good work,” he said, nodding to the selkie before folding up the cloak into a neat square and secreting it in one of his many trouser pockets. Taking Ginny’s hand, he led the way back to the car and Marella’s sealskin.

Once again reunited with her skin, the selkie hugged it close to her body, banishing the glamour that hid her otherworldly beauty. As she regained her true form, Ginny heard Harry let out an amazed
breath and she looked up at him, smiling at the stunned look on his face.

Nose buried deep in the fur, Marella looked up at her and Harry, a suggestive grin playing on her lips. “I see ye’ve felt the effects of being in contact with a selkie’s skin, aye?”

Ginny felt a flush come over her entire body and glanced up at Harry next to her, seeing his cheeks were pink in the dim streetlight. She looked back at Marella and gave her a shy shrug. “Sorry,” she whispered.

“Och, don’t be. I’d have been more surprised if ye hadn’t. Ye are a very bonny couple.” She wrapped the skin around her shoulders like a blanket and Ginny saw her shifting around underneath, leaving a pile of clothes on the pavement next to the car. “Now, shall we take a walk to the beach?”

Harry quickly gathered up her clothes and threw them into the backseat of the car before taking Ginny’s hand again to follow Marella down the street. “How did she know? We didn’t bloody well fuck on top of it,” he whispered in her ear, making her giggle.

Giddy with relief, Ginny veritably skipped down Sea Cliff Avenue, the wind feeling refreshing for once rather than chilling. As she got closer, Marella’s pace increased and she skipped lightly down the pavement when they heard a shout behind them.

“Marella! Marella, no!” Ginny whirled to see a powerful blond man standing about twenty feet behind them, wand out and pointed at Marella.

“Abraham, let her go!” Harry called out, dropping Ginny’s hand and drawing his own wand.

“Harry Potter? What are you doing here?”

“You’re keeping a magical creature against her will. You must let her go,” he said, his voice brooking no argument.

“But the children—”

“Daddy?” Ginny heard a child’s voice and saw Marella step towards Abraham Langston.

“Moira? Moira, sweetling,” she called, “what are ye doing out here? Get back home and into your bed.”

Ginny looked back Abraham and saw Moira, wearing only a nightgown, approach her father. “Daddy, you have to let her go. She has her own husband and babies,” she said, laying her hand on his arm.

“Moira, get home. This isn’t your concern,” he said, putting his daughter behind him, wand trained on Harry now.

“But Daddy, she’s done so much for us. She needs to go back to her own family. I’m big enough now, I can help take care of Scottie and Cameron. Morgan can take care of himself.” She looked up at her father, eyes pleading. “Please, Daddy. Let her go.”

“Listen to your daughter, Abraham. You don’t want to be arrested for this. Then where will your children be?” Harry said, sounding like the Auror he used to be.

Ginny saw conflicting emotions run across his face. Clearly he’d never thought of what would happen to his children if he was caught keeping Marella against her will and the realization seemed to shake him.
“Mr Langston, I need to go back to the sea, to me own husband and pups. I was honored to help ye in your time of need, but your babes are older now; Moira’s nearly a woman grown and Morgan isn’t far behind her. My time here is done,” she said simply.

At this, Abraham Langston seemed to deflate and he lowered his wand, head dropping down in resignation. “Go, then. Go back to the sea and never see us again.” He put his arm around Moira’s shoulders and turned away to walk back to the house.

“Daddy wait,” Moira said, breaking away from her father’s hold and running past Harry and Ginny to Marella, hugging her fiercely. “Is that your sealskin? It’s so soft!”

“Aye, it’s a lovely thing that keeps me warm in the cold waters.” She leaned down and pressed her lips to the top of the girl’s head. “Oh, my sweetling, I’m going to miss you all so.”

“We’ll miss you too, Marella. I’ll never forget you.”

“Mayhap you’ll see me again someday, when you’re out on the water.”

“Maybe,” Moira agreed, wiping away tears.

“Moira, we need to go,” her father called and the girl nodded.

“Goodbye, Marella,” she said, walking away to rejoin her father.

“Goodbye, my sweetling,” the selkie said softly.

Looking up at Harry, Ginny took his hand again, squeezing hard. He still stood ready and didn’t relax until Abraham and Moira disappeared around the hairpin bend, heaving a sigh of relief when they were out of sight. Turning to Marella, she saw a wistful look on the selkie’s face and she smiled, walking toward her. “Come on, let’s get you home.”

Marella’s smile transformed her already beautiful face into something completely ethereal and she turned, practically running down to the water’s edge, pausing for a moment before stepping carefully into the foam. “It doesna burn!” she said, sounding equally relieved and delighted. She held out her hand and Ginny cautiously approached, soaked to the knees in seconds.

Taking both of her hands in hers, she looked at her solemnly. “Ginny Weasley, ye have done me and mine a service that we could never hope to pay back in full. If there is ever a time ye have need of me, get to yonder rock or the ruins and call my name and I’ll come, aye?”

“Oh, no, it’s fine,” she demurred.
“No, none of that. Ye’ve done me a service and I mean to make as fair a trade as I can. I’ll not have it put about that Rònan is a bad dealer!” He grinned at her and raised an eyebrow. “Surely I’ve got something ye’d want?”

Her eyes went to his luxurious brown beard, threaded through with gray and she licked her lips. “May I have a whisker?”

“Och, the wee lass!” He turned to Marella and laughed. “Here I am standing in front of her and all she wants is one of me whiskers!” Face flaming, Ginny watched as he combed his fingers through his beard, pulling out one hair with a wince. “I’ve naught idea what ye’d do with it, but here ye are,” he said, handing it to her. As soon as she touched it, it turned into a thick, wiry seal’s whisker.

“Thank you,” she said, bowing humbly.

“And she bows to us when it’s we who should be on our knees to her!” Rònan said, practically slapping his knee in mirth. “Come, my love, it’s time we were a family again.”

Marella reached out, taking Ginny’s hand again, casting a look at Harry behind her. “Ginny, remember what I said. If there’s ever aught I can do for ye, call for me, aye?”

“I will. Thank you, Marella.”

“Thank you, Ginny Weasley.” Marella let go of her hand and embraced her husband again. Hand in hand, they walked further into the pounding waves until they ducked down underneath an incoming wave, coming up as a mottled gray and sleek brown seal.

Ginny stood, watching the two as they swam joyfully away from the shore until she felt Harry’s hand on her shoulder. “They’re gone,” she murmured as he wrapped his arms around her, banishing some of the chill she had only begun to be aware of.

“Back to their own home and pups,” he said, voice warm in her ear. “Come on, love. It’s freezing out here and you’re all wet.”

“I am, aren’t I?” she said, walking back to the dry sand. “Rònan gave me a whisker.” She held it out to Harry and he raised an eyebrow.

“Ollivander’s?”

“Maybe.” She stood quietly while Harry worked a Drying Charm on her jeans and trainers, restoring blessed warmth. “Marella said something to me.”

“Yeah, what did she say?” Harry took her hand again and they walked slowly away from the water.

“She said that if I ever needed her, to call for her.” She shook her head slowly. “I can’t for the life of me think what I would need a selkie for.”

“Well, maybe you’ll know when the time comes, yeah?”

Walking up the gentle incline of the pavement up to the street, she put her head on Harry’s shoulder and sighed. “Yeah.”

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